

Pope Paul VI: 1963-1978

Paul VI was not the Pope this century wanted, but the Pope that this century needed.

His ascension to the Chair of Peter was not an enviable moment. For five years Pope John XXIII had captured the imagination and won the heart of the world. His successor would almost certainly suffer by comparison.

More basically and importantly, Paul inherited the effects of John's throwing open the windows of the Church. Through the open windows came the breadth of the Holy Spirit and movements of human wisdom and noble ideals. There also came gusts of folly and self-centered ambition.

There were threats that solid values and essentials would be swept away with things that had outlived their usefulness. It was a mighty task to direct the fresh air to the work of rejuvenation, not of destruction.

A lesser man could well have opted for safety and slammed the window shut. Not so with Pope Paul. He reassembled the Vatican

Council on time, opened its discussions to the full force of the Holy Spirit and accepted the responsibility of translating into action what the Council could state only in principle.

For some time, Paul VI was labelled a Hamlet, unable to make up his mind. But eventually he proved his critics all wrong, by the vast number of firm decisions he took — and he did so in his own time, the time when the truth was clear and the occasion prudent.

He gave formal authoritative teaching on such subjects as the Eucharist and moral principles in marriage. He made firm disciplinary decisions such as that on the celibacy of priests. He re-organized wide areas of Church life, such as those of worship and of Vatican administration. He pioneered in areas of ecumenism, personal contacts with people of many nations in their homelands and of Church developments in native cultures.

He did not receive particularly good publicity. But it slowly became more and more evident to more and more people that Paul was the leader the Church needed during these years. He was the leader not necessarily because he reflected popular opinion, but because of his vision of the truth and his complete integrity in responding to it.

We have good reason for public pride in the achievements of Pope Paul VI in the past 15 years.

Now that he has left us, may he rest in peace and may the continuing fruits of his pontificate confirm that he did not live and pasture Christ's flock in vain.

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In This Issue

After paying tribute to Pope Paul VI, we invite our readers to consider the Future of Catholicism in Asia, which at first may seem scary and foreboding. But if one carefully considers that, though Asia is poor, Asia is young and Asia is moving into action, and one would finally conclude that the future of Catholicism in Asia is bright if we count on God's grace and blessing.