He Kept the Windows Open

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan, then 65 years old, taking the name of Paul VI as the 261st sucessor of St. Peter as the Bishop of Rome, was crowned Pope on June 30, 1963, at a papal coronation Mass celebrated for the first time in history outdoors in St. Peter's Square.

In one of his first public addresses as Supreme Pontiff, he declared his intention of fulfilling the wishes of his predecessor, Pope John XXIII, "to let a little air" into the Church, by faithfully pursuing Pope John's revolutionary policy of "aggiornamento," or updating of the Church, to make it truly responsive to the needs and aspirations of men and women everywhere.

The years of Pope Paul's reign were years of world-wide upheaval. Those years were marked by wars and revolutions, of birth-pangs of new nations, of far-flung student ferment, occult explosions, burgeoning charismatic movements, walks on moon. They were years of airline hijackings. In one such instance, Pope Paul offered himself as a hostage to terrorists if they would free the airline passengers they already held. They were years of kidnappings and assassinations, including the kidnapping and assassination of the pontiff's close personal friend, Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro.

They were also years of heightening tensions within the Catholic Church.

Though beset by those who were fearful of changes in the Church, and by those who demanded ever more sweeping changes, Pope Paul — as critics and supporters alike agree — endeavored in his own way to continue and make durable the "revolution" Pope John had launched.

Accused at various times of vacillation and of taking as many backward steps as he did forward, Pope Paul, nevertheless chalked up a record that under most circumstances would be considered, in large measure, liberal and progressive.

He moved to decentralize the Church's government, brought about a significant thaw in Church-State relationships in Soviet-bloc Eastern Europe, fostered ecumenical and interreligious relations with other Christian Churches and with the world Jewish and Muslim communities, furthered liturgical renewal, pleaded time and again on behalf of the voiceless millions in developing countries, and labored unstintingly, in season and out, for world peace.

Taking concrete steps to decentralize Church government, he created a Synod of Bishops, a move which represented the first papal effort in modern times to seek consultation of the world's bishops gathered in collegial assembly beyond an ecumenical council.

He also undertook to reorganize and "internationalize" the Roman Curia — the Church's central administratice arm in Rome — by including diocesan bishops in its various departments and by appointing non-Italian prelates to high posts traditionally held by Italians, "so that," as he said, "the offices and central agencies of the Catholic Church will exhibit a truly universal character."

He established an International Theological Commission in 1969 to advise the Churches major doctrinal congregation. He also abolished that congregation's "Index of Forbidden Books."

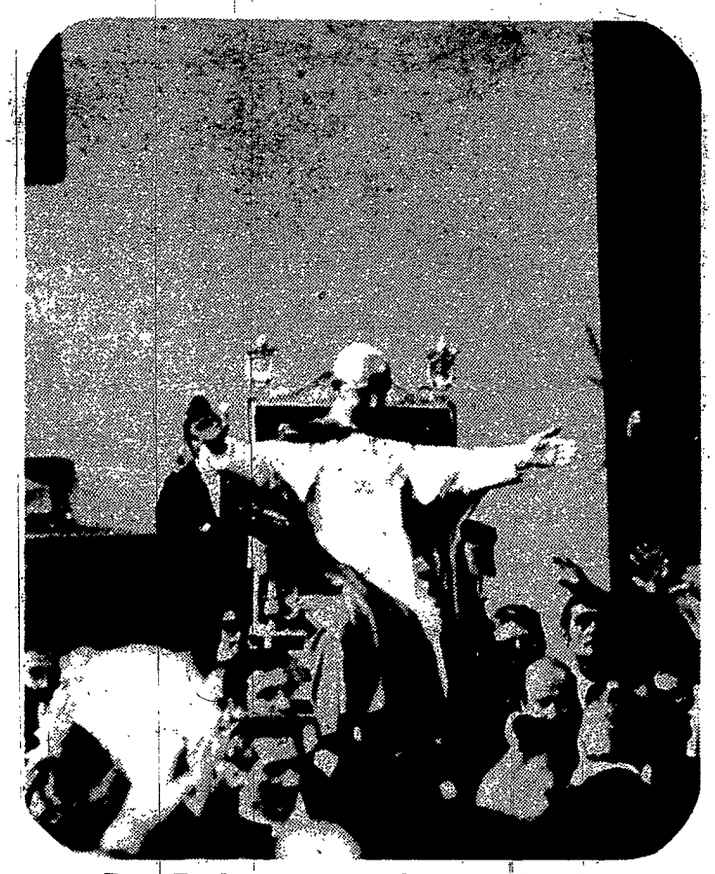
Making the College of Cardinals more representative of the Church throughout the world than it had ever been, Paul increased its membership to an all-time high of 145 in March 1973.

At the same time, he decreed that as of Jan. 1, 1971, cardinals 80 years of age and older could not take part in a conclave for the election of a Pope or be active in the administrative affairs of the Curia.

He also decreed that bishops should submit their resignations from office at the age of 75.

Furthering other phases of the Church's renewal and updating, Pope Paul implemented the decrees of Vatican II that changed the language of the liturgy from Latin to vernacular tongues, restored the ancient order of the permanent diaconate and gave priests and lay persons a greater role in running the local Church.

His precedent-shattering travels abroad definitively ended a long-standing tradition that the pope is "a prisoner in the Vatican," brought the papacy into the jet age, and took it to the far corners of the earth. Pope Paul was the first pontiff to visit the Holy Land since St. Peter, the first to cross the Atlantic— to the United States — and the first to visit South America, Africa, and the Far East.



Pope Paul at general audience at Castelgandolfo in 1974.

On the ecumenical front, from the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Paul revealed in special and general audiences, addresses, exchanges of correspondence, and meetings, a continuing passion to increase understanding and friendly relations with members of all religious faiths.

In 1964, Pope Paul authorized promulgation of Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism and increased the function and authority of the Vatican's Secretariat for Christian Unity.

That same year, in order to push interfaith relations with followers of non-Christian religions, he set up a Secretariat for Non-Christians. Then, in 1974, under the aegis of this agency, be instituted a Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism and a Commission for Religious Relations with Islam.

During his frist trip abroad — a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1964 — he met twice with the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople. Pope Paul was the first Roman pontiff in more than 500 years to hold conversations with a Patriarch of Eastern Orthodoxy.

In 1965, Pope Paul and the Patriarch issued joint nullifications of excommunications decreed against the heads of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in 1054, the date of the "Great Schism" between Western and Eastern Christianity.

In 1975, in an unusual and dramatic gesture, during an ecumenical service in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, Pope Paul prostrated himself to kiss the feet of Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, the representative of Eucmenical Patriarch Demetrios I.

With the approval of Pope Paul, the Second Vatican Council in 1965 issued its historic denunciation of anti-Semitism:

"What happened to Christ in his Passion," said the Council, "cannot be attributed to all Jews without distinction then alive, nor to the Jews of today . . . The Church deplores hatred, persecution, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time or by anyone."

The following year, Pope Paul received Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury, then the spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The two churchmen agreed to set up an Anglican-Roman Catholic International Theological Commission, which would explore the possibilities for eventual reunion between the two Churches, divided since 1534.

The commission of experts has since produced statements of consensus on the Eucharist, the Ministry and on the nature of authority in the Church.

The movement toward Anglican and Roman Catholic unity was quite significant under Pope Paul, though the two Churches remained apart on the issue of intercommunion and on women priests.

In other ecumenical moves, Pope Paul met in 1970 with Catholicos Vazken I, Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians, from Soviet Armenia, in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. The two leaders exchanged a "kiss of peace," thus symbolically healing a 1,500-year rift.

The next year, Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East paid a three-day visit to the pontiff. That visit also ended a period of 15 centuries during which there had been no official communication between the heads of the two Christian Churches.

Still another breach of 15 centuries was symbolically healed in 1972 when Pope Paul embraced His Holiness Amba Shanouda II, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt, before the high altar in St. Peter's Basilica.

Pope Paul was equally concerned with pursuing friendly relations with Protestant Churches. In June 1968, in an unprecedented action, he visited and addressed the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. And over the years, in an unremitting pursuit of the goal of Christian unity, Pope Paul authorized top-level Vatican talks with the Lutheran World Federation and other Protestsnt groupings, including the Pentecostals.

All the while, Pope Paul kept looking out the windows of the Vatican at the Soviet Union and its satellite nations in Eastern Europe.

In his first encyclical, "Ecclesiam Suam'," dated Aug. 6, 1964, he said he had no intention of excluding Communists from dialogue with the Church.

His actions did not belie his words.

In 1965 he established a new Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers, one of the major purposes of which was to study and initiate relations with Communists and others on the subject of atheism.

Four sets of diplomatic conversations over a two-year period were concluded in June 1966 with the signing by the Vatican and Yugoslav representatives of an agreement designed to regularize Church-State relations. And in March 1971, Yugoslav President Tito, in his official capacity as head of state, paid a visit to Pope Paul, cementing resumption of full diplomatic relations between Vatican City State and Yugoslavia.

A block in Hungarian-Vatican relations was removed in September 1971, when Pope Paul prevailed upon the late Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty to leave his long self-imposed asylum in the United States Embassy in Budapest and come to Rome "for the good of the Church."

Meanwhile, with the urging of Pope Paul, negotiations for "normalization" of Church-State relations continued with government representatives of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, and were initiated with the Soviet Union itself.

All these papally endorsed moves, and others reflected a liberal, open-minded attitude.

At the same time however, Pope Paul held firm on certain traditional Catholic doctrines and practices, prompting his critics to label him "reactionary," "conservative."

Removing the topic of mandatory celibacy for priests from the agenda of Vatican II, Paul issued an encyclical in 1964, reaffirming the traditional Latin Church discipline of an unmarried priesthood.

Then, on July 29, 1968, he issued his controversial encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," condemning the use of artificial methods of contraception, including the pill.

The two documents, but especially the latter, precipitated a crisis for papal authority. Leading theologians, priests, a good section of the Catholic press, and even some national Catholic episcopates took stands somewhat at variance with the papal declaration on birth control.

On the issue of papal authority Pope Paul stood firm. Reasserting the doctrine of papal infallibility as defined by Vatican I and reaffirmed by Vatican II, Pope Paul also frequently expressed concern over "extreme" movements, which threaten "to erode dogma and authority within the Church."

Buffeted by "right" and "left" currents in the Church, Pope Paul never lost sight of the overriding cause of peace among the nations of the world.

To plead, "no more war, never again war," was the simple and eloquent purpose of his visit to the United Nations headquarters in New York on Oct. 4, 1965.

Then, as events warranted, he raised his voice in fervent pleas for peace in the Congo, Nigeria, India, the Middle East, Vietnam, and Northern Ireland.

Ever insistent that peace must be founded on

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