

Library Signpost

Some Christmas Cleanings

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

Cardinal Shuster, Archbishop of Milan, gives us this helpful thought as we kneel before the Christmas Crib in our parish church or in our home.

"St. Alphonsus, after having meditated on all the tenderness and love which the Christ-Child shows us in the cave of Bethlehem, ends one of his well-known hymns with the cry: 'Ah, how much it has cost These to love us!' At the foot of the crib this is all that we can say. When a God is so consumed with love for His creatures as to make Himself of no account, to face dire poverty, persecutions and a most opprobrious and cruel death, then there is naught else to do but to shed tears of gratitude at His feet, . . . and to deplore that we have loved Him so imperfectly and so tardily, exclaiming with St. Augustine: 'Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient, too late have I loved Thee.'"

With all the noise of war and war-news jangling across the Christmas bells it is good to be reminded by Fr. Fillion, in his Life of Christ, of the silence of Mary when God's Word became her Son. Only in such a silence of spirit can we come into full possession of Christ the Word within us:

"In a few words the Evangelist gives us a delightful picture of the Blessed Virgin's contemplative soul and of her pure and profound heart. Thanks to St. Luke, we can form some idea of the inner working of her soul. She gathered and kept in her memory all these words, that is all the things she saw and the words she heard with regard to Jesus; then she compared and combined them together so as to make a more exact reckoning of the divine plan. Amidst so many marvels, so calm and recollected did she remain that nothing escaped her and from her maternal memories she formed a rich treasure, which she later communicated to the Apostles. But beside the crib she was silent, though she had so many wonders to relate. She knew that the hour had not yet come to manifest them to the world. As St. Ambrose says with exquisite delicacy: 'Her lips were as chaste as her heart.'"

Fr. Gavan Duffy was perhaps the greatest missionary of our time. When God took him to Heaven last summer, it looked to human calculation like a poor way to manage the divine affairs. The thought kept recurring: "Where shall we find such another for the Church?" Here is one of his thirteenth sermons for Christmas:

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh.

When I want you to understand me I speak to you in words, which express my thoughts. When God wants mankind to know Him, He sends His Word to us, and Christ is born.

Sursum Corda

Deepest Kind Of Peace

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

By an odd coincidence perhaps we should say a providential coincidence just two days after our entrance into the war there came from the press an attractive little volume concerned with the deepest and of peace known to man in this world.

St. Benedict, who was, above all others, the creator or at least the re-creator of civilization during and after the onslaughts of the barbarians upon the Roman Empire, chose as the watchword of his order and of the monastic life the single word Pax - Peace. There is vast significance in that word. Civilization is broken by war, and reestablished by Peace. But let that significant fact rest. What I have in mind is the coincidence I have mentioned.

The book is entitled The Voice of Trappist Silence. Its author is Fred L. Holmes. It appears with the approbation and blessing of the Rt. Rev. Bruno Ryan, Abbot of the Cistercian (Trappist) monastery at New Melleray, Peosta, Iowa. It is a description of the life of the monks who seek peace in seclusion and in life-long silence. It has been selected as the Book of the Month by the Catholic Book Club.

"Why," do you ask, "should such a book be called timely or providential? Why not at this moment a book on war, on the army, the navy, the air force? Why not a book to stir our patriotism and whip up our zeal for war? Especially why not a book to glorify the spirit of self-sacrifice in battle, now that so many young men are preparing to be martyrs in their country's cause? Indeed, would it not seem that a book which glorifies the monastic life, the life of retreat from the world, is at this juncture rather ill-timed? Should we not praise and glorify those who go to the field of battle on land and sea, instead of those who retire behind the protecting walls of a monastery, especially of a Trappist monastery?"

Those questions cannot be answered without a revelation of one of the profoundest truths in the Christian religion. Be it stated immediately and unhesitatingly that we Catholics believe in the power of prayer and penance before and beyond all other instrumentalities for the winning of a war and for the final establishment of a just and abiding peace. It is to be feared that when our priests in the pulpit and our Saints in books of spiritual doctrine speak of prayer and mortification as the greatest power in the world, some persons, even some not-too-well instructed Catholics, imagine that the statement is oratorical or rhetorical or pietistic. The fact is that we believe genuinely that a man or a woman, a monk or a priest or a nun on their knees in the cloister or in the home can do more to help the cause of justice and right than the soldier behind a gun.

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," is a familiar old line from Tennyson. We all memorized it and recited it when we were in school. Perhaps we thought it "just poetry." It happens to be in that form poetic, but it is a fact, a tremendous fact, that those who pray

"But my word is wasted if you will not listen, and Jesus (God's Word made man) is wasted unless people receive Him with good will.

"Therefore should our prayer, at Christmas-time, be for a greater receptivity, a greater willingness to listen to God's Word and to conform our lives to His teaching.

"And not only for ourselves should we thus pray but for all humanity. Our missionaries, here and abroad, need help in many ways. But what they perhaps need most is a softening of the world's heart toward truth. This is a grace, that we must pluck out of God's willing hand, as a small child tries to force open its father's fist to get the candy that has been shown. That Daddy wants to give, but that must be won from love's grasp by some little show of effort.

"Christ is born. We have Him and we hold Him. Our Merry Christmas has come to us. But let us not be selfish. There is a whole world of men waiting to share our joy. Let us resolve to make it theirs, through our missionaries, a present of the Word, which was in the beginning and which we and they together will fully understand, enjoy and live by in the eternal reality of Heaven."

Of all modern Wise Men, Chesterton has gone with the most childlike heart to Bethlehem, and offered there the tribute of his most golden book, The Everlasting Man. Read what he has to write about the very special "lump in the throat" which Christmas always brings to "men of good will":

The word Bethlehem "is something that surprises us from behind, from the hidden and personal part of our being; like that which can sometimes take us off our guard in the paths of small objects or the blind pieties of the poor. It is rather as if a man had found an inner room in the very heart of his own house, which he had never suspected; and seen a light from within. It is as if he found something at the back of his own heart that betrayed him into good."

These rousing lines from Chesterton's Ballad of the White Horse may serve as a vigorous recessional:

"The giant laughter of Christian men That roars through a thousand tales, Where greed is an ape and pride is an ass, And Jack's away with his master's lass, And the miser is banged with all his brass, The farmer with all his stalls; Tales that tumble and tatter that trick, Yet end not all in scolding Of kings and crowns in a merry plight, And the clock gone wrong and the world gone right That the mummings sing upon Christmas night And Christmas Day in the morning."

Our thanks for the above selections: To Burns, Oates and Washbourne, of London, for No. 1 from Shuster's The Sacramentary; to Kennedy, of New York, for No. 2 from Fillion's Life of Christ; to the Alumnae of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis, who publish Fr. Gavan Duffy's sermons from which No. 3 is taken; to Dodd, Mead & Co. of New York, for the two Chesterton items.

do more for religion and civilization than those who fight.

To see that fact you must have supernatural vision, eyes of faith to see what the world does not see. "Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see," said our Lord. The pity is that even some who "have the Faith" don't really see. They see with the eyes of angels or Saints. They see, or think they see, what all the world sees, and no more. They say with Napoleon and other warriors that not prayers but big battalions win wars. King David thought otherwise, and indeed not so much King David but the Holy Ghost, who inspired him to write, "Some trust in horses, some in chariots, but we go to battle in the Name of the Lord."

Virtually all the religious Orders which send priests and Sisters to the foreign missions also maintain as part of their work strict cloisters within which remain in silence and prayer those who never go forth to do what is usually called apostolic work. And any active missionaries in the field at home or abroad will tell you that those who are never seen in public, who do not preach or teach or administer material relief do more for the missions than those who come into direct contact with men and women in the world.

You will not find these facts stated in that didactic manner in the book The Voice of Trappist Silence. It is a book largely of photographs with a charming commentary in excellent English style (thanks partly I believe, to Mr. Harry Lorin Binns, modestly referred to as "Consulting Editor"). The pictures and the text form a beautiful volume. Between the lines and behind the pictures you will find indicated the great supernatural truth hinted at in this little piece: the fact of the supremacy of prayer over action even in time of war.

Copyright 1941 N.C.W.C.

Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Dec. 24, 1936, Edition: A joint Pastoral signed by all the Mexican Bishops warned against the errors of Socialistic and Communist education and stated that parents who wish to receive education must withdraw their children from schools in which those errors are taught.

Until children receive religious training and have instilled in their principles of morality, anti-crime movements will make little headway. The Rev. William F. Bergan, Chancellor of the Diocese, told a Chamber of Commerce audience.

One Eugenio Imaz advertised by the Rochester Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy as editor of a Catholic newspaper was exposed by the CATHOLIC COURIER as not representing any Catholic group and the paper "Cruz Y Raya" was declared on reliable authority as not a Catholic publication.

The Rev. Bernard A. Drew was ordained by Archbishop Mooney for the Holy Priesthood in Our Lady Chapel, St. Patrick's Cathedral, for the Diocese of Rapid City, South Dakota.

Old-timers had their hardships, but they didn't sit in helpless misery, without light or food or heat, because a little wire broke. Baltimore Sun.

Are Only Catholics Saved?

By no means! Such is far from the teachings of the Catholic Church, which leaves the judgment of each and every man to our all-just and all-merciful heavenly Father.

No man—be he Catholic, Protestant, Jew or Pagan—can be sentenced to eternal punishment except through his own fault by deliberately disobeying the dictates of his own conscience—by defying God with malice aforethought knowing full well the consequences thereof.

It is true that the Catholic Church has ever insisted that here is the one true Church, founded by Christ upon the Rock of Peter with His promise that the gates of Hell would not prevail against her with His assurance that He would be with her all days even unto the consummation of the world.

But for him without the fold through no fault of his own, be he an ignorant savage who has never heard of the Church, or an intellectual Protestant who knows her falsely because of erroneous education of mental inhibition—the Catholic Church teaches that there is certainly salvation if he lives up

to his conscience and repents of his sins.

When you hear this salvation propaganda against the Catholic Church, remember it was not she but Martin Luther who condemned the Pagan philosophers because they had no faith in Christ "even though they had been virtuous in their inmost souls" (Luther's Luther).

"Every month one of these pamphlets is prepared to set straight our non-Catholic neighbors on fallacious statements frequently made about Catholic teachings and practices. You would please us greatly if you would write for information on subjects upon which you would like a Catholic explanation." Catholic Information Society, P. O. Box 26, Narberth, Pa.

Twice Bitten

You can't fool the American public twice. Martha Prendergast tells of the man in her office who was listening to his radio the night the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.

"Orson Wells at it again," he sneered and turned off to another program.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 22)

Faith and humility and perseverance, self-sacrifice and patience in suffering and persecution, marked the days of our scholar and poet. His was a soul fully dedicated to the service of the Master. His was a spirit completely attuned to the inspirations and graces of the God Whom he loved so dearly. Whom he served so faithfully.

MODERN PERSECUTIONS

Cardinal Hlond has just given to the world in book form his reports made to Pope Pius XII on the persecution of the Church in Poland. It is a tale of such savagery as marred the pages of early pagan history. Repression of the clergy, expulsion of religious, dispersion of the faithful, closing of schools and churches, are among the acts carefully planned and diabolically carried through for the destruction of the Church in Poland. Eight hundred years of religious development among a people noted for their religious character among all the peoples of the world, are to be brought to naught if the Nazis have their way.

Christians have much to pray for this Christmas. The last few days must have made Americans conscious the danger is no longer merely for others. It is for all who still believe in democracy, in liberty, in religion. While we pray for all who suffer from the war, while we strive to overcome all forces of evil that would disrupt God's world, we must not neglect to use well the religious liberty we enjoy here in America. Devout attachment to the practice of our Catholic faith, practical appreciation of all the Mass and the Sacraments mean to us, and personal dedication of our souls to Christ in His Church, should be the reaction in us to the contrasted destruction of the comforts of religion in sister countries. While we pray for stricken Poland, while we beseech the Lord for her deliverance from the heel of the invader, let us be ready to do what we can when the hour dawns for her resurrection from the death-like horrors into which she has fallen.

THE RED CROSS

Fifty million dollars is asked of the people of the United States by the Red Cross for relief work in the war. The money is needed for what lies ahead and also for relief work already undertaken and underwritten by the organization up to now.

The Red Cross deserves well of every American. It has been the instrument by which the millions who contribute to it have mingled relief to the unfortunate in storms, in earthquakes, in conflagrations, in pestilence, in famine, in war.

Every citizen that has an income will want to further the good work that now lies before the Red Cross by his own contribution. A special solicitation will be made in all places where the Community Chest does not underwrite the quota expected of the community it serves. No money can be dedicated to a more compelling, a more necessary charity. War is no respecter of persons, spreads its terrors and its injuries and death and destruction on all sides. The Red Cross does not cure war; but it does serve to alleviate the sufferings and to relieve the want resulting from war.

THE CHRISTMAS GOSPELS

Three Masses are offered by the priest on the Feast of Christmas. One commemorates the eternal birth of the Word from the Father; another celebrates the birth of Christ in Bethlehem; the third signifies the rebirth of Christ in our hearts. The Gospels of those three Masses give us the story of the Nativity from the Gospel according to St. Luke, the story of the shepherds from the same Gospel, and the sublime beginning of the Gospel according to St. John which tells of the Word of God made flesh.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming sons of God."

May this happy day find us receiving the Infant Saviour of Bethlehem, the Word of God made flesh! With happy hearts let us go with God's angels to Bethlehem, summoning the shepherds on our way, let us kneel with Mary and Joseph before the crib and offer to Him our hearts. Let us tell Him that we rejoice in His coming, are most happy to receive Him as our Saviour. Let us ask Him to enable us to become children of God by the grace He gives, the true Christmas gifts that can never fall away!