Library Signpost

Clipping, Mailing for Christ

By REV. BENEDICT EHMANN

A Catholic soldier, after Midnight Mass this Christmas Eve, spent his dogwatch (4 to 8 A. M.) on an observation tower clipping his copy of the Christmas issue of America. Let him tell it himself:

"The editorial on Christmas I am sending to a non-Catholic relative. The articles on Christmas family customs in other countries go to a woman of seventy who is one of the loveliest Catholic mothers I know. The Word (a regular column) goes to a friend who doesn't go to Mass regularly. I'm hoping Father Delaney's message of peace will bring him to Mass each Sunday. And there is something for him, too, in Father Parsons' Washington Fable. But Father Gardiner's This Christmas Poetry and the poems "Expectancy" and "Christmas Carol: 1943" are for my Christmas scrap-book. The lovely cover is thumb-tacked above my army cot . . . These hours between the Midnight Mass and the 9:00 A. M. Mass that I shall go to presently have been made happy by sharing the thought and labor of the Editors and contributors of America with others."

There are several tangents of thought which this interesting paragraph could send me flying off, but the one in particular which induced me to quote it here concerns the good that can be done by Catholic readers sharing with others the good things they find in their Catholic magazines. That soldier is a fine example of a one-man powerhouse. All of us Catholics can be the same. Are we shy of propaganda? If we are, we are the only ones. Don't we realize we have the Truth, the only Truth, and nothing but the Truth? People all over are hungering for just that Truth and Love and Peace which are in the Gospel of Christ. Many of them will not be fed unless people, ordinary, simple people, like yourselves, proffer a helping hand. "That which you have heard in the ear," Jesus said to His apostles, "preach from the housetops." Every Christian is a Christ-bearer, a "member" of Christ, and shares in Christ's mission to enlighten men with a knowledge of the Truth. Call it propaganda, if you will, but there is nothing wrong with propaganda—when it is for the right thing.

That soldier on his observation tower on Christmas Eve might not have been figuring it out in so many sentences, but he was actually doing his share of Christ's mission by cutting out his clippings and mailing them around where they would do good. He was radiating Christ (Whom he had perhaps received at Midnight Mass in Communion) by spreading His Christmas Light to others.

His example gives me a cue which I suggest to my readers. Subscribe to a good Catholic magazine or two, give it a good reading for your own enlightenment and inspiration, and then clip out articles and features to mail where you think they will do most good—any one of us can think of at least a dozen people in our shop or neighborhood or relationship, who need a lift toward the Light, or (to put it better, since we all need a constant lift toward the Light) who are "ripe" for some word or direction from us.

Let's see how you could clip the January 1st issue of America. The first page contains a New Year's Message which could be sent to that fellow who tried to get you into an argument at the shop about the Church and Peace. Further in, there is an article Religion Not Determined by Nationality or Race: isn't there somebody, you know who, some time or other, talked through his hat on this important topic? For your friend who takes Life and Time as the last word on current events, there is another article on Contemporary Readings in the Higher Sophistry: the friendly tone of the article will keep your friend friendly, and still, perhaps, induce him to make the necessary intelligent discount to what he continues to read in Life and Time.

Perhaps the best Magazines for this clipping-and-mailing spontaneity are America ($4.50 a year, Grand Central Terminal Building, 70 East 45th St., New York, 17, N. Y., The American Press); The Sign (a monthly at $2 a year, payable to The Sign, Passionist Fathers, Union City, N. J.); and The Catholic Digest (a monthly at $3 a year, payable to the Catholic Digest, 41 East 8th St., St. Paul, 2 Minn.).

If only a quarter of this Column's readers would begin and continue such a mail-box campaign for Christ, the good would be incalculable. Think it over and listen to that voice in your heart which is telling you—yes—to start trying it. And when you do, remember—there must be prayer to the Holy Spirit constantly, before, during, and after. In regard to that point of prayer to accompany our spiritual reading and our attempts to give it to others, I conclude with this lovely reminder from Thomas a Kempis, the third book of The Imitation of Christ, chapter 2, in which the sacred writer speaks of sacred writers:

"They speak thy words (O God), but they give not the spirit to understand the words. They speak fair, but if thou be still they kindle not the heart. They show fair letters, but thou declarest the sentence. They bring forth great high mysteries, but thou openest thereof the true understanding. They declare thy commandments, but thou helpest to perform them. They show the way but thou givest comfort to walk therein. They do all outwardly, but thou illuminest and informest the heart within. They water only without forth, but thou givest the inward growing. They cry all in words, but thou givest to the hearers understanding of the words that be hard."

(I am indebted for this lovely translation to Father Edward Klein's new edition of the 1530 version by Richard Whitford, published by Harper and Brothers, New York, and available now in a pocket-size at $1.50; surely one of the finest English translations, with just enough of the original archaic flavor preserved to give the tasting of it an attractive bouquet.)

Clergy Recordings

The Irish Digest quotes the following:

The clergyman was praying—as well he might—for the troubles of the world. "Let us pray," he said, "that the wheels of Europe may run more smoothly . . ." There was a pause, while the congregation prayed, and his voice rose again: "Let us pray for Greece."

The rector of a County Kerry church gave a handyman a present of some seed potatoes—"British Queens," I believe. In the course of time he met him one day and inquired as to what kind of crop he had. "Splendid, Your Reverence. The missus agrees we never had finer potatoes in our lives."

The rector anxious to have his little joke, said: "Knowing your extreme political opinions, I am surprised that you would grow anything with such a high-sounding British name."

"Oh, that's all right, Your Reverence; before we ate them we boiled the divil out of them."

Mr. Walker Could Go Fishing

The weighty and many-paged magazine "Esquire" is not in the United States mails this month and as a result our weary-backed mail carriers are walking a little straighter.

Congressman Frank C. Walker, Postmaster General of the United States, has added the virtue-endowing Esquire to his list of periodicals now suspended from second-class mailing privileges.

Although liberal and secular critics have called Mr. Walker an enemy of free speech and a dictator, the Postmaster General continues to refuse government subsidy, which is the real character of second-class mailing privileges, to magazines consistently offending against public decency.

In all honesty, Mr. Walker is not an enemy of free speech. Neither is he a dictator. As far as Mr. Walker is concerned, the publisher of "Esquire," Mr. Smart, may print it every day if he likes. The Postmaster, moreover, has never tried to stop Artist Vargas from painting his seductive and semi-nude females for "Esquire" or any other magazine.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Walker has not even barred "Esquire" from the mails. If Mr. Smart really wants to save the cultural life of his subscribers all he has to do is pay first-class mailing costs and the poor mailcarriers will again struggle under the weight of "Esquire" and its Varga girls.

The present below-cost postal rates were granted under a law passed by Congress in 1879 to all publications such as newspapers and magazines that "promote the public welfare."

In the "Esquire Case," the Postmaster General argues that Mr. Smart's magazine "is so devoted to material that is either obscene or close to obscenity that, far from promoting the public welfare, it is harmful to the public welfare."

Mr. Walker's action against "Esquire" is his way of saying either Congress must change its law or Mr. Smart must change his magazine.

Favored as they now are by the second-class mailing privilege the rich exploiters of obscenity may plot to change Mr. Walker. But losing his job would not bother Mr. Walker. Very likely he would laugh and go off fishing, while Mr. Smart and Mr. Varga grow wealthy on obscenity and cheap postal rates in the name of freedom of speech.

Poland's Border

A Pole would put it this way: "It would be a travesty on justice if after an Allied victory in a war which started when Britain and France declared war on Germany because Hitler attacked Poland, Poland should come out of it worse off than if Hitler had been left to complete his designs." The Pole would be referring, of course, to Moscow's claims concerning the western borders of Russia, which means naturally the eastern frontiers of Poland.—Edwin L. James in the New York "Times."

Song of the Khaki Christ

By Rev. James J. Galvin, C.S.S.R.

We who walked in leather sandals through the quiet cloister yard
Chanting psalters at sunrise for the glory of the Lord:

We who lifted up our voices in the sanctuary's light
Now lay aside our scapulars, our habits black and white

We who won the tasseled cap of Arts, the Doctor's robe and ring,
Heard a drum-beat in the twilight like a thunder-clap for spring;

And we quit the stuffy class-room setting pen and text-book down,
Clapping chalk-dust from our cassocks: we go striding out of town.

We who kept monastic silence, we who freely sealed our lips,
Now pray and parry scuttlebutt on spray-white battleships.

From sacristy and hospital, suburban school and slum:
We hurry to the Colors, to our fighting men we come.

Hot guns thunder, and the blood runs chill;
And the cannon mutter curses, and the black bombs spill;

And the cities glow like Sodom and the smoke and darkness splits
With the crackle-ack of challenge to a host of Messerschmitts;

Searchlights flutter and the planes dive low,
To Kodiak, to Sicily, to Tarawa we go.

Vivat Ecclesia! Domino gloria!
Mori pro Patria. Our Destiny we know.

There are beardless lads in Africa who smile at us in pain;
Lads who danced in Queens and Galveston, but will not dance again.

Lads who pitched a thousand innings, lads who read the Sunday Post,
Lying maimed and blind and murmuring the names they cherish most!

And we scribble down in pencil little letters from the dead:
Little messages to mothers, to some little sweetheart.

And they mumble as we touch them with our cool sanitary thumbs:
And blessing them, we hasten to their cannon-mangled chums.

We tumble through the hollow skies with parachutes in tow;
We huddle with Commandos in the barges as they go;

We scramble over stony cliffs where life hangs by a thread;
In tracer-fire and powder-flash we kneel beside the dead!

And on rocky Arctic islands we must lie on frozen ground,
And we hearken in our slumber to a bomber homeward bound;

And our dreams mount up and pierce it, and outpace it on the way.
Alleluias in some little town we walked in yesterday.

And we hear a church-bell ringing, and we hear a bus go by,
And vendors hawking oranges and huckleberry pie;
And suddenly we shudder and awaken with a sigh!

Long Toms roaring on a rifle-peppered front;
In the olive-groves of Sicily we left four Barred Host.

In the jungle swamps of Papua where strong Mauraus grow thin,
And the scarlet parrots chatter, and the yellow snipers grin;
With the fox-hole for confessional, we confess and pardon him!

And on palm and orchid islands naked natives gape in awe,
To see strong men in brown and green from York and Arkansas,

Gather around our altar-jeeps with heads and hooded head,
And stack their guns to kneel and pay mute homage to the dead.

And they wear Our Lady's medal and they bless themselves and rise;
And a sense of pride steals over us and gathers in our eyes.

For, for this it is we follow them on keel and wheel and wing . . .
By the chrism on our hands we've sworn this oath to Christ the King:

To sleep and creep and climb with them to keep their spirits bright,
To keep them in the Grace-of-God's hilarious delight,

To stand abreast of each of them and shout their hearts to ring
With three eternal cheers for Christ: For Death has lost its sting!)

Vivat Ecclesia! Domino gloria!
Mori pro Patria! We fight for Christ the King!

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Little-Known Facts for Catholics

By M. J. MURRAY

Democracy 'Irrevocably' Linked To Christianity

Democracy is an inspiration of the Gospel of Christ and for its preservation, therefore, is irrevocably linked to the Christian faith.

Contributing to a new symposium on democracy, the celebrated Jacques Maritain, the celebrated philosopher and Catholic convert, states:

"What is important to the political life of the world and to the solution of the crisis of civilization is by no means to prevent that Christianity is linked to democracy, and that the Christian faith would compel every faithful to be a democrat. It is rather to state that despite any errors and any infidelity democracy is linked to Christianity and that the democratic impulse sprang up in history as a temporal manifestation, sometimes disfigured, of the evangelical inspiration."

Statesmen, says Maritain, are well aware of democracy's dependence on Christianity, and "it is not without reason that, in defending democracy, they invoke today Christ's Sermon on the Mount."

Fourteen of the nation's outstanding leaders, including Maritain, have contributed to this new symposium on the survival of democracy in the post-war world, which is published by the Kerry Foundation, Washington, D. C., and the Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee.

Other contributing authors to the book, which is entitled "Democracy: Should It Survive?" include such authorities as Walter Lippman, Dom Luigi Sturzo, Phillip Murray and Karl Bernfeld.

Seeking to establish a working basis for the modern democratic state, the authors demonstrate how moral, educational, economic, and political democracy can survive only if it is solidly grounded on a recognition of man's inherent dignity, and how a neglect of this principle will result in the bleak slavery of Totalitarianism.

"If the leaders of the state or the planners hold that man has no supernatural destiny," the dedication states, "then obviously the reason for the survival of democracy crumbles as does the basis for freedom."

Jimmie Raised Right

After Mary Cullen read me the letter, I looked up the city called Cocks for her. (That's where he was supposed to have landed in Germany from an airplane.) And her comment was "I think Jimmie is alive. You know Jimmie. He'll say and do the right thing, wherever he is, just like his father before him, because by the grace of God I was able to raise Jimmie right. And that could make all the difference in the world for what happens to a boy when he comes to just such an emergency as Jimmie must have come to—many times over there." From "Thanks to Angels" by Ted Lellenthal, Chicago Tribune-Daily News.