Father Gillis Says:

The Wisdom Of Faith

Sometimes, when engaged in more or less desultory reading we stumble upon something that seems to be our own, but which is quoted from one of the world's great thinkers. On such occasions we feel a thrill not necessarily of pride but of satisfaction. So it happened recently when I glanced at the "Treasure Chest" which J. Donald Adams presents on his regular page in The New York Times Book Review. He quotes from Goethe's "Conversations with Eckermann": "People always fancy that we must become old to become wise; but in truth, we years advance, it is hard to keep ourselves as wise as we were. In certain matters a man is as likely to be as right in his twentieth as in his sixtieth year."

That truth — I think it a truth — has been the theme of many a commencement address I have delivered. I used to think I got the notion out of my own noddle. But perhaps it came from Goethe whose "Conversations" I always keep close by me. Into that great book I dip now and again, off and on at any odd moment. But I confess I hadn't remembered that I got from Goethe the idea that in certain matters (kindly note that qualification "in certain matters") the young are wiser than the old. But if I got it from Goethe he got it from someone else, and he from someone else, and so on back perhaps to our Lord's saying that we must "become as babes," if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. One of the meanings of "entering the kingdom of heaven" may be to progress from worldly wisdom to heavenly wisdom. Our Savior seems to say that we must make progress by going back. We were nearer to Him, and consequently nearer to Wisdom when we were "babes" than we are when we get older.

Goethe doesn't mean, J. Donald Adams accentuates the fact, that we were wiser in our first childhood than we are in our second. He is not comparing adolescence with senility. He means — at least I mean when I tell the young folks at graduation — that when we are young we have the impulses, clear vision, praiseworthy ambition. As we go on in life we come gradually, and in general unknowingly, to accept the world's point of view. We pick up what the world calls wisdom, that is shrewdness, caution, "prudence" (using that word in a sense unknown to Catholic theology). We come to accept — also in a false sense — what the wiseacres call "tolerance." We carry tolerance to such an extreme that we tolerate what in our more straightforward days we knew to be intolerable. We shrug the shoulders and say, "Oh, well," too easily and too often.

We get into the habit of compromise. We say yes on principle and more on expediency. As St. Paul says, we see what is better and we approve of it — but we do what is worse. If the priest in the pulpit urges us on to holiness, we fling at him a word taken from the mouth of fascists, "perfectionist," as if the Gospel were not a summons to perfection. "Be ye perfect," said Jesus. We say "that sounded all right when I was young and had high hopes, but I have learned a lot as I went along in life." Yes, a lot. A lot of the world's habit of toning down the higher demands of religion and — to tell the truth — the higher expectations which we ourselves had when we were young.

If that sounds too much like a sermon, let's come back to Goethe. He was no preacher. And decidedly he was no saint. He was about as "worldly" as anyone who ever lived. He was more intimately acquainted with what is called "the world" than any other great thinker. He rates as a philosopher, but he was no recluse. In the set in which he moved he came into close contact with such sophistication as you would not find in the most highly pagan ized contemporary "society." He was a pretty gay blade, though one of the three or four greatest philosophical poets of all time. But looking back at it all, he gave his judgment that at twenty we may be wiser in some things than we are at sixty.

I would go so far as to say that if this great world could be conducted on the principles held by most of us in our youth; if the caginess, the skepticism, the cynicism of middle age and of old age, were to be abandoned, and the affairs of nations were to be conducted on the "perfectionism" which youth doesn't think impossible, we might get somewhere. As it is we seem like the music in the popular song — to go 'round and 'round and come out—well we come out here where we now are. It isn't the young folk who have placed us in our present predicament. If we were to hand over to them the job of running the world they could hardly make a worse mess of it than their elders. At least, to do so they would have to "go some."

Worth Quoting

Chicago New World — It seems that parents have left the entertainment of their children to other agencies, possibly the school, the theater, the many mechanical devices they feel can keep youngsters busy and interested. They have forgotten that the key-stone of the home is their presence and example. Parental guidance and supervision cannot be substituted for by any mechanism external to the home.

The Yardstick

By Rev. Geo. Meyer.

ADA Plans Answer For Communists

On January 6 a turning-point was marked in the history of the American liberal movement. A group of 150 so-called progressives or liberals convened in the city of Washington, under the auspices of the Union for Democratic Action, to set up a nation-wide organization which would be of one and the same time truly progressive and unalterably anti-Communistic. The new organization will be known as Americans for Democratic Action.

The formation of ADA is one of the most hopeful developments of recent years. Its policy on economic and social problems will be vigorously progressive. It will take second place to none in pushing for short-term economic reforms and for a long-term reorganization of American economic life along the lines of industrial democracy. And, on the negative side, it simply will not tolerate interference of any kind whatsoever from Communist or Fascist sympathizers.

This is not to say — as some of ADA's more frantic enemies and even some of its undiscriminating friends have already alleged—that the new organization will indulge in "red baiting." Its policy on this point was made crystal clear at the Washington organization meeting. (Incidentally, perhaps the enforced absence of the Daily Worker's correspondent from this initial meeting partially explains the Worker's laughable analysis of the proceedings.) ADA made it unmistakably clear that it hasn't any intention of wasting its energy on a witch hunt. It simply says to the Communists: You go your way and we'll go ours. We have an important job to do, and we are determined not to be hampered by Communists or other totalitarians in carrying out our program.

And therein lies a moral for the rest of us. ADA is anti-Communist, but it has the elementary good sense to recognize that to be anti-Communist is only half the job, and by far the easier half at that. The more difficult part of the job is to come up with a social and economic program that will give life and meaning to the promises inherent in the world democracy. Anything less than this is the reverse of anti-Communism. For Communism in the United States, when all is said and done, can flourish only to the extent that the rest of us default on our obligations. It goes without saying, of course, that the strategy of the Communists ought to be studied very carefully if the movement is to be effectively checked and curtailed. But woe to those who think that Communism can be eliminated by the FBI or by Congressional investigations and purges! The FBI and Congressional committees can help, but it would be dangerous and naive to exaggerate either their function or their effectiveness.

The mere profession of faith in democracy, far from being adequate, actually tends to play into the hands of the totalitarians. This was the warning issued recently by Sir Stafford Cripps in an interesting little book entitled "Towards Christian Democracy."

"Constant professions without performance," Sir Stafford says, "are the most damaging form of advocacy. It drives the people away in bitter disillusionment, and leaves a vacuum of purpose in their mind which can then easily be filled by totalitarian materialism, paganism, or any other evil idea."

ADA subscribes to this point of view instinctively. Its whole purpose, as a matter of fact, is to try to fill up the vacuum to which Sir Stafford Cripps refers — to fill it up with a forward-looking program of economic and social betterment. The defeatist will tell us that our choice is limited as between the "jungle" and the "pail" — the jungle of uncontrolled free enterprise, and the jail of collectivism. ADA is determined to prove that that's a totally false dilema. Its members refuse to admit that planning is synonomous with totalitarianism. On the contrary, they argue that the very lack of planning can advance the cause of the totalitarians.

Perhaps the philosophy of ADA may be adequately summarized in the words of a recent essay on full employment by Professor Landauer of the University of California: "A large part of American public opinion is prejudiced against planning because of its Russian origin. The communists as well as the conservatives have done their utmost to create the conviction that the three essential elements of the Russian system, i.e. the dictatorial form of government, the collective ownership of factories and farms, and economic planning cannot be separated. . . . On the contrary, since planning is the only safe way to prevent depressions, and since every major depression creates a strong temptation to trade political liberty for alleged economic security, a national economic plan is an indispensable protection for free institutions in the future."

ADA will need the help and the prayers of all of us in its efforts to arrive at a type of decentralized planning in complete harmony with the principles of American democracy and with the principles of the natural moral law. Because of its political alignments (which, incidentally, will be clarified and possibly even changed as time goes on) ADA cannot reasonably expect to be endorsed by all Americans. Nevertheless, its future will be watched with sympathetic interest by those who believe in full employment in a free society.

AS WE SEE IT

Breathing Spell

By DAN PATRICK

The reports are in on the latest Roosevelt-Stalin meeting.

This time it was in Moscow behind the walls of the Kremlin. The same Stalin who paid lip tribute to the Atlantic Charter during the war was there.

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who apparently came out on the short end of his diplomatic tussles with Stalin at Teheran and Yalta was not at Moscow. In his stead were his son, Elliott Roosevelt and his daughter-in-law, Fay Emerson Roosevelt.

They came to Moscow as correspondents for LOOK magazine and presented a series of questions to Stalin. Judging by the answers attributed to the Soviet dictator, doves of peace must have been flying around the conference room at the Kremlin.

In reply to the questions proposed by Elliott, Stalin declared the Soviet talk in the United Nations, could see no danger of war, saw no real deterioration of relations with the United States and declared for foolproof control of atomic energy.

Whether his answers will prove to be so much window dressing remains to be seen. However we hope they carry more weight than some of his pledges at Yalta.

For instance only this week the world watched the force of actual events turn into a hollow mockery the Yalta declaration that Poland would have free and unfettered elections.

Despite this self - evident skepticism, however, we can take some of Stalin's talk at face value, particularly when he says that the peoples of the world, including the Russians, are sick and tired of war.

What Mr. Stalin does not say, however, is more important. He has not pointed out that the internal economy of the Soviet Union needs a breathing spell which various experts predict will run from five to fifteen years.

At the most, however, they term this interval a breathing spell. It does not, they emphasize, mean a deviation from long-range Russian policy of Communizing the world. In an excellent report on this matter the magazine NEWSWEEK concludes:

"The Russians think that time is on their side.

The article says further:

"In technology, the Soviets are a generation behind the West.

"These factors also indicate many short-range developments. The most imminent is probably the hard battle the Soviets will wage at the Moscow peace conference to obtain vitally needed reparations from the current industrial production of the entire Reich. They have already suggested $3,000,000,000 worth a year for ten years. American officials consider this ridiculously high. These officials now, however, indicate that a figure of $400,000,000, might be feasible. In return, for reparations, the Russians have indicated that they would agree to the complete political and economic unification of the Reich with no strings attached.

So far the chief support for the Russian proposals comes from Americans actually charged with dealing with the Germans. The State Department still opposes the suggestions. And it has one ace in the hole. The Russians are apparently about ready to ask again for an American loan. They need this about as badly as they need German reparations.

"Another prospect: The Russians will continue their present atomic diplomacy. No observer consulted by Newsweek thought there was any appreciable chance of the Russians agreeing to inspection of atomic plants as the United States demands. The only circumstance under which they would allow it would be if they felt that yielding on inspection would allow them to achieve their objective of forcing the United States to give up its technologically advanced weapons such as the atom bomb itself, rockets, long-range planes, and bacteriological warfare developments.

"The shift in Russia's policy indicates that for the immediate future it will probably not attempt forceful intervention through local Communist parties in Western European countries. The Soviets have already found that in countries like France and Italy this is a difficult and dangerous game to play."

In Balkan States directly controlled by Communist regimes the Soviets will probably need American economic assistance and so may lift the iron curtain slightly. In these countries also the withdrawal of the unpopular Russian Army will aid the local Communist governments. In the Far East, observers expect the Soviets to work for continued chaos in China through moral support — and little else of the Chinese Communists. They will probably also maintain the current stalemate in Korea as long as possible, keep their grip on such places as Dairen, and snipe at General of the Army MacArthur.

This blueprint does not take into account unexpected events in the Western states that might play into the Russians' hands and cause them to take the offensive again. The most important single development that could bring this about would be a weakening of the American diplomatic line.

Millions for Selznick

The Boston Pilot—Jan. 19, 1947

We've long felt that a large share of the blame for the horrible damage Hollywood has done to minds in this country lies in the continuous exploitation of the "stars," those glamorous, grossly overpaid marionettes who strut and languish in front of a camera to the megaphoned instructions of a "director" in the wings. Advertisers din the refrain: "Use the Product Hollywood Uses!" There are Hollywood columns, Hollywood magazines, stuffed from cover to cover with film; little-tattle; the clothes the "stars" wear, the sports they prefer, and their evanescent "romances."

Possibly the most influential of the gossipers is Hedda Hopper. This "Duel in the Sun" business is a chance to discuss the ethics of Miss Hopper and the type she illustrates.

"Duel in the Sun," this woman wrote in her syndicated column, is "sex-rampant." Also "it's lusty, lush, lascivious, and will make David Selznick millions!"

The point, the very important point is this — Miss Hopper notes these qualities, sex-rampant," "lusty, lush and lascivious" with approval. In her estimate, "Duel in the Sun" is "the finest technicolor seen in these parts for many a year."

It's easy enough to understand the producer who speaks an indecent film past the censors. His interest is simply and wholly in filthy lucre—quite properly called "filthy" in this reference. So "damn the torpedoes"—damn any consideration except money-making. One can also understand the actors. Some of them are not very cerebral. Moral cowards, they do what they are told.

But what sort of mind is it that recognizes a motion picture as "sex-rampant, lush, lustful and lascivious" and applauds the performance? Miss Hopper has a large readership and a large radio audience. Neither group is very intelligent — or they would not read Miss Hopper and listen to her. But they are numerous, they're young, and they all have souls to save. Doesn't Miss Hopper recall that Christ promised a very special hell for the Fagins who lead children astray?

Priest Shapes Labor Laws

Boston — (ENS)—The Rev. Thomas E. Shortell, S.J., eminent authority on labor problems and director of the Institute of Industrial Relations at Holy Cross College has been called upon to assist in shaping future Massachusetts labor legislation.

He was appointed by Gov. Robert F. Bradford as one of nine members of a committee, representing labor, management, and the public, which will study existing state labor laws and recommend such changes as it deems necessary to curb industrial disputes.

The Divorce Tide

By J. J. Gilbert

Washington — The steadily growing number of divorces in the United States is now being recognized as one of the most serious problems confronting the country. Some students of civic affairs are linking divorce with juvenile delinquency, a problem to which the United States Department of Justice has lately been giving so much attention.

In addition to its inherent and very sad moral aspects, the unhappy phenomenon of increasing divorce has a direct effect upon the public and economic life of the country. Blasting family life, divorces reflect upon individual and group stability, producing in time increased problems of law enforcement, public care, rehabilitation and frequently mental health.

Divided homes also are reflected in housing problems since two homes often are needed where one sufficed before; in the physical maintenance and moral guidance of minors, destroyed credit, lowered or lost purchasing power, and unemployment.

Always serious, the problem no longer can be blinked. It does not do to say it is a natural aftermath of war, when Los Angeles County expected to report a 1946 record of five divorces to every six and a fraction marriages; when other sections reported ratios of one divorce to every two marriages or less, and when divorce courts in at least one locality remained open several nights a week to handle the business. It is freely predicted that in 1947 the divorce rate for the country as a whole will reach at least 40 per cent of the total marriage rate.

Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas has introduced two measures in the 80th Congress. One is a joint resolution providing for an amendment to the United States Constitution which would empower Congress to enact national divorce legislation. The other measure, which would be enacted after the adoption of the amendment, would establish uniform regulations for marriage and divorce. The second measure would grant divorces on six grounds: adultery, cruel and inhuman treatment, abandonment or failure to provide for a period of one year or more, habitual drunkenness, incurable insanity and conviction of an infamous crime.

One prominent Washington attorney recently appealed to the women of the country to help stop the rising tide of divorces. He ventured the guess that not one divorce in every ten granted across the nation "is worth the paper it's written on." He said only the women of the country could stop this evil.

President Truman, when he gave his State of the Nation address to Congress early this month, speaking with reference to something else, used words which are strikingly applicable to this situation. The President was talking about future labor legislation and whether or not it is needed, when he said: "Collective bargaining agreements, like other contracts, should be faithfully adhered to by both parties."

The thought occurred to us that many a citizen, some of them prominent, would "hit the ceiling" if anyone suggested that they would "welch" on a business contract, and yet they think nothing of striving publicly to break their marriage agreement. After all, religious-minded or not, every person ought to appreciate that marriage is a contract. It has become the least respected and most easily repudiated contract in our country. Why can't it be regarded as highly, and as inviolable, as a collective bargaining agreement, a sales contract, or the rental of an office?

Couples Will Renew Vows

Chicago —(NC)— All Catholic married couples in the Chicago area will be invited to renew their marriage vows at Holy Hour services to be held at the same time in all churches of this city March 12, in connection with the annual meeting of the Catholic Family Life Conference.

Center of this extraordinary ceremony will be the Cathedral of the Holy Name here. All those couples who observed their silver or golden wedding anniversaries in 1946 or will in 1947 are invited to the Cathedral. All other couples, including newlyweds, will be asked to attend

Letters to Editor

Editor:—

I have seen by chance an odd number of your so interesting "Catholic Courier-Journal" and I dare to write to you in my bad English. . . . (You will not mind. I am a French missionary) that to ask you if you could not kindly find a good person who would accept to forward his one journal to us.

We are so deprived of spiritual food here in our far away African post and little by little we become intellectually impoverished. It is a sacrifice like others for us, of course, but I am so sure your good heart will understand and you will try to help us.

Beforehand I thank you.

Father Jean Delmare, W.F.,
White Fathers,
Nyamonga,
Tanganyika,
East Africa.