

The Holy Land, a Divided Land

The author of the following article is assistant secretary of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, New York. He has returned recently from a 12-month tour in the Middle East where he represented the Pontifical Mission for Palestine.

By FATHER JOHN G. NOLAN (N.C.W.C. News Service)

The surprise announcement of Pope Paul VI that he will visit Jerusalem next month focuses attention on the situation in the Holy Land and on the work of U.S. Catholics there.

The Holy Land proper is Palestine, a name no longer on the map. It disappeared in May, 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel. The core of ancient Palestine is the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

The term "Holy Land" also can apply to an area much broader than Palestine. It covers the overall area in which Biblical events took place — present-day Jordan and Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Egypt.

Prior to World War I, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1920, by a league of Nations mandate, the country came under British administration. The mandate ended in 1948, and the British troops withdrew.

Palestine again became a battlefield. War raged for months between the newly-proclaimed State of Israel and the Arab States. Casualties on both sides mounted into the thousands. About 500,000 Palestinians — Arabs who had centuries-old roots in Palestine — fled into neighboring Arab states.

These Palestinians are still refugees — and their number has increased, with new births, to 1.2 million. It is estimated that half of them are under 17 years of age. More than 400,000 still live in refugee camps provided by the United Nations.

In 1947, before the British mandate ended, the United Nations General Assembly had decreed the partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State. The UN stipulated that Jerusalem should be an international city, under special international rule.

At stake, of course, was the protection of, and the right of free access to, the shrines and holy places.

Jerusalem is sacred, not only to Christians, but to Muslims and Jews as well. For the Muslim, Jerusalem is the place from which Mohammed was transported into Heaven. As such, it is the third holiest site of his religion. For the Jew, Palestine is a Promised Land, and Jerusalem, the City of David.

For the Christian, Jerusalem and other places of Palestine are venerated and set apart through association with the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

The United Nations partition plan, although adopted by a majority of member-states, has never been realized.

The Palestine of old — part of which is now in Jordan, part in Israel — is today an armed camp, manned by the troops of nations technically still at war. Thus, the sacred shrines are cut off from one another; Bethlehem is in Jordan, Nazareth is in Israel.

Ordinary tourists may pass from Jordan into Israel (via the historic Mandelbaum Gate), but they may not return. Christians in Israel may visit the holy



A Franciscan monk heralds the birth of Christ by ringing the bells of the Church of St. Catherine in Bethlehem. Those bells have been rung every Christmas for centuries.

places in Jordan at Christmas and Easter, but only for a few hours.

JERUSALEM (itself is a divided city. Jordanian and Israeli soldiers, armed with sub-machine guns, face each other on the alert 24 hours a day. Free access to both parts of the city is available only to a handful of diplomats and UN truce observers.

In 1948, when war ravaged the city, Pope Pius XII spoke in three encyclicals. He spoke of the "arrow which sears our soul at the thought that the blood of men continues to flow freely on the soil on which Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, shed His Blood."

He urged nations to "give an international character to Jerusalem and its vicinity." He stressed the necessity of assuring "with international guarantees both the right of free access to the holy places scattered throughout Palestine and the freedom of religion and the respect for customs and religious traditions."

The American bishops also appealed for a "real and effective internationalization of Jerusalem and its environs" in a joint statement in November, 1950.

Meanwhile, the plight of 500,000 Arab refugees from Palestine — most of whom had found refuge in Lebanon, Syria, and the Gaza Strip — reproached the conscience of the world. Most of these refugees had left Palestine on short notice, leaving everything behind. Reduce

ed to beggary in countries foreign to them, they were in desperate need of food, clothing, housing, and the other necessities of life.

At the request of the Vatican, an American priest, Mgr. Thomas McMahon, of New York, went to the Middle East in 1948 to assess the needs of the refugees. Early in 1949, through the instrumentality of Mgr. Giovanni B. Montali, now Pope Paul VI, the Holy Father established the Pontifical Mission for Palestine.

Mgr. Joseph T. Ryan, who became president of the Pontifical Mission three years ago, reports that U.S. Catholics have provided the Palestine refugees with "up to \$20-million" in money, goods and services since 1948. The money — collected in a one-year appeal — pays for clinics and hospitals, care, clothing and food distributions, schools, care for the aged, and even chapels and convents.

More recently, the Pontifical Mission has opened a small library in the old city of Jerusalem, the only Catholic public library in all Jordan.

Mgr. Ryan also is the national secretary of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association which, under the presidency of Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, helps to

finance the training of priests and Sisters, and support missionary activity in 18 countries, some of which are in the Holy Land.

Catholics in the Near East countries are in large numbers, members of the Eastern Rites with their liturgy and rituals, laws and customs, different from Roman Rite Catholics in the West.

Christians in these countries, with the exception of Lebanon, which is 51% Christian, constitute a small minority of the total population. The majority of people in the Near East generally (Israel excepted) are Moslems. Catholics in Jordan make up only 2.7% of the total population; in Turkey, 0.7%; in Egypt, 1.2%.

U.S. Catholic welfare agencies operate in these countries serving the poor "on the basis of need, not creed." Catholic Relief Services-National Catholic Welfare Conference, for instance, provides food, clothing, and medicines in Turkey, food and vocational-training scholarships in Jordan. Last year alone, close to one million Egyptians in medical institutions received, thanks to CRS-NCWC, dietary supplements of flour, corn meal, powdered milk, vegetable oils and beans donated from U.S. surplus food stocks.

God's World

Voice of God

By REV. LEO J. TRESE

In the dark of the first Christmas morning, the shepherds showed a remarkable responsiveness to God's invitation. "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us," they said, and hastened off to seek their newborn Savior.

As we meditate on this passage, we scarcely can escape a feeling of shame at our own sluggishness in responding to the urgings of God's voice within us. Because, let us make no mistake, God does speak to each of us, time and time again.

True, He does not speak to us through a visible emissary as He spoke to the shepherds. That was a special message which God wanted all the world to hear. For His personal communications to you and to me, God does not set the night sky on fire. Gently and softly He intimates to our mind and heart His will for us.

A thought forms, "I really ought to do this and so." An impulse stirs, "I must do it. I shall."

This, let us remember, is a reality of spiritual life. It is not mere poetic imagery. The term, "voice of God," is a metaphor, admittedly, since God has no vocal cords. But God's communication with the individual soul is not a metaphor; it is what we commonly term an inspiration of grace.

THESE INSPIRATIONS of grace are a necessary consequence of God's infinite love for us. He simply will not leave us to flounder about by ourselves. Some day, in heaven, we shall see in its fullness the part that God has had in our lives. We may be humbled then to discover how few of our thoughts and resolutions have sprung spontaneously from ourselves.

The sad thing is that God speaks to us much oftener than we hear Him. One reason for this is that some times we do not want to hear Him. We are afraid that what God is trying to say may cost us something in the way of sacrifice. We ignore God's voice, as a small child will ignore his mother's call to dinner or to bed.

More often, perhaps, God cannot make Himself heard because His voice cannot penetrate the noise of our activity. Inspirations of grace usually are very low-keyed. We have to listen for them. It is notable that the only disciples of Bethlehem who heard the angels on Christmas morning were the shepherds, secluded and silent under the stars.

For spiritual health and progress we must, we absolutely must find in our lives some quiet moments for God. We must "go into the hill country" from time to time where, in peace and quietude, God's voice can be heard — the inspirations of grace can rise to the surface of consciousness. This is a time when we just look at God. Without prayer book or rosary beads we just look at God — and listen.

If we make an annual retreat, we know that this is an ideal

time for sharpening the ears of the soul. However, once a year is not enough — and once a day is not too often. An excellent time and place for this attentiveness to God is the empty church; perhaps five or ten minutes on our way home from work, or at least after Mass on Sunday.

Our own room at home can be a citadel of quiet, too. There, with door shut, we can sit and look at the crucifix and say, with the child Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." There will be times, almost certainly, when nothing happens, when God seems silent; but it is worth many such periods of silence to be alert and listening when God does speak.

On Christmas we shall follow the shepherds in spirit as they hasten to Bethlehem in search of their Savior. We, each of us, make our own journey to make the journey to our own Bethlehem, our own search for Christ, our own discovery of our part in God's plan. It is only on such journeying and in such seeking that we shall find security, peace of mind and happiness.

Our journey is longer than that of the shepherds. It stretches through years, and the route is not quite the same for any two of us. Somehow we must manage to listen to God's voice; we must learn from Him the next step on the way.

Justice Award To Dr. Blake

Chicago—(NC)—The Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago will present its award for interracial justice leadership to Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, stated clerk and national leader of the United Presbyterian Church, at a dinner here Jan. 14. The council recently named its annual award in honor of the late President Kennedy. President Johnson received the council's award in 1962 and R. Sargent Shriver, director of the Peace Corps received it in 1961. Dr. Blake will give the main address at the dinner.

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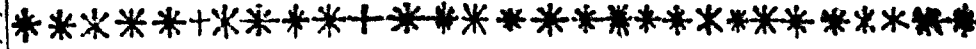
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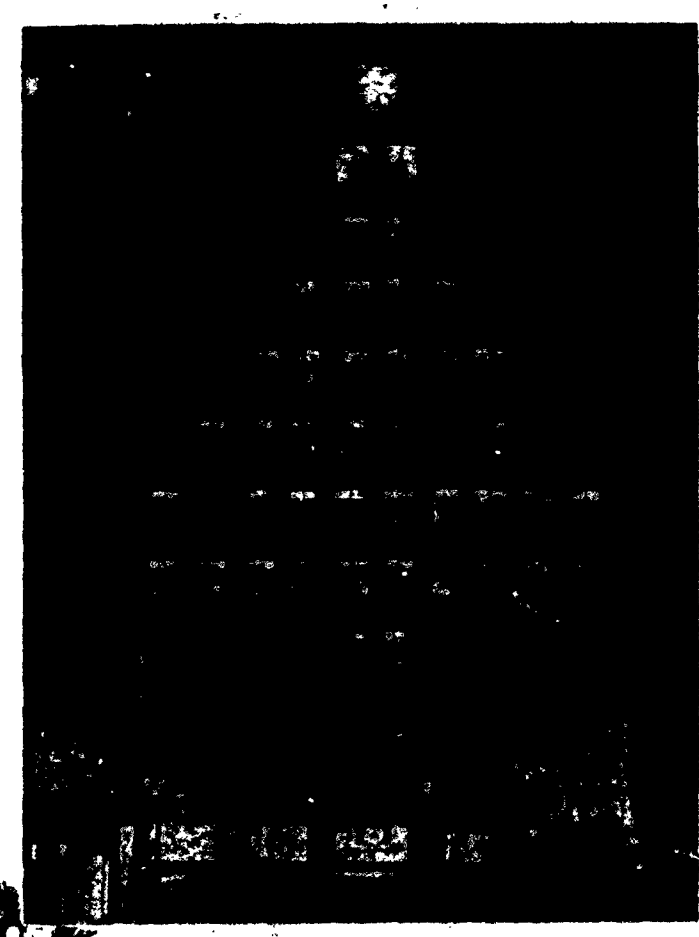
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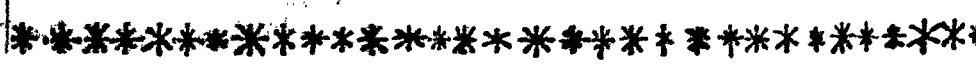


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