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Christmas After Murder

by Emmanuel Maria Heufelder, Abbot of Niederalteich

(This article was written by the Abbot of the Bavarian Benedictine Monastery of Niederalteich. The main work of this Abbey is the promotion of Unity among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians. Abbot Emmanuel here expresses the feelings of European Christians on the occasion of President Kennedy's assassination. The youth of Europe, especially, had the greatest hope in the late President as one leader who would have been able to bring about world peace. The article was sent to the Very Rev. Damasus Winzen, O.S.B., Prior of Mount Saviour Monastery, Elmira, where it was translated from German. Abbot Emmanuel's hope was that it could be printed and brought to the attention of American readers.)

This title for a Christmas Death. He Himself became subject to this law, and so achieved a redemption from within from the root of human existence. Death, "the wages of sin," thus became a sign of grace and salvation, a passage to "life eternal in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23). Raising their eyes in confidence to the Redeemer lifted up on the Cross, those wounded by the sting of the serpent would find recovery (Jn. 3:14f.).

A word addressed to us Christians by Jews says this: "When the Messiah comes, He will change the world. But has the world changed since Christ came?"
Certainly we can answer by quoting innumerable examples from Christian history, showing how the world has in fact been transformed by the spiritual forces which Christianity has released in the world.

But have not the shots at Dallas "jarr'd us awake" out of all complacency in the marvelous effects of Christianity in the world, when a Christian champion of peace was brutally torn away from us? Have they not made it clear to us once again without disguise how terribly "the hidden power" of lawlessness is still at work? (2 Thess. 2:7)

Has not this murder — and afterwards the murder of the murderer — torn open the abyss of humanity's inner decay and made us realize the deep insecurity of all human order? A sudden terror fell upon men at the news of that crime. Did anyone not feel personally threatened? Did not people walk the streets as in a haze, unable to see a way ahead?

ONE MAN who was deeply disturbed by that catastrophe called God "ridiculously cruel" for allowing such a thing to happen in His world — in which just now we are hearing again the Christmas message: "His goodness and kindness of God our Saviour has appeared" (Tit. 3:4, 2nd Mass of Christmas). "Peace on earth! Paeem in terris."

We ought to ask ourselves once again whether we have understood the message of Christmas. It is a message which allowed the tremendous seriousness that belongs to the Cross to be obscured not only by an ever-increasing commercial abuse of the sacred mystery but also by the way in which we see and celebrate Christmas as a religious feast.

At the Cross everything was simple and sober. After a strenuous journey Mary and Joseph found no room in the inn, and one cared about them. Their last refuge was one of those caves that shelter at times the poor of Palestine. Nor were there any angels at the Cross that night; only the shepherds reported that angels had appeared to them and had sung the glad tidings. Very soon the young life was threatened by death. The weeping mothers of Bethlehem stand full of sorrow before the bodies of their infants, senselessly slain by Herod's sword.

What does it mean then that God's Son became man? The Jewish people — and even the disciples until the Spirit descended upon them — erroneously thought that the Messiah would effect a transformation of this world of time; that He would bring a new order of society, of politics, of economy. His miracles were misunderstood in this way, as if He had come merely to multiply loaves and heal the sick.

THE CURSE of sin was lying upon mankind — God had offered man His love when He created him. But only in freedom can love be offered and returned. Deceived by the captain of the rebellious angels who wanted to be like God, man refused the offer of God's love; but thereby he cut himself off from life, and his existence fell under the law of death. (Gen. 3:3) He had refused to recognize as his Lord the God who is Love (I Jn. 4:16) thus he fell under the dominion of "The Prince of this World" (Jn. 14:30).

When the Redeemer came He did not abolish the Law of

force — "this world as we see it passing away" (I Cor. 7:31). The cosmic subject through sin to the Prince of this World, approaches the destruction of its present form. But right within this passing form, as "the grain of wheat falling into the ground and producing many grains" (Jn. 12:24), new life is already sprouting. Indestructible and greater — and more splendid than that which has passed (Apoc. 21:4).

THE MAN OF FAITH knows that He who hangs on the Cross and cries the death prayer of God Friday: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" is He Who "reigns from the wood of the Cross" (Hymn of the Holy Cross). A man who cannot see through to this background of Christ's death on the Cross will not know what to make of the "ridiculously cruel" God, and the absurdity that this pure, noble and most generous of men had to die.

Our time is steeped in materialism. It is a time of transition from progress in science and technology, from economic growth and political power, to the sacrificial death of the Christian man Kennedy and the example of his wife's fortitude, born of deep faith, were more urgently needed in this crucial hour of man's history than the public service of that rare statesman in whom humanity placed such high hopes.

ECHS - Notre Dame Holiday Ball
The E.C.H.S. - Notre Dame Alumni Association, Elmira, held its second annual Holiday Ball Saturday night, Dec. 28 at Columbus Center.
Proceeds from the party will be used in conjunction with the association's scholarship at Notre Dame High School.
Mark Terry and his orchestra played for dancing from 9 to 1.
Joseph A. Lynch and Matthias F. Fennell, immediate past presidents of the association, were general chairmen.

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WATKINS GLEN Epiphany Supper
Watkins Glen — The annual 5 cent and 10 cent Epiphany supper will be held at St. Mary's of the Lake parish on Jan. 6, Sunday. Serving will be from 5:30 until 7 p.m. at the center and the children of the parish will entertain under the direction of the Sisters and Mrs. Louis Vickio.
The supper committee includes:
General chairman, Mrs. Raymond Granston, assisted by Mrs. Lenita Salvatore, Mrs. Nick Martin, Mrs. Michael Barone, Mrs. Frank Chiacchierini, and Mrs. James Adessa as co-chairmen.
Cashiers are Mrs. Hazelle Dunham, Mrs. Arthur Barnes; food tickets, Mrs. Frank Cole and Mrs. Arthur Robert.

Religion, Race Conference in N.Y.
New York — (NC) — More than 2,500 religious leaders, city and state officials, civic leaders and labor-management representatives will attend the first New York Conference on Religion and Race here Feb. 25.
The conference will mark the first time that representatives of the three major faiths have taken a unified stand in formulating action programs to eliminate racial inequalities in civil rights, education, housing, employment and in the life of the church and synagogue.
The all-day conference, which will be held at the Americana Hotel, is jointly sponsored by the Archdiocese of New York, the Diocese of Brooklyn, the Protestant Council of New York, the Queens Federation of Churches and the New York Board of Rabbis.

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