

Priests for Tomorrow



The 'World' Good or Bad?

By FATHER LOUIS HOHMAN
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Last week we attempted to deal with the basic concept of priesthood and some of the misconceptions surrounding its meaning and function. We said that the priest shares in the mediatorship of Christ, in His work of redeeming the world.

We said that redemption means recovering at the cost of Jesus' blood the order, truth, beauty, and "godliness" in sinful man and the world about him.

But now we run into considerable confusion about the meaning of that word "world". What do we mean by the "world" which Christ redeemed? The priest is often spoken of as being in the world but not of the world. This would seem like a safe statement, easy to grasp. But the fact is, it is anything but that.

The word "world" can be and is used in several senses even in Scripture. We say, "God made the world" and "He saw that it was good." On the other hand we say that the three sources of sin are the world, the flesh and the devil. St. John's Gospel tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son." In another place John records the words of Jesus, "My peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give." On the one hand, therefore we have love and admiration for the world, and on the other at least a healthy regard for its dangers.

Along with the opposite meanings we find in Scripture, we find throughout the history of Christianity a wide variance in the significance of "world."

All through the centuries we find theologians and philosophers presenting the material world as the creation of an evil spirit, while others have glorified it as the only good. Our society is influenced strongly, for example by the Puritans, the Protestant sect which has managed to extend its influence even to our time in regarding material things as evil in themselves. Our attitudes toward sex in many instances and the disastrous experiment in Prohibition are but two examples of this influence.

We are confronted, therefore, with almost opposite meanings of the same word. To say that confusion has resulted is a massive understatement.

How do we separate these two senses? First of all we must look at the positive side. We cannot of course subscribe to the heretical proposition that an evil spirit is responsible for the material world. God created the world and everything in it. As the philosophers tell us, "Whatever is, is good." Evil is nothing more than a lack of something which should be. All things, from the smallest microbe to the mightiest mountain are the creation of God and therefore good. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims His handiwork." (Psalm 18).

Just as the painting reflects the personality and skill of the artist, so do all things created reflect and speak of the goodness and wisdom of God. In this context we must love the world and let it turn our minds and our hearts to its Maker.

In what sense, then, is the world bad? All things have their purposes and man has his. Man is made a cut above all material creation in that he is made in the image and likeness of God. He is a person. His purpose cannot be beneath himself, rather it must be above. So when man attempts to find his whole meaning in material things, wealth, or in animal behavior, he reduces himself to those levels and twists his whole meaning.

The material world is to be used by man to make him more a man. It is for man always a means to become more fully a person, more like God. It can never be a goal in itself. When man becomes an idolater by worshipping the material world, making it his God, he has chosen his own ruin. In this context the world can be said to be bad for man.

We are all aware of the attraction of material things and pleasures to our animal nature. This is where the danger comes in. What should be our slave and our instrument, enslaves us and degrades us. When one tends in the direction of being enslaved by the things around him, we say that he is worldly.

The priest must therefore be not of the world. He must have a healthy reverence for the world of creation. He, perhaps more than anyone, should see it as an outpouring of God's love. He should use it as an instrument of good for bringing men to their full realization as

sons of God. At the very beginning God gave man dominion over creation. Man, by using his intelligence and his freedom was to bring the earth along with himself to fullest development.

It is in this sense that we see the healing work of Christ which occupied so much of His public life, as the work of rebuilding material creation to the order and beauty which God intended for it. Man is supposed to use his intelligence, his will and his energies to remake a world corrupted by the sin of man.

It may seem rather far-fetched to blame disease, calamity and disorders in the world on man's sin. One way to understand this is to see, that if a man had kept his integrity, had always been fully a person in the image of God rather than degraded and reduced his potential by sin, the state of the world would not be one of disorder but rather ordered by man's reason. For example, had man overcome sin and kept the integrity of his person it is likely that problems such as poverty and population would be nonexistent.

Therefore, as the Vatican Council's Decree on the Church in the Modern World instructs us, man should have a great zeal and love for progress which serves mankind because this is all part of the great plan of Redemption.

WHAT PLACE does the priest have in all this?

First of all it is evident that he may not withdraw from the world on the basis that it is evil. Just as Jesus Christ had concern and love for material things, so must the priest. Although he may not be immediately involved in the work of science, technology or material progress, he must encourage these things and expand effort to make it a better place in which to live. He must be vitally interested in overcoming poverty, hunger, inhuman housing conditions, disease, lack of education, or any other evil, physical or social, which makes the world less lovely, less reflective of the God who made it.

As Vatican II instructs, the priest must preach by word and example that all human activity, constantly vexed by man's pride and derailed self-love must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection. For, redeemed by Christ and made a new creature in the Holy Spirit, man is able to love the things themselves created by God, and ought to do so. He can receive them from God and respect and

Conversions On Decline

Taipei —(NC)— The flood of conversions which distinguished the Church in Taiwan for a decade seems to be on the wane and missionaries here wonder whether this is a normal leveling off or whether special factors are involved.

The number of Catholics in Taiwan grew from 80,861 in June, 1956 to 293,449 in June, 1966. Between 1953 and 1964 the increase of the Catholic share of the population in Taiwan was the largest among Catholic minorities in the world growing from 0.4 to 2.2 per cent.

But the annual conversion rate is falling rapidly. There were fewer adult baptisms in Taiwan from June, 1965 to June, 1966, than during any similar 12 month period since 1953-1954. The decrease was noted in all seven dioceses here.

The peak in conversions was reached in 1947, when Taiwan registered 25,338 adult baptisms.

reverence them as flowing constantly from the hand of God — the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for this one! Decree on Church in Modern World, Paragraphs 37, 39.

The notion that the priest has no place in the affairs of men but must confine his activity to the rectory and the church is now dead — and should be. If it is his specific function "to reestablish all things in Christ, both those in heaven and those on the earth" (Eph. 1:10), then his must be an active concern to rid the world of all disorder, social and physical. It goes without saying that he must do this under the guidance of his bishop whose helper he is. It is equally clear that the bishop has the same, if not a greater responsibility in this matter.

If religion is not to be pigeonholed, regarded as unnecessary and peripheral to life, then the representatives of God must plunge into the mainstream of life and make it their serious concern. "Someone once said 'You can't pray on an empty stomach.' It would be more to the point to say that you can't even be human, you can't be what God intended you to be. Redemption for a hungry man begins with his being fed.

Peace Hopes Seen in Visit Of Papal Envoy to Vietnam

Saigon — (RNS) — Although observers around the world had interpreted his visit to Saigon as one having high political and war-and-peace overtones, Archbishop Sergio Pignedoli on his arrival here said his mission was one of "a strictly religious character."

Nevertheless, the 56-year-old prelate, a veteran Vatican diplomat heading a special papal delegation, was officially greeted at Saigon's airport by South Vietnam's Foreign Minister, Tran Van Do.

High-ranking Catholic dignitaries also met him as he embarked from the jet which had carried him from Rome.

Archbishop Pignedoli said he had come "to preside, in the name of the pontiff, at an extraordinary conference of the Vietnamese hierarchy on Sept. 30 for discussion of Church problems in the light of the decisions of the Second Vatican Council."

He added that he had also come to Saigon "to bring the Vietnamese people at war a message from the Pope. In sending me here, the Holy Father has wished to show his particular sympathy for the entire people of Vietnam."

The archbishop, a longtime friend of Pope Paul, expressed surprise at the great number of reporters greeting him. Asked whether he would try to promote peace in Vietnam, he replied by saying: "We all pray for peace, but that is not the purpose of my mission here."

Washington — (NC) — The dynamics of alcoholism, the etiology of homosexuality, placing the hard to place in adoption, maintaining the aged in their own homes, and world hunger will be among the varied topics considered at the 52nd annual meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Charities.

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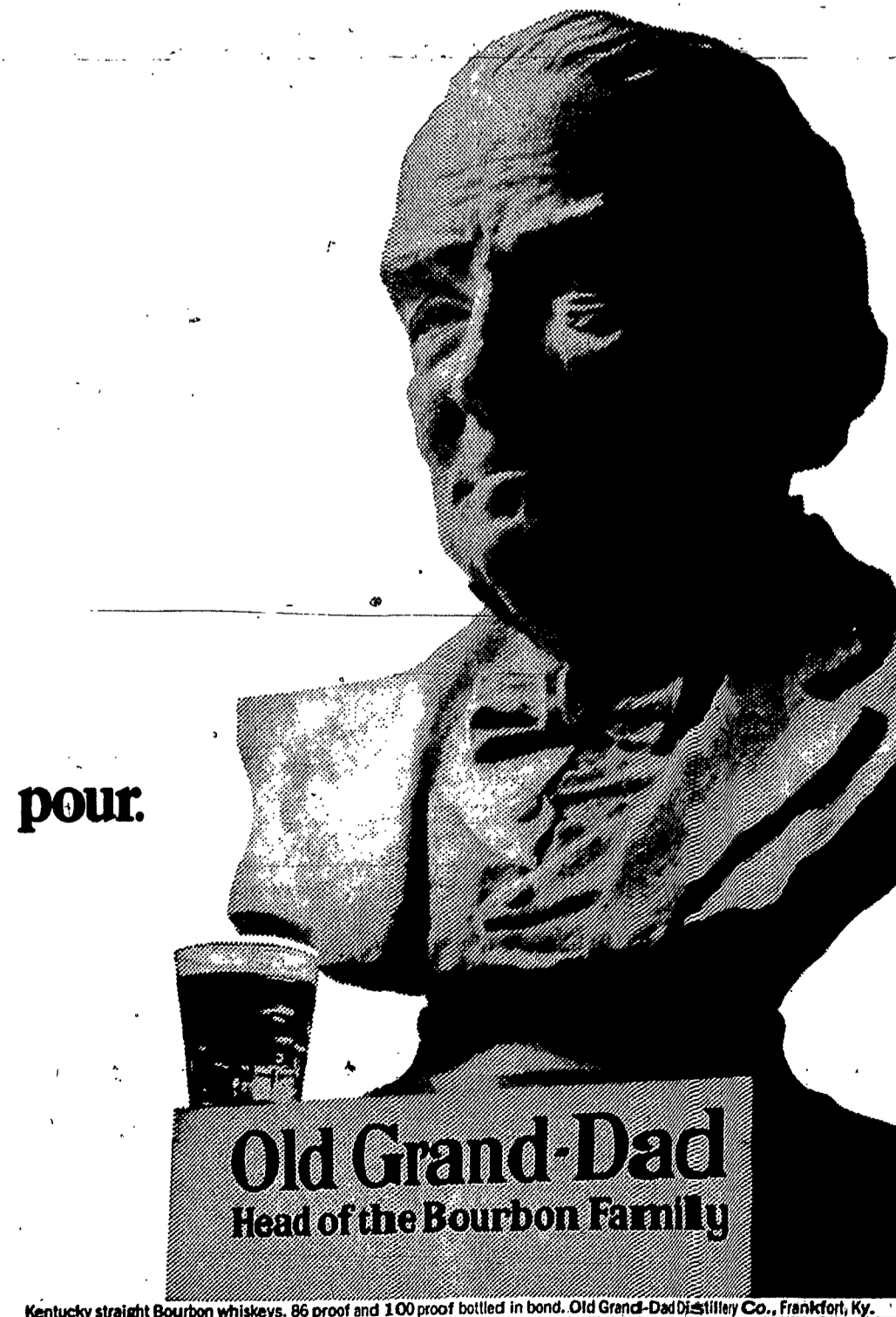
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Cornerstone at St. Charles

Monsignor James C. McNiff, vicar general of the Rochester Diocese, blesses the cornerstone for new St. Charles Borromeo Church in the town of Greece. The new edifice is scheduled for occupancy for Easter. Monsignor Robert A. Keleher, pastor, is at left. (Mantelli Photo)

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