

Thank Allah for the Pope'

Death Stalks Road to Bethlehem

(The author of the following article is a writer for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. He recently returned from a trip through the Holy Land with Monsignor John G. Nolan, national secretary of the association.)

By EDWARD SULLIVAN

Bethlehem—(NC)—It used to be only five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, five beautiful miles, that ran along a hilly ridge that was the spine of old Judea. To the left, Joseph could see black patches of the Dead Sea and the ghostly mountains of Moab. To the west, Mary could make out the thin blue line of the distant Mediterranean shore.

Today, death stalks those five beautiful miles. The ridge bristles with barbed wire and men scurry along the valleys out of artillery range.

Nowadays, to get from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, it is 12 lurching miles that twist along a narrow, hairpinning mountain road. Except for the whining of jitneys loaded with farmers, chickens and pilgrims, the traffic is still pretty much the same that Joseph and Mary joined: donkeys heaped with firewood, herds of sheep blocking the road, and women balancing unbelievable burdens on their heads.

But in the Holy Land today, man skulks in the shadow of fear. Along that ridge of hills, war is likely to break out again at any moment.

Bethlehem itself, birthplace of peace, is within easy crossfire of the armistice lines tensely dividing the still-warring Arabs and Zionists.

Around here, one must say "Zionist" instead of "Jews." The Arabs say they have no complaint against Jews, being Semites themselves and long-time neighbors. They say it is the foreign, Zionist Jew, usurping Arab claims in the new Israel, who is the declared enemy of Arab nations. After 18 years, those nations are still very much on a war footing, poised against what they call "Occupied Palestine."

So here is Bethlehem—holy to Jews and Moslems as well as to Christians of every rite—unavoidably situated at the center of conflict and, by an odd coincidence, for the same reason that Christ was born in a cave.

The first thing some one approaching Bethlehem notices is that the hills are pockmarked with hundreds of natural caves. Plainly, here is ready shelter for shepherds, for stranded Nazarenes coming to Bethlehem for the Roman census, for bivouacking armies—or for refugees fleeing war in Israel. Every town and village bordering the new Israel was overrun with refugees in the 1948-1949 flight, but Bethlehem, whose caves are storied in Arab folklore, attracted refugee families in extra thousands.

The caves have since been emptied of refugees, now collected in teeming, semi-perma-



Children who never had a homeland.

nent United Nations camps. As long as the sufferance of the rich Western nations lasts—and there are signs of it expiring—the refugees are kept alive on a minimal diet, clothed in cast-off Western dress, and sheltered in places they don't want to be. For the most part, they want to go home to their farms and shops and grazing lands in their own bit of Palestine—even if they have to fight their way back.

It has already happened: unarmed Palestinians have suicidally chosen to be summarily shot down on "their own" side of the line, rather than live in landless disgrace.

In four host countries bordering Israel, the number of refugees has now swollen by simple generation from 800,000 to nearly 1,300,000—so this threat to world peace is not diminishing with time.

Now, a third generation of anger is being born in the camps and alleys of Bethlehem. And the anger is directed not only at Zionists, but also at the largely Christian nations of the West. The refugees believe the West perhaps out of guilt arising from its own history of anti-Semitism, over-reacted to the Hitlerian horrors by imposing Israel on the Middle East without regard to Arab rights. In the Arab world, they say, hatred of any kind of Jew is a recent and strictly Western import.

IN BETHLEHEM, today, there is ample evidence that all of

this was pretty much foreseen in 1949 by Vatican officials.

Monsignor Giovanni B. Montini, then a secretary in the Vatican Secretariat of State, asked the help of Cardinal Spellman of New York who is president of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, and created the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, a relief agency that would bring American Catholic aid to refugees in the Holy Land regardless of race, creed or politics. Even today, it is reliably guessed that hardly 10 per cent of the refugees aided by Vatican relief are Christians.

It has to be a guess because, when the Pontifical Mission issues U.S. food, surplus clothing, medicine, blankets, textbooks—and hope—it never inquires of a poor man's ideology.

Catholics in America have, since 1949, responded with more than \$10 million in goods and services. In the interval, during which Monsignor Montini became Pope Paul VI, the people of Bethlehem have seen, because of the open hands of the Pontifical Missions, what it means to be Catholic. To get women and children out of the caves and streets, the Pope's mission has paid rent for as many as 500 Bethlehem families at a time.

On the edge of town where Joseph and Mary once sought shelter for their Child, the Pontifical Mission runs an orphanage for girls that poor families cannot afford to keep.



A refuge in an alien land.

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(except in emergencies, of course) toward self-help development and training.

Says Monsignor John G. Nolan, Pontifical Mission president: "Self-help is the lasting solution to the refugee dilemma that we can work out right now—without waiting for a political miracle."

Pope Paul himself has brought person-to-person relief to the stricken Holy Land in a unique way. His January, 1964, pilgrimage unlocked floodgates of tourists and pilgrims who had been staying away in droves because of the war. Thirty per cent of the economy of Jordan, which includes Old Jerusalem, the Holy Sepulchre, Bethlehem and most of the principal sacred places, leans heavily upon tourism. When the world saw the Pope travel unmolested in the Holy Land—saw him even cheered by both Arabs and Jews—the tourists returned in unprecedented numbers.

The Pope's visit, it is estimated, has increased tourist income to Jordan by another 40 per cent. Even within range of each other's guns, both Jews and Arabs are now building new roads and hotels, trying to keep pace with the new pilgrim invasions, and turning on traditional Middle East hospitality.

An Arab journalist told me: "We have reasons every day to thank Allah for the Pope."

Solidarity Seen In New Institute

Ponce, Puerto Rico—(RNS)—The solidarity between Roman Catholic bishops in the U.S. and Latin America took another step forward with the establishment of an institute for Intercultural Communication at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico here.

Scheduled to open in the Fall, the institute will be located in the former college building of the Religious of the Sacred Heart on a seven-acre tract transferred to the university by Bishop Fremiot Torres Oliver of Ponce, the university's chancellor.

The institute will train U.S. priests, Brothers, Sisters and lay for apostolic service in Latin America, as well as business and professional people seeking to work in Latin countries.

Doctor's Job 'Highest' In Value

Vatican City—(RNS)—Pope Paul VI paid high tribute to the medical profession, saying it was highly thought of by men and of "an inestimable value in the eyes of God."

He spoke to 600 delegates to the 15th national congress of doctors who work for the Italian organization which controls health facilities for those engaged in public service.

The Pope spoke of the human and Christian values of the medical profession, stressing that doctors were carrying out a "noble, social, humane, protective, generous and self-sacrificing mission."

"It may be without apparent satisfaction," he said, "but it is rich in the highest human values that are a solace to an upright conscience and bring with them unique joy. There is no other reward in the world like the sense of a job well done and help given to one's fellowman."

Bishops Meet In Trinidad

Port of Spain—(NC)—Because independent nationhood has been obtained in many territories of the Caribbean region, laymen must now make vigorous efforts to explain, defend, and apply Christian principles to the problems of the day.

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