

# God's People On a March

(Continued from Page 1)

her a "sight." How much more is said in "He sat by the blazing hearth" than "He sat by a hot stove."

**RICH CONNOTATIONS**—are built into words through years and years of usage. The expression "The People of God" is one enriched through centuries of history.

The expression reaches back to the books of Moses and connotes such ideas as a choice by God, a call, a covenant, a consecration, a promise. It suggests a chosen people constantly on the march, called to give witness everywhere to Yahweh as His Servant; a covenanted people, always looking back to His mighty deeds done for them in their going out of Egypt; a messianic people, hopefully looking forward to an end-time when would come the Anointed One, the Expectation of the Nations.

As much reading alone can help us capture the connotation of words, so only much, much bible-reading will unfold all that the expression "The People of God" enfolds: When used by the Church, it introduces a dynamic element. It connotes a people on the march, looking back to past intervention of God—His coming into history, His life, death, resurrection and ascension—and all the while stretching forward to an end-time when He will come again to judge the living and the dead (the Parousia).

Finally, the expression of the Church as "The People of God" suits better the ecumenical aims of the Council. Involving, as it does, ideas of election and call, the term connotes that everything depends on God's initiative—a more palatable view to those who believe that faith alone justifies. Situated before the chapter on the hierarchy, the institutionalism of the Church is played down with its concomitant fears of intertemperate use of "power" and infallibility.

However the expression "the People of God" is limited. By itself, it cannot express the reality of the Church in all its fullness. For the Church is more than the people of God; it is more than Israel. For the Incarnation has intervened and has added new dimensions to "the People of God." Its Lord is more than the Messiah; He is the Son of God Himself. Its blessings are more than the good things of this world; they are wholly spiritual.

The people are no longer restricted to one nation; the call is to all nations. The people of God is a new creation, born of the fusion of God's people of old, namely, Israel, and of the Gentiles—that of the two He might create in Himself one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the idea of "the People of God" needs to be completed by St. Paul's concept of the Church as "the Body of Christ"—namely, that which "the People of God" has become since the Incarnation, Easter, and Pentecost.

## 'Questions No One Asks'

**Bristol**—(RNS)—Theology must stop answering questions no one is asking, according to the fiancée of a former Roman Catholic priest.

Miss Florence Henderson, who is engaged to marry Charles Davis, noted British theologian who left the Catholic Church in December, presented her views in an editorial in the January issue of Contact.

Contact is an interdenominational journal which has a circulation of more than 100,000 in west England.



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# Seminary Priest Has Some Thoughts on Labels

By REV. ELMER McNAMARA

When a Catholic priest writes such dangerous and damaging statements as appeared in the recent Catholic Courier editorial entitled "Too many Labels," it is time to speak out both from a love of truth and, I hope, charity towards the author.



Father Elmer McNamara is professor of Scripture at St. Bernard's Seminary, a position he has held since 1938 following biblical studies in Rome. Father McNamara has been a frequent contributor of scholarly articles to the Courier.

Perhaps the regrettable thing about Father Atwell's visit to St. Bernard's Seminary (which triggered the editorial) is not the fact that he forgot to take his camera with him, but that he forgot to bring along a copy of Denzinger or a manual of theology, even an old one.

Opening the pages of either, and reflecting a little, would have prevented him from asking the inane question "How really practical is the orthodox, heretic categorizing today?"

This is like asking "how practical is right and wrong categorizing today?" Father Atwell, I am sure, would be quick to say that right and wrong categorizing is very practical today, even though an increasing number of the so-called intelligentsia might call it into doubt. For Father Atwell knows that with out right-wrong categorizing his zeal like that of all good Catholics, for the rights of oppressed minority-groups and his condemnation of those who do the oppressing makes no sense.

The struggle for the rights of the oppressed is praiseworthy and the oppressors are condemnable precisely because, according to orthodox theology, the one is right and the other is wrong. This, indeed, is what the whole of life is—all about right and wrong, and if it is in the moral sphere, right and wrong not according to situation ethics or self-pandering eclecticism, but according to the revealed doctrine of Jesus Christ as it has been mandated to the Catholic Church to teach.

I have instanced the practicality and necessity of right-wrong categorizing, not as though the Catholic Faith were to be thought of solely in terms of morality, but because the practical necessity we are under of putting labels on our moral

actions as right and wrong points clearly to the prior necessity of putting labels of right and wrong on our beliefs about God and man, time and eternity, life and death.

If a man believes that there is no God and no hereafter then his right and wrong categorizing will often be conditioned accordingly. As a communist he may resort to trickery, lies, broken pledges, purges and bloody revolutions if it suits the cause. As a hedonist he may plunge himself into a mess of sensuality. Or he may be one of those who, for various reasons, conforms to social customs and recognized standards, struggling along with varying degrees of success as those who have no hope. If he believes in God, but regards God as a remote, capricious, self-seeking, and domineering master, then his right-wrong categorizing may often produce the kind of immorality which St. Paul describes in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. If a man looks on his fellow-man as just another clod of clay he may be inclined to look down his nose on the clod if it happens to be yellow or black, or deformed or incurably sick.

The whole point of the matter is that it is extremely practical and necessary that men label not only their moral actions as right and wrong, but antecedently and more importantly that they label their thoughts about God and man as right and wrong. And the latter is exactly what we mean by orthodox and heresy. The word orthodox means a right opinion, the truth, God's truth. And heresy means a wrong opinion, a false opinion, which is wrong and false precisely because it is a heresy. The Greek word 'heresy' means a personal choosing of one's own thought in opposition to that of Christ and His Church.

The whole history of theology, and for that matter the history of the thinking Church as expressed in theology with-in and by the Magisterium, is a history of orthodox and heretical categorizing, and its resultant development and clarification. The fact that clarification of doctrine often comes with or after a heresy does not point to the heresy as necessary

or in any way excusable. Orthodoxy then, or right thinking according to the mind of Christ and His Church, is essential to the very basic foundation and life of the Church. That is why the Church, following the advice and warning of Christ and His Apostles, has had of necessity, in every century (and the 20th is no exception) to categorize right and wrong in doctrine.

As one writer has stated: "The first law of life, be it the life of plant or animal, or man or of a society of men, is self-preservation. Neglect of self-preservation leads to ruin and destruction. But the life of a religious society, the tissue that binds its members into one body and animates them with one soul, is the symbol of faith, the creed or confession adhered to as a condition sine qua non of membership. To undo the creed is to undo the Church. The integrity of the rule of faith is more essential to the cohesion of a religious society than the strict practice of its moral precepts. For faith supplies the means of mending moral delinquencies as one of its ordinary functions, whereas the loss of faith, cutting at the root of spiritual life, is usually fatal to the soul."

Christ made it plain that one of the principal ways of self-preservation for the Church, and hence her perennial duty, is to detect and ward off heresy and false teaching. For He warned about false prophets and Messiahs and said: "He who believes not shall be condemned" and "if he will not hear the Church let him be to you as the heathen and publican."

The Apostles took this warning of Christ to heart and followed it out with faithful insistence. St. Paul said to the Galatians: "There is not another Gospel, but there are some pretenders who are disturbing you, and wish to pervert the Gospel of Christ. Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach to you any Gospel other than that which we preached to you, let him be anathema!"

Having preached this Gospel of Christ all his life and having labelled and condemned the errors contrary to it, Paul's last words to the bishops who

were to succeed him were: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge living and dead alike; in the name of His Appearing and of His Kingdom: proclaim the Word and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience—but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching." (2 Tim. 4:1-2) As Paul had done so did the other Apostles, and after them the Fathers, Bishops, Councils and Popes down through the ages.

Conscious of this fact, Father Atwell is ready to make a limping concession: "Perhaps in the Athanasius-Arius fourth century, the Church needed to make sharp distinctions between what was authentic doctrine from any deviations—that was the time when the fabric of our theology was being fashioned." But this is a gross understatement. There is no perhaps or two ways about it at all. The Church did need, vitally so by divine mandate, to make sharp distinctions between what was authentic doctrine and the serious deviations from it which constituted the Arian Heresy. And she carried out her divine mandate in 325 when, at the Council of Nicea she anathematized the heresy and defined that the Son is true God.

In his next paragraph Father Atwell seems to conclude, if I read him rightly, that after the Arian controversy, for the next 16 centuries the Church was busy reformulating its faith in the light of whatever intellectual and social change was at hand. Then, all of a sudden "in our own time" (this century or the last-ten-years)—there has been a real break-through of intellectual and social change, and it is time to jettison medieval terminology, perhaps even patristic, and get with it in the modern idiom of some of the in-depth theologians, and down-to-earth citizens of the Secular City.

Let me say at once that the history of the Church's teaching, if we wish to speak of it in terms of reformulating (though there are better terms to describe it), is not a process of discarding old formulations for new ones, but of explaining, if possible, in clearer terms

the already existent ones. The term "Father" which Christ chose to designate the First Person of the Trinity is not likely to be abandoned in the lifetime of Father Atwell.

Perhaps what Father Atwell had in mind more specifically was scholastic terminology and some such "horribly medieval word" as transubstantiation.

About the use of this word and similar ones we can learn something from Pope Paul's recent Encyclical "Mysterium Fidei", in which, incidentally, he was labelling, and expounding Catholic Doctrine and false opinions and warning that "with the aim of seeing to it that the hope to which the Council has given rise—that a new wave of Eucharistic devotion sweep over the Church—not be reduced to nil through the sowing of the seeds of false opinions. We have decided to use Our apostolic authority and speak Our mind to you on this subject."

Then later on in the Encyclical, admitting that the formulas of faith can be made clearer and more obvious, and that doing this is of great benefit Pope Paul has this to say about formulas or terminology itself "And so the rule of language which the Church has established through the long labor of centuries, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and which she has confirmed with the authority of the Councils, and which has more than once been the watchword and banner of orthodox faith, is to be religiously preserved, and no one may presume to change it at his own pleasure or under the pretext of new

knowledge. Who would ever tolerate that the dogmatic formulas used by the ecumenical councils for the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation be judged as no longer appropriate for men of our times, and let others be rashly substituted for them? In the same way, it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority take something away from the formulas which were used by the Council of Trent to propose the Eucharistic Mystery for our belief.

"These formulas—like the others that the Church uses to propose the dogmas of faith—express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress.

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this reason, these forms adapted to all men of and places.

Father Atwell, in paragraph, admits that some aberrations, and errors should be resis quote him: "Pope John said the best way these fight such errors is by t cing of mercy and t other words the only r active for bad theolog ter theology."

I will now give the di full quotation of Pope which Father Atwell "The Church has alwa ed these errors. Freue has condemned them v greatest severity. No however, the Spouse o prefers to make use medicine of mercy rat of severity. She consid she meets the needs of cent day" by demonstra validity of her teachi than by condemnation certainly, that there is of fallacious teaching, and dangerous concepi guarded against and no

Pope John was not trasting a bad theolog better theology, but t mercy and severity as proach to dealing with and the erring. He o himself, and as a sugg the Council, that mere phized and severity b phazied. And the Cou generously followed out t tion, surely as relat severity of condemnat

The mind of the Co this issue is fairly wel up in the following c from the Constitution Church in the Modern "This love and good wards those who thin differently than we d ical, political and even matters), to be sure, no way render us indif truth and goodness. Ind itself impels the disc Christ to speak the sav to all men. But it is t to distinguish betwe which always merits tion, and the person who never loses the di being a person even wh flawed by false or in notations."

One wonders whethe John were alive today, not be inclined to m the more severity v mercy. Surely he wou ate the errors which ar ing.

And this is exactly successor, Pope Paul done and is doing. Eve the Council ended, P thought it necessary his Encyclical "Mysteri (which we quoted a which he spoke in stru condemning "errors al Sacrifice and Sacram Eucharist. And anyone read his magnificent directives since the c of the Council cannot note that, while setti

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