

Seeing Jesus As Truly Human

By DENNIS J. GEANEY, O.S.A.



I think most of us have formed our earliest mental picture of Jesus from the Nativity scene in our parish church, school, or home. As we slide into old age, these memories may become even more vivid.

The visual images of the crib were supported by the Nativity narrative of St. Luke; the decree of Caesar Augustus which set everything in motion; the angel, the manger, the swaddling clothes, the "No vacancy" sign on the inn, the shepherds, and the singing of the heavenly hosts.

This visual and word picture fitted into a still larger picture, the celebration of Christmas at home. We associate the birth of Jesus with the comings and goings of relatives, Christmas cards, Santa Claus, filled stockings, the exchange of gifts, midnight Mass, the Christmas dinner, trees and windows that are lit throughout the neighborhood, the din of jingle bells, office parties on the last day of work, and the lounging around the house before we go back after the holidays.

For most people, but by no means all, Christmas adds up to warm feelings and pleasant thoughts about our family and neighbors. Somehow, our feelings about Jesus are wrapped up in this whole package. If we do not sort out our feelings about Jesus and take an adult look at Him, He will remain the sentimentalized, helpless little baby.

We also must realize that if we start toying around with anybody's baby Jesus image, and imply that Jesus became a real male, we can expect repercussions.

Pasolini's Christ

Pier Paolo Pasolini, an Italian Communist, dared to upset our childhood memories by his film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Instead of an American Hollywood passionless religious drama, he gave us real people who live unglamorous Italian lives and feel at home in rough and barren terrain.

Joseph was a workman or husband of Italian extraction whom

you have seen come out of a tavern after a hard day's work or sitting in his front porch on a summer night, talking to a neighbor with a can of beer in his hand.

Mary would be Miss Nobody in a beauty contest. I felt I met the apostles somewhere. They were the longshoremen or stevedores I met in childhood, rough men with ruddy complexions from being on the piers in all kinds of weather. They were my early image of real, earthy people.

Jesus was an intense young man, caustic or activist. One might feel uncomfortable with him because he was always driving. However, if you believed in his cause, he would be easy to take.

He only relaxed with children. His display of anger with the money changers and his telling off the Pharisees was read. He was not on an errand for his father like a deputy delivering a warrant or subpoena. He was filled with the passion of an angry young man. He stood his enemies to the teeth and gave his enemies a tongue lashing that we seldom witness. He was standing up to the Establishment against social injustice and he would be forced to pay the price. Somehow Pasolini's Jesus struck me as a leader of a Berkeley campus student demonstration.

Reactions Vary

I was not able to watch the picture in a relaxed and attentive way. I was in a theatre filled with Catholic high school students who were watching it on company time. I think that I was reacting more to the students' reaction to the picture than the picture.

They just could not take the movie seriously. They responded by giggling, laughing, and all the symptoms of a group who had been unnerved and were rudderless in putting what they saw into any framework.

I was trying to assess their reactions. Was it too much for them to accept Christ as a human being? The Christ of holy cards and cribs they could handle by putting them aside as unreal. But, here was someone who was tough and he called himself Jesus. This seemed to be disturbing. They wanted no part of Jesus as a real man who was not afraid of his emotions and did not have to play it cool.

The last supper in a cheap restaurant with waffles for the Eucharistic bread was so far from DiVinci's and all renaissance paintings that it evoked great laughter. It was the opposite reactions of some older people who got angry when the

parish altar was arranged for the priest facing the people which they derisively refer to as the "new liturgy."

To change a childhood image is difficult for high school students as well as adults, but it has always been difficult for every generation to accept Christ as human. This has been one of the earliest Christian heresies, that is, to divinize Christ to the point that his humanity is denied. It is hard to accept a human Christ like Pasolini, one who really identifies with suffering people.

A group, in St. Paul, Minnesota, have issued six Christmas cards which seem to catch the Christ according to the gospel of Pasolini in American scenes. The pictures were taken from our city slums.

One is the outside of a tenement slum, another a crowded apartment, another an elderly lady with a wrinkled face holding a little boy, another a Negro boy of four with the caption, "I am Christ."

I wonder what reactions they evoked when families opened the Christmas mail and were reminded that Christ was not a holy card, but a reality of urban living.

This could spoil Christmas for some of us.

Christmas Memories

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



The six happiest Christmases I ever spent were in Saint Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, New York. They were quiet, peaceful, prayerful. But all that was over 30 years ago.

Since then every Christmas has been somewhat chaotic by the demands of preparation for the parishioners. One stands out in particular.

It was the year 1944 in Breigny, Oise, France, about 20 miles south of Paris. I had made arrangements with M. le Cure Alphonse Krjin (rhymes with "fine"), a young Dutch Pastor of Moreilles-sur-Oise, to use his church for our soldiers' Midnight Mass; and with 400th Bomb Group Headquarters to transport the men in trucks to Christmas Eve Mass. . . Then the Battle of the Bulge began.

German spies began to infiltrate the Paris Area, including ours. Dressed in uniforms of American officers, they spoke perfect English and were thoroughly trained in American ways and information.

Our military intelligence began to panic, rightly. All movements of the Base were cancelled — and on the morning of December 24, we had orders to switch all Christmas preparations to the Base.

Instead of the lovely ancient French church, we used a huge room in Headquarters Building. Instead of a majestic High Mass sung by a trained village choir, we had a Low Mass with the responses well made by the congregation of soldiers. (We anticipated the vernacular by the people 20 years before Vatican II.) Instead of a long, rhythmic procession of soldier-altar boys, we had two acolytes, two servers, a cross bearer and myself. Instead of sitting in pews, the men stood jammed together like matches in a match box. Instead of the church altar with a beautiful tapestry background, we used a makeshift table.

Nevertheless, the rough, easy unaffected piety of the soldiers at Christmas Mass under these crude conditions was an inspiration. Similar things are happening in Viet Nam, Korea and other military bases this very Christmas.

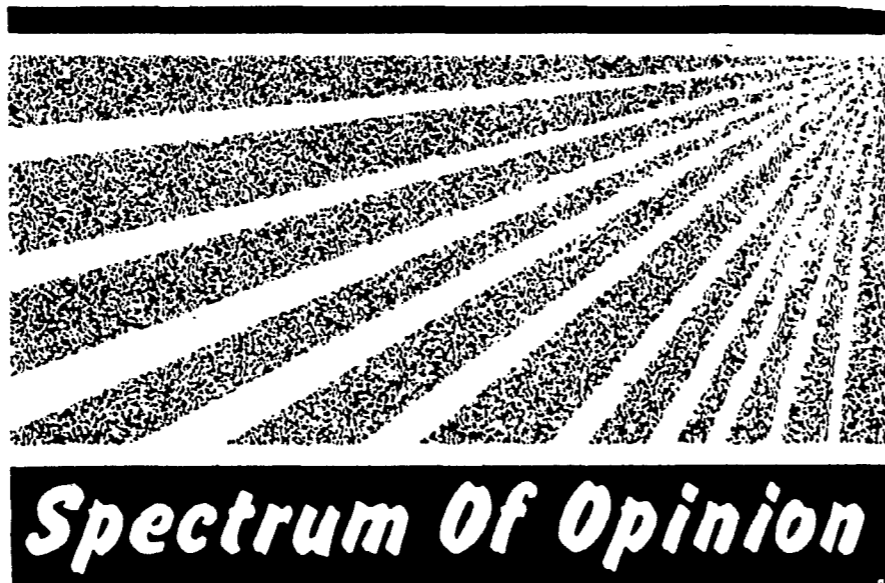
Cpl. Joe Fazio of New York was my chaplain's assistant, a priceless gem. He was all man — and profoundly religious. A year ago summer he stopped at the rectory in Clyde with a charming wife and six of his nine children.

Sgt. Charlie Farrell of Providence was an unofficial assistant — a military fusion of St. Aloysius and St. Thomas Aquinas. Today he is a priest, and is the Spiritual Director of the Dominican Seminarians at their House of Studies in Washington.

And as I think of all the other wonderful men — and women too — in the Air Force I think to myself: "How could these young people be so thoroughly good under the crudeness of military life, especially in combat conditions? It is a great tribute to their own characters, to their parents, and to zealous chaplains who served these young men as if they were their own sons."

Christmas in Europe or Alabama or Africa or Texas or Sampson or in the Diocese of Rochester is in its essential, the same: Christ comes to the altar through the powers of the priesthood, and renews again that for which He came: to give Himself for you and for me and for all mankind that we may be one in Him and by Him and through Him. "O come! Let us adore Him."

A BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND PEACEFUL NEW YEAR.



Joseph A. Breig

Catholic Press Fills A Vital Need

This is the last of three columns briefly discussing the question, "Seeing that the general press (as a result of Vatican II) is very much interested in religious events, are Catholic publications any longer necessary?"

In the first article, I quoted Father Andrew Greeley, the sociologist, who wrote that his University of Chicago survey of Catholic education had been "distorted beyond all recognition" by the general press.

In the second, I showed that Time magazine had similarly distorted the facts about a Chicago Catholic group called Vatican II 1/2, concerning which I happened to have personal knowledge.

To continue: for more than 20 years I have been an editor of a group of Catholic newspapers. On the basis of that experience, I can testify that inaccuracy and misrepresentation in the secular press concerning "things Catholic" is very far from being unusual.

Even when facts are not twisted to make a story—even when there is a thoroughly honest effort in the general press to report something Catholic—more often than not the published ac-

count is superficial and grossly inadequate.

I could give a thousand examples, but let me confine myself, for brevity's sake, to one.

At the October, 1967, meeting of the new World Synod of Bishops in Rome, the synod Fathers witnessed a proposed "basic" or "standard" or "normative" Mass in the Sistine Chapel.

The general press, by and large, told the readers not much more about this event than that a Latin American bishop considered the Mass too unceremonial and referred to it as a "mini-Mass."

That is a striking term; granted. But should the press give readers no more information than that about a Mass proposed by the Church's leading liturgists as a "basic" Mass for Catholics all around the world — a "normative" Mass from which liturgical experimenting would

Does this kind of superficiality meet the needs of a billion Christians and of other interested persons for information concerning the progress of liturgical reform and renewal in the Catholic Church?

Fortunately, the Catholic press gave readers a complete

account of the basic Mass, and an explanation of why it was being proposed by the Vatican's liturgical commission.

Thus far in these three columns about the need for a Catholic press, I have talked about the superficiality of the general press merely from the point of view of NEWS about things Catholic.

But even if the general press provided adequate news, still people would need a Catholic press to inform them on spiritual, moral and doctrinal matters.

The tone of the general press, for example, is almost invariably sympathetic toward divorce, contraception, abortion. The mind of a Catholic who reads no other press will inevitably be influenced in the direction of pagan concepts in many matters.

I do not deny the virtues of the general press; I am aware of them. But the general press is this-world-oriented at the great expense of things spiritual.

To ask whether the Catholic press is any longer needed is rather like inquiring whether we ought to do away with the Scriptural readings, the prayers and the homily at Mass.

Letters to the Editor

Christmas Invitation

A little child is coming into a world that once again is covered with darkness. A mist again enshrouds the people; it is a mist of doubt, of indecision, of misgiving, of misapprehension.

Let us go forth and greet Christ the Lord. In him we can still hope.

Early on next Monday, while darkness still covers the earth, a little child, heralded by the Angels and bearing in his tiny hands a message of hope and eternal love will come.

He first came into the world in an obscure village. His mother wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

The first to see him were the lowly animals of the farm, the cows, the horses and the sheep.

They were the first to greet the Son of God. They gazed on the son of all mankind out of their mild, brown eyes, and if they could speak they would have said, "And now let us give praise to God for this child."

He lived, grew and went to school in another obscure village, and when he was thirty he became an itinerant preacher. He never stepped foot in a large city, he probably never went more than a hundred miles

from the place of his birth, but in the end, his enemies took him and killed him.

On Christmas day a light will come into the world, a light that all mankind cannot extinguish. On that day all those who love this child who is the light of the world will send up their cry in song.

"O come all ye faithful," shall we let the radiant light of this child shine on us in vain.

"O come let us adore him," please come and let us adore Christ the Lord.

He is the living bread sent down from Heaven and given to us for the life of the world.

Let us go to the Altar of God to greet Him.

Brother Francis,
Immaculate Heart of Mary
Monastery, Geneva, N.Y.

25 Years For Rosary Crusade

Albany—(RNS)—Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., was honored at a dinner here marking the 25th anniversary of his Family Rosary Crusade which he founded in Albany only a few months after his ordination.

Since then the Holy Cross priest has carried his Family Rosary movement throughout the U.S. and in many corners of the world under the famed slogan, "The Family that Prays Together . . . Stays Together."

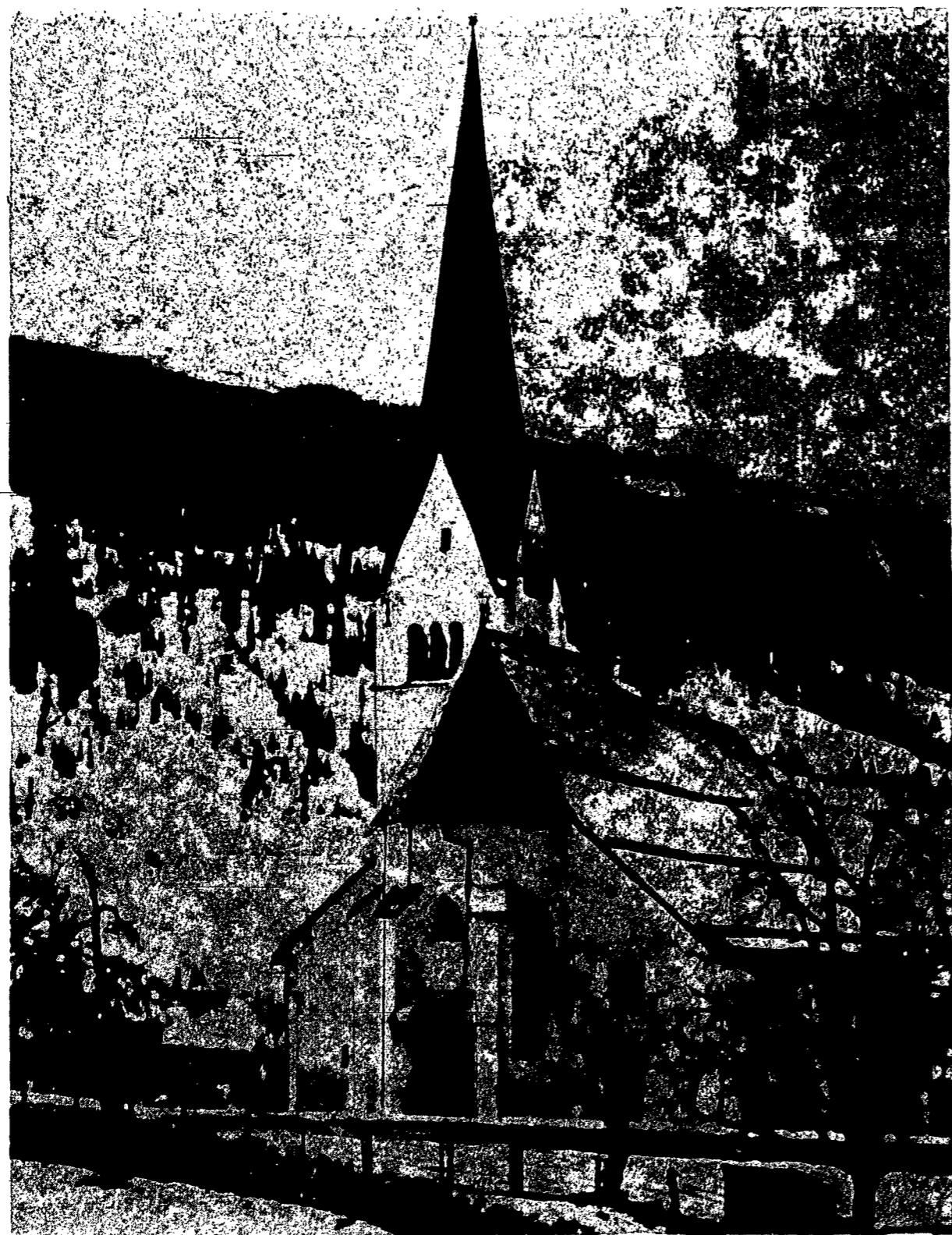
Father Peyton was 19 when he came to America from his native County Mayo, Ireland. He became seriously ill with tuberculosis and prayed to the Virgin Mary to intercede for his recovery. In 1941 he became a priest, and determined to devote his life to the Virgin Mary and to the promotion of family unity through prayer.

Before beginning his Rosary crusade, he served as chaplain at the Holy Cross Fathers' Vincent Institute in Albany.

Nativity Drama On ABC-TV

"Christmas in the Marketplace," an hour-long special telling the story of the Nativity will again be presented on ABC News' "Directions" Sun. Dec. 24 (ABC-TV, 1-2 p.m., EST).

"Christmas in the Marketplace," produced by Wiley Hance and first seen on "Directions" last Christmas, is a play within a play written originally by the late French author Henry Ghéon and adapted for television by Marie Ponsot. On "Directions," the story is played in modern style and idiom. Among the cast, Boris Tumarin will appear as the gypsy Patriarch Melchior, as the narrator, and as one of the three Magi.



Home of 'Silent Night'

Salesburg, Austria — (RNS) — The famous Christmas carol, "Silent Night" was born in this parish church near Salzburg, Austria, on Christmas Eve, 1818, because an organ which needed repair. Rather than forsake the traditional singing at St. Nicholas Church, the choirmaster, Franz Gruber, and the parish priest, Father Joseph Mohr, composed a simple melody that could be learned quickly. Their hastily composed carol has since been translated into many languages and is now a universal favorite.

At Our House

Merry Christmas!

By Mary Tinley Dady



The folks at our house wish all the folks at yours a Very Merry Christmas!

Ready or not, here it comes. And if you have time, three days before Santa's visit, to read a feature in your diocesan paper, you're like the character in Dickens' Christmas Carol: "It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well."

Annual resolution at our house, along about Thanksgiving, has been "Let's keep Christmas simple this year."

We meant it, too. No more last minute shopping, plowing through department stores with their depleted stocks, wondering indecisively whether Aunt Agnes would rather have a gay and somewhat gaudy blouse or a practical flannel nightgown. Or did we send her a nightgown last year?

No more major decorating projects, either, like the year the painters came to do the living and dining rooms on December 20-21 when they had promised to "Get you all finished before Thanksgiving."

Those Choirboys!

Nor the "projects" like last year's candle-making that tied up the kitchen with tallow-encrusted pans and the dining room with "choirboys." Oh, those choirboys! It had seemed like inexpensive fun when Kay Haynes, Helen Hall, Mahelle Murphy and I started our little fellows; tall, medium and small, "made of stuff you have around the house."

All we had to do was fold pages of two Ladies Home Journals, two Harpers and one Readers Digest. But what intricate folding! And did we stop to realize that a Readers Digest has nearly 300 pages to be pressed into shape, page by page? At minimum hourly wage rate, those choirboys would cost a pretty penny, plus the colored paper, yarn, felt and spray-paint we did not "have around the house."

Nope, no more "projects" — except the Christmas decorations Mary, Markie and I saw demonstrated and are now in the throes of concocting, mostly, thought not quite, of "stuff you have around the house."

Shopping this year was cut back, really, because of a mail-order catalogue suggested by column reader Mrs. Catherine L. Kirby of Silver Spring, Md. Armchair shopping made the task pleasant and budget-saving. Of course, as usual we were carried away in the toy department of the catalogue, finding goodies for all of the grandchildren.

Christmas Family Plan
Now that the New Family Plan for Christmas is in effect, we find ourselves with a carton of toys — but reserve stock of toys is never amiss, for giving now to needy children, to stash away for future birthdays and to restock the toy box at our house.

"The New Family Plan?" Sug-

gested by Ginny, this plan complicates Christmas giving for all of us in a family as large as ours and won unqualified and unanimous approval. "Took the pain-in-the-neck out of Christmas" as one of us put it. In essence it is this: each adult draws the name of another adult family member; each child, that of another child.

The drawing was held at our house on Thanksgiving Day. Foreseeing a complication, pleasant or not, five-year-old Matthew wondered, "What if you draw your own name?" and, sure enough, he did. So did his Uncle Brad. Also some of the seven Junior Dads draw names of their brothers and sisters. A reshuffling of names straightened that all out and everybody went home satisfied, with only one outside-of-immediate-family gift to worry about.

So, we're anticipating a happy and simplified Christmas.

May it be the same at your house!



"Nobody knows what a tight-money policy really IS if they haven't lived here . . ."