

Pope's Bold Foray Warmly Received by Workers

By FATHER R. A. GRAHAM

Special Correspondent

Vatican City — (RNS) — Pope Paul's midnight Christmas Mass in the steel mills of Taranto was a bold and deliberate foray into the world of the working class. His words to the helmeted men pausing between shifts reflected embarrassment. Yet, in fact, it was a friendly and receptive audience. His apology for the Church was meant not so much for these new recruits from rural Southern Italy as for workers elsewhere more fixed than they in traditional working-class ideologies.

The pontiff's frankness in admitting the gap separating him from them was surprising. "It seems to us that between you and us there is no common language. You stand immersed in a world that is unfamiliar to the world in which we, men of the Church, live."

He addressed them as "brothers and friends," yet he went on immediately to say that, in reality, this may not be the true state of affairs. Because, he said, "all of us are aware of this evident fact: the world of labor and the world of religion in our times are two separated worlds, cut off and often in opposition."

It was not always like that, he said, and it should not be like that today. "Precisely as Pope of the Catholic Church, as a lowly but authentic representative of that Christ whose nativity we commemorate this night... we have come here among you to say that this separation between the world of labor and the world of religion, the Christian religion, should not exist."

Pope Paul insisted that the Church, as a mother, does understand them. "Do not say and do not think that she is blind to your needs or deaf to your voices." It is true that the Church is not a partisan of the class struggle, he said, especially when it takes the form of hate and violence. "But the Church recognizes the need for justice for an honest people and defends and promotes it as much as it is able."

These are themes, of course, that have been classic at least since Pope Pius XI in the 1930s told the then Canon Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, that the "scandal of the 19th Century was the loss of the working class to the Church."

The de-Christianization of labor in Europe has been a major worry of the Church. But Paul VI perhaps marked the transition from this clas-

sic theme when he transferred the problem from the narrow perspective of worker-employer relations (the "exploited" and the "exploiter") from the industrial revolution to the technical explosion that has transformed society since World War II.

Since Vatican II the need is to clarify the Church's outlook on the relation of religion to technology and not so much to the classic capitalist society.

The pontiff cited the conciliar decrees on the Church in the Modern World to stress that there is no thought of challenging the victories of man's genius as though these achievements could in any way present a challenge to God's achievements.

He denied that the Church wishes to "clericalize," as he put it, man's work or to substitute purely religious ends for the development of human activity, "to oppose the gospel to scientific, technical, economic or social progress."

There were no protesters at Taranto, no "contestators," certainly not among the workers for whom the midnight Mass was reserved. It is legitimate to speculate on the Pope's own reactions to this peaceful recep-



Pope Paul VI distributes Communion to steel workers at Taranto, Italy, during the celebration of Christmas Midnight Mass. (RNS)

tion among a group of men who as a class are identified with the "revolution." He had spoken of them as "disinherited" and "despairing." Yet they were willing to listen to

him and to anyone who could show them a way to a better future. This is a kind of revolutionary spirit, he must have thought, that is

now out of date in a time when the upheavals in society arise not from the victims of the industrial revolution but from the children of the consumer revolution.



'Altar Girls'

Girls, attired in white robes, pose in the sanctuary of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic church, a French-language parish in Montreal. The "altar girls" serve alongside altar boys in assisting the priest at liturgical services, including Mass. Father Gerard Riopel said the break with tradition has been enthusiastically received by the parishioners and has created a new interest in religious worship. (RNS)

Pope Paul: Have Faith in Today's Youth

Vatican City — (NC) — Have faith in today's youth and they will pay you back a hundredfold with their willingness to fulfill the obligations society will ask of them, Pope Paul VI told a group of Italian educators (Dec. 30).

Young people and the problems that face them was the topic of Pope Paul's brief talk to 500 members of the Federation of Institutes Under Ecclesiastical Authority. Members

include directors of Italy's Catholic schools.

The Pope said that "the adults of tomorrow" are "the connecting fabric of civil and social life." He said that the Church looks upon these youths with great hope, convinced "of the mature and profound seriousness"

with which they take their obligations.

"Have faith in these young people," Pope Paul exhorted. The young, he said, are capable of "giving back a hundredfold for one of those seeds planted in their avid minds which seek to know."

Despite Dire Forecasts On S. Viet Government

Thieu Stronger Than Ever

By FR. PATRICK J. BURKE, S.S.C. (NC News Service)

Saigon — Despite the dire forecasts made by some commentators in the United States about the life expectancy of the Thieu government immediately following the Viet Cong Tet offensive, the overall picture at the end of the year is much better than anyone would have imagined, a U.S. official said here.

Following the Tet attacks and again when the Viet Cong attacked in May and June, the forecasts were that the Thieu government would collapse within a few weeks. Yet now that government is stronger than ever.

It was an eventful year for Vietnam with developments inside the country and events outside affecting the situation. The opening of the Paris talks in May, the partial and then the complete bombing halt over North Vietnam, South Vietnam's refusal to go to Paris, and finally the decision to go all affected the country.

Despite marked improvement in nearly all departments, there are still formidable obstacles to be overcome. Among the continuing threats is that of further inflation. There was a 50% increase in the money supply and a 30% increase in commodity prices in 1968.

The enemy is still formidable and still has military options open to him.

despite his severe losses at Tet and in the May-June offensive. He is prepared to use his options for psychological and propaganda purposes but with no hope of eventual military success.

He remains a threat because of his use of the sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, where he retreats to refit and retrain. In rural areas he still has an infrastructure which he is now trying to legalize.

By December this year the enemy claimed to have elected 1986 liberation committees in the villages and hamlets. U.S. intelligence knows and can identify 1,028. According to allied sources, 65% of these liberation committees are in Viet Cong-controlled areas; 15% in contested areas; 15% in areas controlled by the South Vietnamese government and 5% in abandoned hamlets.

"The Vietnamese are intelligent and when well led and properly encouraged can get ahead and are capable of achieving their objectives in Vietnam if they keep to it," a U.S. official said. "There is every prospect of reasonable successes."

Major problem areas for 1969 remain in getting effective government at all levels. There is a need for a merging of national forces into a viable form so the South Vietnamese can face the communist politically. Rooting out corruption in government must be continued in the coming year. The government must as-

No Executions in Nation in 1968

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — The year 1968 is the first on record to pass without any executions in the United States, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

This disclosure led one legal expert in the battle against capital punishment to predict that executions will never be resumed in this country.

William C. King, director of information for the Bureau of Prisons, reported that 1968 was the first without executions since his agency began collecting records in 1930.

Jack Greenberg, director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.,

said last year's absence of executions constituted a temporary "de facto national abolition of the death penalty."

"The longer this de facto abolition lasts," he said, "the tougher it is going to be to just open the gas chambers again some day and march a thousand guys in there."

The Bureau of Prisons reported that on the first day of 1968 there were 435 inmates waiting in "death rows" across the country — twice the number of the previous year.

The great number of court challenges to the death penalty has been

the delaying factor and Greenberg said that it could be years before the questions are resolved.

The NAACP agency launched its drive against capital punishment in 1965. A similar effort was also undertaken by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ACLU has been backing attempts to have state legislatures abolish the death penalty. Thus far, nine states have eliminated it completely and four others (including New York) allow it under special circumstances, notably the murder of a policeman or prison guard.

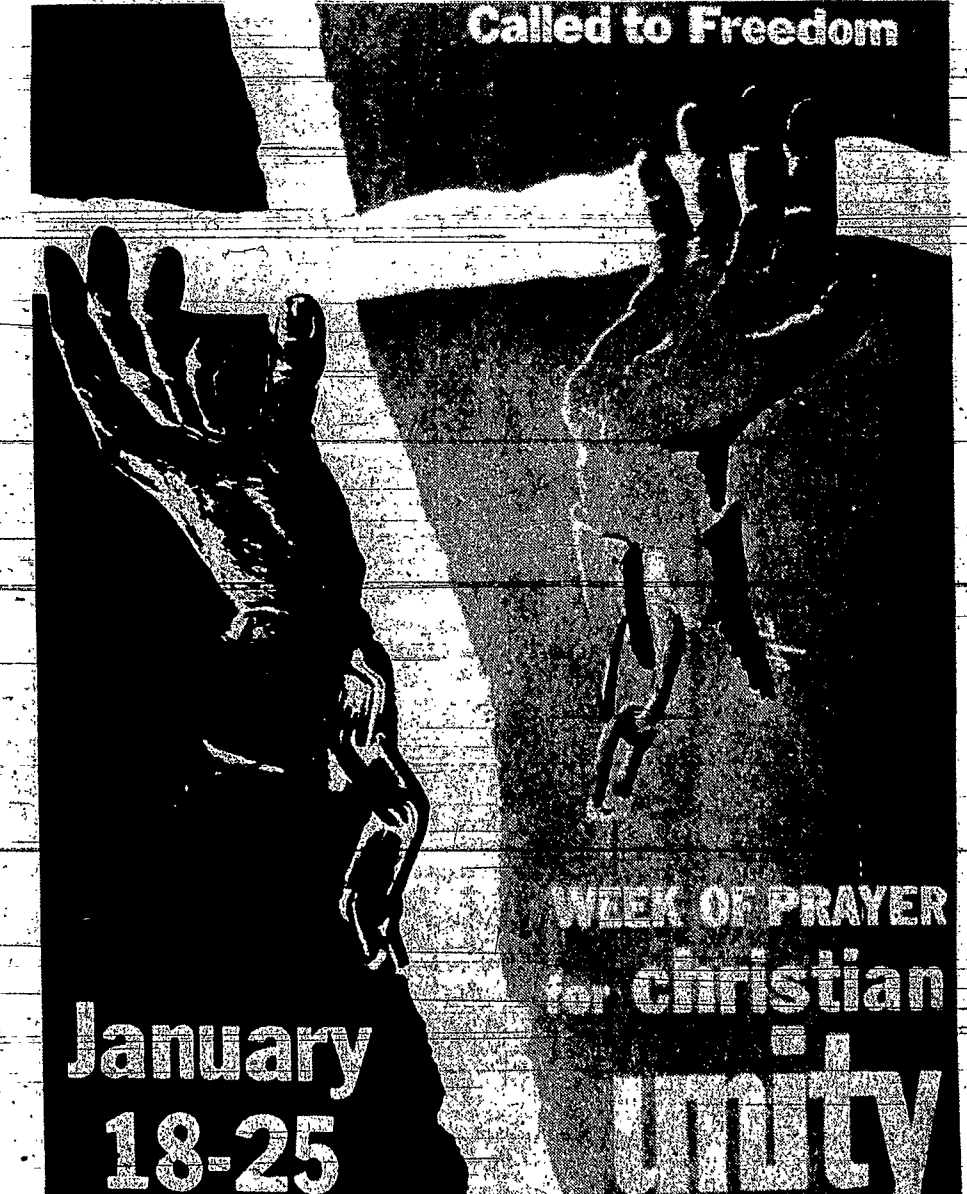
ON THE INSIDE

Bishop Sheen	6
Around the World	5
Around the Country	5
Commentary	19
Diocesan	7
Editorial	6
Entertainment	14
Women's Page	8
Sports	17

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"Called to Freedom" is the theme of the 1969 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Jan. 18-25. Sponsored in the U.S. by the National Council of Churches' Department of Faith and Order and recommended by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the week is planned to help churches consider the meaning of being called to freedom.