

# Christ is Our Lord Not a Mere Infant

A few years ago the reaction to commercialism in this holiday season was the widely publicized "Keep Christ in Christmas". A campaign was waged to take the Scotty dogs off Christmas cards and put a creche on every mantel.

But lately we read about concerned Christians who are pleading: "Let's get Christ out of Christmas". They put it this way: "Let the shopkeepers continue with greed, let the passion for greetings, gifts and holiday grog go on, but let's protect Our Lord by contending that He would have no part of this."

Some even go so far as to remind us of the scene where Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple. They suggest that were He on Main Street today He would denounce the annual crime of exploiting His sacred birthday as ruthlessly as He condemned the commercial profaning of the Temple.

There is another side of this reform movement: some voices decry the sentimentality which marks even our churchy observance of the Lord's birth. They hold that "elaborate and tasteless decorations" in the churches, and the "almost-worship of the Infant" are as phony to the real Christ as is the annual home-coming of the faithful folk who jam into Midnight Mass. One critic even wrote: "Christmas has become a charming bag of religious sedatives to soften the blows of a hard world."

How each of us finds meaning in Christmas is determined, I suspect, by our personal intellect, our traditions of family, our ability to let the awe for the mystery of the Incarnation penetrate the surface festivity. We may tire or perhaps be frustrated under pressures of getting ready for the feast, but we know, each in his own way, that to despise it all is to smear an authentic part of our life—to deny the fact that we are members of the family of God marking the birthday of our Brother.

The core of the Incarnation is the marvel that within our life-time God is still mysteriously present in our world. We know He is still demonstrating, often behind veils we cannot pierce with human eyes, that He cares for our society. Such mystery is the core of Christmas. Not just the mystery of how the Almighty came into our history at Bethlehem; but also the shattering wonder that He is still mankind's best and last hope. So Christmas is not the false gesture of "Let's pretend we're back in the stable" but a hope-filled declaration: "He came to us as the Lord of all things, spiritual and material, and is still asking for our love."

Christmas will be relentlessly honest, no matter how we clothe it with frivolous and sentimental diversions, if we bring the Christ of the first century into the affairs of the twentieth. Christ must not remain imprisoned in Christmas-past. He came to call men of every century to new life, to new love for each other, to new virtues and higher ideals than society would normally aspire to.

Christmas this year, when all of those divine commitments are so desperately needed in our sick society, can be a hopeful feast if we see that the calendar-renewal of His coming challenges us to practice His kind of justice and love in our individual cell in society.

We can liberate Christ from the perversions of Christmas not by trying to take Him out of the feast or to hide Him away as though He would be offended by our holiday, but by asserting His lordship over our times. One sensitive cleric, writing recently on the theme of improving the Christmas-mood said: "Negotiate to get the Beatitudes posted alongside the Shepherds, plant a Cross beside the Creche, Jesus' invitation to poverty beside the merchants' pitch for possessions."

It's not hard to add other suggestions about asserting the message of Christ at Christmas: It's a time of loneliness for many who have no family or must be away from home. So special visits to aged friends, to a shut-in, to the recently widowed, to the bed-ridden, could be a Christ-like compensation for the hours most of us will happily (but less-usefully) spend at parties next week.

Many of us give expensive gifts only to the ones we know, persons who usually do not desire or need what we choose for them. The truly needy, the unknown and forgotten poor are all around us, within reach of a personally delivered gift or a charity sent through an agency. Read our list of the unfortunate families on pages 1 and 2, who need you more than your friends do. Or Catholic Family Center offices in Rochester, Elmira, and Auburn will help you select a needy family. Give them a call.

Bethlehem speaks to us of family love, marital fidelity and purity. Christ can be asserted in our homes and private conduct if we make this season a time for humble confession of sins and amendment of our imperfect lives.

Mary and Joseph epitomize obedience to the vocational demands that God has asked of them. That spirit of self-surrendering generosity to the obligations of our state of life should be renewed this season to show that God rules the direction of our lives.

—Father Richard Tormey

## Carols and Stores

Two news items came from widely-separated locales last week—one from Miesbach, Germany, the other from Rochester, N.Y. Yet both touched on the same issue, related to the world's celebration of Christ's birthday.

In Miesbach, aroused townspeople overturned a ruling by the local Catholic church council to bar the traditional "Silent Night" in church services because it had been "overcommercialized."

At about the same time, the Rochester Council of Churches had been asked by a committee of a member church, to ask local businesses to tone down the use of traditional church music "used to promote sales and profits." They said Christmas carols were used too often and too loudly in the stores.

In Miesbach, the local pastor learned a lesson because, as he put it, "the whole town was up in arms, defending the song" when they learned it might be silenced by a vote of the council.

In Rochester, there may be a lesson of a different nature. It may be that businesses, regardless of commercialism's crass reasons, may have a more sensitive thumb on the pulse of the public than some churchmen. They know that the average shopper—who also is the average Christian—has a special place in his heart for "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." True, they use the knowledge to sell—which in itself is not sinful.

Church people who object to the use of such music in such places only serve to insularize religion. To an extreme it would mean that sacred music should be heard only in churches or, assumedly, in other places of proper trappings.

In fact, churchmen who work all year long to bring Christ's message to the people owe a bit of gratitude to merchants who, for their own reasons, bring the same message to people at a time when their minds and hearts are open to receive it. Perhaps it is a dividend for the church leader.

Christ chased the money-changers from the temple but he never said not to mention Him in the marketplace.

—Carmen Vigliucci

## Cardinal Cooke Declares:

# Religion Must Help Fight Crime

By KIM LARSEN  
NO News Service

Washington — Government alone cannot solve the problem of crime and violence, and the task may be left undone if religion does not play a strong and positive role in battling those problems.

Terence Cardinal Cooke of New York made this declaration in the final report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

The cardinal's contribution to the expansive work of the presidential commission was praised by Dr. Milton Eisenhower, chairman, during the last press conference of the commission when the final report was released.

Eisenhower noted that Cardinal Cooke's seven-page chapter on "Religion and the Problem of Violence" was one of several new items disclosed by the commission. Since its creation in June 1960, the commission has issued numerous volumes of reports.

Eisenhower pointed out that the greatest threat to America comes from within rather than from outside sources. He said Arnold Toynbee, prominent British historian, in extensively studying 21 major civilizations, discovered that 19 of them crumbled from internal decay.

This internal moral breakdown is strongly emphasized by Cardinal Cooke in his report.

Calling violence a moral and social evil, the prelate pointed out the necessity of distinguishing between good and evil.

"There is a need to speak the truth about good and evil to today's radical militants," he wrote. "In their confrontations, in their attempt to dehumanize their opponents by their rhetoric, they are projecting the fatal illusions that some people are wholly good, others wholly bad and that all people can be compelled by fear and force."

"Government alone," he wrote, "can never solve all our problems. It can never touch the hearts, the free wills, and the minds of men as religion can. Social persuasion can go only so far. It is the role of religion to stimulate change in attitudes and to promote peace and understanding among men."

Cardinal Cooke cited three roles for religion in combating violence: peacemaker, prophet, and bridge-builder.

Not only must the church act as a bond between different social classes, ethnic groups, and interest groups, but it also must give effective witness to truth, both functions of which lead to bridge-building, the cardinal explained.

Recognizing the need for change, Cardinal Cooke also said there is an equal need for continuity and relationship.

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edness. "We all need a bridge from past to present and from present to future. Religion does provide continuity among the various stages of life," he wrote.

Concluding, Cardinal Cooke pointed out that "under God we can achieve a renewed sense of faith in America and Americans, a firm hope for the fulfillment of our personal destinies and the dreams enshrined in the preamble to our Constitution, and an ever-increasing love and respect for our fellow citizens."

Eisenhower underscored the need for improved morality when he was asked what the public can do to help battle crime and violence.

"Only parents can reduce permissiveness in the home," he said, "by supervising the reading, listening, and watching habits of their children."

## Letters

### Silence on Smut Called 'Misguided'

Editor:

The editorial concerning pornography motion pictures (12/5/69) deserves comment because it condemns the tactics of citizens' groups combating immoral movies and implies that if we do nothing the evil will disappear. This is wishful and misguided thinking.

The Holy Father in October spoke on the subject of eroticism. He said: "It appears that in certain countries the law has come to give honorable treatment to every offense against public decency, against the right of innocence to be protected and the right of decency to be publicly respected."

Pope Paul continued: "Do not let your sense of liberty of Christian civilization responsibility be put to sleep." He warned that "a sense of the inevitable" should not prevent responsible people from presenting "legitimate and effective opposition to pornography and eroticism."

I believe that if we follow the editorial advice the problem can only worsen for community silence implies community indifference or even approval. As for myself, I will do what the Pope suggests and actively fight pornography.

—Nicholas Heber, Rochester, Member of Citizens for a Decent Community.

The editorial questioned the means (street-picketing which publicizes evil and attracts trade) rather than the goals of groups who deplore sex films. The Pope himself suggested that the protest of force should be "effective." Theaters say the free-publicity which picketing brings is "effective" for their trade. It is not hindering the booking of any film. — The Editor.

### Peace Marchers Draw Support

Editor:

With my friend Father Cuddy seeming to tar all war protesters with one brush by calling them peace-niks, I am moved to point out that while the moratorium was unquestionably used by many fringe organizations to further their own destructive ends, the majority of its members, both the fired-up marchers and the great silent majority that cheered them at home, are intelligent people deeply serious about ending war. And I for one see great courage and hope in this.

But I am saddened by the treatment we seem to give the conscientious.

### 5 Giving Days Until Christmas

Thursday is Christmas. The holy season of Advent, the time of preparation is almost at an end. Appeals are still coming to us and we are in need of funds. There is still time for you to remember the poor this Christmas. Please send your donation to the Catholic Charities Christmas Fund, 50 Chestnut St., Rochester, New York 14604.

ous objectors. They see a war carried on by a nation proudly pointing to our commitments while at the same time denying real equality to millions of people at home. They see a standing army all over the world guarding our commercial interests. So we label them peace-niks or, worst still, ignore them.

Where is our compassion? Our Christian love? Where does a voice rise in their behalf from our pulpits?

—Joseph T. Fohl, Rochester.

### A 'Thank You'

When I write "thank you" to you for your generous response to my plea for cancelled postage stamps, it really seems lifeless and cold. For you cannot see the gleam in happy children's eyes, or hear the sigh of relief from a worried mother, or feel the warm handshake of a grateful father, or see the parched lips of a sick person, as he wishes "thank you."

But all these are the "thanks" you have made possible. I cannot put these into words, but God sees the time and interest you have shown in helping us help His poor people with your cancelled stamps.

Please continue to send your cancelled stamps, especially foreign and commemorative.

Bro. Dan Crahen, O.M.I.  
Oblate Stamp Bureau  
391 Michigan Ave. N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20017

## Word for Sunday

### The Word of John Ran on Ahead

By Father Albert Shamon

Christ saw John the Baptist as "his messenger." John saw himself as a herald unworthy to strap the sandals of the Messiah; St. Luke sees John as a prophet—the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Thus Luke introduces John as a prophet by situating him in his historical setting. Luke's words are solemn and formal: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor, and so on."

This magnificent passage resembles the prologue of a great drama. Because John came to announce salvation to both Jews and Gentiles, "all mankind shall see the salvation of God." Luke reckons the time of John's preaching according to the reigns of the kings of the Gentiles and the princes of the Jews.

But we should note that John did not begin his preaching till he received a special call. Till then he remained in the desert in prayer and fasting. Till then, he was nobody. Man cannot speak effectively to other men, unless God first has spoken to him. So when "the word of God was spoken to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert," then he went into the whole region of the Jews and shook the country with his preaching of a baptism of repentance.

John's repentance was more than ordinary contrition for past faults. Rather it was a call to a complete about-face, a change of heart, a mind henceforth absorbed in the Creator instead of creatures and vanities.

It was a filling up of the valleys of sin, a levelling of the mountains of pride, a smoothing away of whatever might obstruct the steps of the Savior when He comes.

But his repentance meant even more. Light dispels darkness. Repentance meant not merely removing the



"YOU NEVER SUSPECTED YOUR OLD PASTOR WAS A FASHION PACESETTER, DID YOU?"

darkness of sin, but scattering it by the light of good works. John's trenchant expression was, "Brood of vipers! . . . Bring forth fruits befitting repentance." As each class asked what it could do, he told the rich to share the wealth; officials, not to overreach their commissions; soldiers, not to be merciless and rapacious (Lk. 3:7-14). (Note that John did not say soldier was wrong.)

Such demands stamp the cross on our lives. No man can become a Christian just as he is. Phyllis McGinley wrote, "It is easy to be a saint if I can keep my comfort, my sins, and my wealth."

Sins, one cannot keep; the rest he may, but in a Christian way. John did not ask anyone to flee the world. He told no one to abandon his livelihood, but to purify it to that living in this world might be a means of sanctification for him.

But John would be no prophet if he did not put the fear of God into

his hearers. Therefore he spoke of judgment in fire and of a testing that would separate the good from the bad as wind separates grain from chaff. He heralded the long-awaited Day of the Lord, whose terrifying side the prophets were so fond of depicting. Yet again like the prophets, he added hope to fear. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." God is gentle as a lamb, and salvation is for the whole world. On a note of hope John ended his preaching: "So with many different exhortations he kept on preaching the gospel to the people" (Lk. 3:18). Thus was fulfilled the word of Gabriel to Zachary: "Many will rejoice at his birth" (Lk. 1:14).

Before the word of the Father came, the word of John ran on ahead. God always uses persons to prepare the way for the Lord. He comes to men through man. It is His way. Does our behavior cry out Christ? Does our lives shout out Christ? Are we an Alleluia from head to foot?

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# CC

NEWSPAPER

## Bishop

# 5 E

Bishop Hogan, 100 years old, died a great joy on Dec. 13 at St. John's Hospital in what was his 100th year.

The five priests of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, who were his spiritual fathers, are: Father Michael P. Kelly, Stephen R. C. Mitrano.

Three of them, including their studies, were at St. John's Seminary in Aquinas, N.J., where Bishop Hogan was a student.

Other orders who were his spiritual fathers are: the Society of the Holy Spirit, the Society of the Holy Spirit, the Society of the Holy Spirit.

## Father

# Gregorio

Father Gregorio was able to drive his own car, a 1968 Ford, which he had bought with his own money. He was 100 years old when he died.

Not that it's a model with nearly 100,000 miles on the odometer, but it was a real car, and it was his.

The occasion was the 100th birthday of Father Gregorio, who was born on Dec. 13, 1869.

The celebration was held at St. John's Seminary, where Father Gregorio was a student.

The celebration was a great success, and it was a joy for all who attended.

## Ecumenical

Families who were with other families, and they were all there. It was a great day for all of them.

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