

THE HOLY FATHER

Priest Defectors Are Crown of Thorns

By PATRICK RILEY
(NC News Service)

Vatican City — "This is our crown of thorns," said Pope Paul VI of what he called "a small but overly conspicuous number" of priests and Religious abandoning their state of life.

Speaking (Dec. 15) to a consistory of cardinals, the Pope linked these departures to "the uncertainty of the priest about his status."

Such uncertainty "concerns faith in the very nature of the priesthood, the priest's human and ecclesiastical formation, his religious and apostolic function, his hierarchical and sociological position, his inner and outer manner of life and his mission in the modern world."

He once again affirmed his determination to preserve the law of priestly celibacy in the Western Church.

Vatican sources said this speech would replace his usual Christmas speech to the cardinals. These sources also said the Pope would not give his

usual Christmas speech to the world this year, a speech which in the past has been taped ahead of time by television and radio for prompt delivery on Christmas Day.

Instead, the Pope is expected to give a much lengthier speech from his study window than has been his custom on Christmas.

Speaking of priests and Religious who leave their sacred duties," Pope Paul emphasized:

"We understand how complicated and dramatic this phenomenon is in each individual case. We understand how wrong it would be to pass judgment on the interior state of these unhappy souls, even if the outward manifestations of such desertions cause so much bitterness and scandal among the people of God, and in themselves deserve to be strongly deplored."

His reason for mentioning these departures was "so that we may have the aid of your common prayers that they may not lack, wherever possi-

ble, charitable aid."

Of priestly incontinence, Pope Paul said: "It is of the greatest importance to give high testimony to the great majority of the clergy who are strong and faithful to their mission and to their duty, and at the same time to give again to every priest certainty about his vocation, about his being a person specially chosen, about his sacramental investiture."

"It is of the greatest importance to instill into him awareness of his indispensable relevance to the present time, to propose to him the way of life, both evangelical and up-to-date, which will help him to identify himself with the mystery that is proper to him, and to spread the charisms of word, grace and example to the community and to individual souls."

Pope Paul, still speaking of the priest, declared: "His person must be given dignity, though unbecoming useless ornaments, and his voluntarily poor and hard-working daily life must be sustained by sure and adequate sustenance."



Don't Be Dismayed by Changes

Vatican City — (NC) — Pope Paul has urged Catholics not to be "too much dismayed" by upheavals within the Church today.

Speaking at a general audience, Pope Paul took note of the problems facing many Catholics today but at the same time he said that many of these problems "often spring from numerically small minorities and very often from sources which are not at all authoritative."

The Pope in the early part of his talk noted that "a sense of confusion seems to spread even among the ranks of the best sons of the Church, at times even among the most studious and the most authoritative."

"There is much talk of authenticity,

but where can we find it at a time when so many characteristic things, even essential ones, are questioned? There is much talk of unity, yet many try to go off on their own."

"There is much talk of the apostolate, yet where are the generous and enthusiastic apostles at a time when vocations diminish and when cohesion and the spirit of conquest is weakening among the Catholic laity itself?"

Despite the numerically small groups and modern means of publicity which can distort the slightest facts remarkably, he said, "There is still an immense majority of healthy people, good and faithful, to whom we can give credit."

"Indeed it is to them that we turn

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Christmas in the Old Days

By Sarah Child

I think sometimes of Christmases past, but only those before the age eight. The others tend to blur and blend together and no particular year stands out in my mind.

Those Christmas Days before I was eight blend together, too, but there is no blur. The pictures I see are rich red velvet standing out in relief against the homespun fabric that is a child's life.

The red velvet image comes in part, I suppose, from the wreaths my mother would hang in the front windows signaling the start of the season for us. They had candles inside them and the light they cast was warm and soft and as much as I liked looking at them from inside the house, it was even better from outside, to start up the hill in the cold darkness and catch sight of them. Sometimes I must remember to ask my mother just when she threw them away.

Sometimes during the week that preceded Christmas Day there was a special visit to St. Augustine's, the church that seemed so large and now seems so small and old. Each year the creches and the evergreens arranged around it which we had come to see would take me by surprise. I could not know then that even 30 years later the first sight of a church so transformed for the Christmas sea-

son causes me to draw in my breath sharply in pure pleasure.

Christmas morning with its gift opening, new clothes and drive to church passed in a flash. It was upon the return from Mass that the day would revolve into high gear.

There was a ritual about the afternoon and evening that never varied—into the car, each child with one or two new toys that he could not part with, for the block drive to our paternal grandparents. Cousins, aunts, uncles—every one of them on my father's side—would be gathered.

Grandma always placed her creche under the tree. The top of the upright piano was loaded with photographs of weddings, christenings, first Communions and other less ordinary events. Everywhere there were crocheted dollies, antimacassars, portieres and even crocheted ornamental cups and saucers stashed to an unbending stiffness in sugar. The smell of the sour red wine that my grandfather made in his cellar pervaded the room, the decanter next to the pignolati, a Christmas cookie confection covered with honey that my grandmother made.

We children took turns pounding the piano with the adult voices growing louder and louder until one of the men, usually my father, would

close the top over the keys.

Dinner was in shifts, with the children first. While the others would begin to seek out couches and chairs to doze and rest, our parents would be getting us together.

Now the third part of our Christmas Day was beginning. The 20-mile drive into the country to visit my mother's parents usually turned into an adventure, it being late in December. How deep would the frozen ruts be in the dirt roads, how heavy the drifting snow? How many deer would we see, silhouetted against the snow-covered stand of pines?

Then just before complete darkness we would turn in the driveway. No candles in these windows, only the lovely glow of the kerosene lamps already lit and the waiting arms of Grandma, Grandpa, a young aunt and uncle and an even younger aunt just my own age. Another tree, more gifts. Another table laden.

And much later guided by a flickering lamp up the stairs we stumbled to dream under patchwork quilts of the frozen creek next to the house just perfect for sliding on and of the trip to the pond to cut pieces of ice for the ice cream freezer.

Tomorrow would be the second best day of the year. We had just had the best.



Beautiful Santa

Professional Santa Claus Jean Apperson sits patiently beneath a hair dryer during the finishing phase of his weekly shampoo, bleach, setting and styling of his silvery hair and beard. Apperson, who has been playing Santa for 31 years, gets his beauty treatment in Denver, not the North Pole. (Religious News Service)

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

A Christmas Meditation

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

The stable of Bethlehem has no tree, no decorations, no blinking lights to pretty, nor pretty boxes with toys and socks.

The Baby's bed is not bedecked with a baby boy's blue blanket. It has no varnish. It smells of dry grass and other feed for sheep and donkeys.

The Baby's food is from His Mother's breast. As Christ sleeps, Our Lady and St. Joseph munch a simple Christmas fare of bread and goat's cheese, a bit of fish and sup of wine.

And yet this cave so dark and stark God's calm Spirit pervades. For Infinite Love is Incarnated in the Baby Jesus.

And God's Spirit joins together Jesus and Mary and Joseph in one great love. Not with stuff that perishes, stuff that TV ads seduce us to believe

brings happiness; but the gift that perseveres; the gift of the heart, this is God's love, never to corrode or rot or dissipate.

In Christian homes all over our country the memory of that stark night is recalled.

Alas, celebrated strangely by pretty cribs so clean and colorful; so odorless; celebrated by stuff piled high as if love were measured in things material.

In dull incomprehension these seem to say: expensive toys and costly liquors, sparkling trinkets, exotic smells; laden tables and every flesh-satisfying comfort; these are the Gospel of Bethlehem.

But the Gospel of the cave is otherwise. It is a divine protest against utter poverty and unconcern

Church Renewal Topic of Book

By JOSEPH McLELLAN

New York — (RNS) — Church renewal programs should be understood not so much as efforts to bring about changes but rather as efforts by the entrenched structures to survive, according to a provocative new study published here.

Entitled "Can These Bones Live? The Failure of Church Renewal (Sheed and Ward)," the book is co-authored by H. Elliott Wright, a staff member of Religious News Service, and Robert S. Lecky, formerly of Christianity and Crisis, bi-weekly magazine, and presently a staff member of the National Council of Churches.

The book's underlying thesis is that in most cases "renewal" becomes a process of redecoration rather than of radical transformation.

For this reason, the authors assert, renewal programs promulgated for a widespread Church body from a central administrative leadership have little chance of retaining long-term vitality.

"They see more hope in localized renewal efforts following grass-roots initiatives, but find that lack of inter-communication limits the effect of such efforts and ultimately leads to 'bewilderment and frustration.'"

Consistent with their view of renewal as a survival mechanism for the institutional Church, the authors describe the "underground" church as a "reaction to renewal" rather than a part of it.



WASHINGTON LETTER

Nixon Criticized for Hunger Inaction

By Kim Larsen

Many participants in the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health expressed severe criticism of President Nixon's address before the gathering of more than 3,000 persons.

Many of them complained the talk contained "nothing new." Nixon deplored the fact that people are hungry in the United States. He asked for support of three of his programs:

The family assistance plan, which will assure poor families of some income; expansion of the food stamp program, and establishment of a Commission on Population Growth and the American Future.

But the vocal White House conference participants wanted Nixon to announce some outstanding program to eliminate hunger and malnutrition immediately in this country.

He didn't. The response to the President's poorly delivered speech was not enthusiastic merely polite. The gathering applauded the introduction of Sen. Charles McNamara's bill to make decisions for yourselves."

lem, shortly after Nixon left the conference hall.

Many groups attending the conference let it be known that they are quickly tiring of conferences. They want action. Nixon did promise action. But so far there has been only more talk.

The complaint that Nixon said nothing new in his address is not entirely fair. Largely overlooked by many persons were the President's brief references to letting the poor people run their own lives while the government supplies them with the necessary resources to overcome hunger.

Governmental policy toward the poor has always been paternalistic. Not only has it, in a small way, supplied needs; but also, in a large way, regulated lives.

The fact that Nixon is willing to get the government out of the business of running people's lives is noteworthy.

"The task of government is not to make decisions for you or for anyone. The task of government is to enable you to make decisions for yourselves," Nixon declared.

He did not, however, offer any suggestions how this might be done.

There are many ways in which the poor and hungry can control their own lives. For instance, if and when the family assistance plan goes into effect, the poor should not be regimented into jobs for which they have no liking. They should be allowed to be choosy just as are the affluent.

Instead of being issued food stamps, the poor should be given money and trusted that they will spend it properly and wisely on food. The fact that individuals have to use food stamps marks them as less than desirable elements. This discrimination would be eliminated if they were given cash instead. And this would give them more control over their own lives.

The suggestions could be endless. The big test will be whether Nixon will heed any suggestions when they are presented to him.

Only then will the nation know if Nixon's one new idea is truly an innovation. If so, Nixon will then be vindicated in view of the harsh criticisms made against him.

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