

A Silent Night, A Mighty Message

On the day of our judgment, Christ has told us clearly, He will come into our world in power and majesty so that His judicial authority may be seen clearly by all men. There will be angels blowing trumpets, He said, the living mustered in mumbling, frightened clusters and the souls of the dead brought miraculously back to earth to hear again the thunderous tones of their eternal sentence.

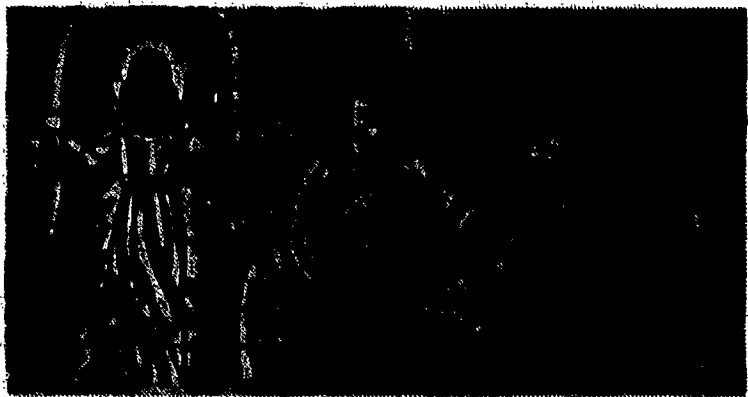
But on the day of our salvation His coming was secret and obscure and hushed. The reason seems quite clear: salvation is by faith, and on the night of the Nativity the Father did not expect mankind to see its Saviour but to believe in Him.

For centuries we have retold each other those precious details of the Christmas story, of the dark sky opening to the radiance and rousing song of a heavenly choir, of a jubilant angel's message that a Child was born in Bethlehem, of a bright star that floodlighted the road to His crib. But actually that first Christmas was a story of darkness, of awful silence, of majesty in humble garments, of things no human eye could see.

There was surely no bright light nor ringing song within the cave that sheltered Mary and Joseph on that great night. It was probably lit by a wood-torch or an oil-lamp which caused flickering shadows on the earth-walls. No angels voices sang there; the breathing of animals and the whimpering cry of an infant were all that broke that lonely silence. As a cave for livestock it was surely odorous, damp and untidy. Yet we make Christmas a festival of lights, color, laughter and song.

Theologians assure us that the obscurity which enfolded the newborn Saviour was not an historical accident. Unlike other children, the Son of God could and did select all the details of His human birth. He deliberately chose the silence of a stable, the care of a poor, teenage mother, the obscurity of a birth-town where no one knew His family.

The point was not to dazzle men into admiration, not to let them reason into conviction, but to offer their hearts an object of curious search. Men were not to see divinity nor extraordinary wonder in this birth but simply to believe what the angels told them.



How plain was it all to Mary that night, or in all the months before Bethlehem, even long before there was any stirring of life within her? She had had only the word of an angel to light up the darkness of that divine secret: "You shall conceive and bear a son... the holy child to be born will be called Son of God."

Joseph too had only such simple things as the virtue of his bride and a dream-message from an angel to help him know the dignity of the child born that night. But they both accepted this child on faith.

Historically we can demonstrate that God's gifts and the secrets of divine wisdom have usually come to humanity through homely things, from humble teachers to the rest of men. It was not a break with the divine strategies that Christ comes to our minds through the homely pictures of a midnight birth, an exultant young mother, a smelly stable. It is the kindness of God and His knowledge of us that makes Him hide majesty in simple things. So much of our lives are made-up of the obscure and ordinary; so few ever escape the routine of the homely and dull and unexciting; the glamorous or dazzling hours are few and far between in any life. Because we are steeped in the homely and the obscure He came to join our race in just that way.

The trouble is that the darkness in which the Son of God came to earth makes it easy for some of us to mistake Him or refuse to see Him. We take Christmas as the commemoration of the birth of a baby we sentimentalize over rather than the arrival of a Lord who demands our love. We sing carols about a Bethlehem but forget He really was born to die at a place called Calvary. The whispers of God asking us to believe in Him are drowned out by the noise of our parties. The delight of opening gifts from each other obscures the wonder of His gift to us: the Son of God, sent to be our brother.

—Father Richard Tormey



Brazil Archbishop Declares:

'Internal Colonialism' Sapping 'Third World'

Chicago — (RNS) — The "awakened consciences" of the developed nations, the potential of the world's youth, and the "Abrahamic minorities" are the keys to building a new Third World, according to a Roman Catholic bishop writing in an ecclesiastical weekly published here.

Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara of Olinda and Recife, Brazil, acknowledged spokesman for "progressive" elements in the Latin American hierarchy, said he does not see violence as the "way out" for the underdeveloped Third World.

"Today," he said, "established violence keeps millions of people in a sub-human situation. For the Third World to turn to violence would be to declare that no alternative exists."

Noting that it is difficult to cite an example of any region that has overcome underdevelopment without violence, the Archbishop said: "Yet, I recall that everywhere in the world movements are appearing with ever more intensive demands for justice and peace."

"That being so, I can dream about the day when there will dawn for mankind a new civilization with justice and peace recognized as the essential values. For me that dream has validity because I believe in the power of truth and love... in the work of God, who will not allow falsehood and hate to prevail among men for all time."

The controversial prelate, writing in the Dec. 10 issue of Christian Century, said that today's task is to "consolidate all movements seeking to humanize the world."

Known affectionately to his flock as "Dom Helder," Archbishop Pessoa resides in two small rooms attached to a dilapidated church in Recife's slums. He recently wrote a book, "The Church and Colonialism."

A consistent and outspoken critic of what he calls the "fallaciousness of the communism-anti-communism dichotomy," Archbishop Pessoa wrote that for him "the most threatening clash of our time is not between East and West (communism and anti-communism) but rather that which results from the ever-increasing disparity between the northern and southern parts of the world — between the developed and underdeveloped countries."

He spoke of millions who suffer "the consequences of extremism — a massive, hysterical anti-communism which reaches such a point of blindness and hate, in some instances at least, it seems to be a new form of industry."

Father Finks Writes

Inertia Biggest Detriment in Poverty War

By Alex MacDonald

Father P. David Finks, former director of the diocesan Urban Ministry, now working in Washington for the U.S. Bishops' Division of Urban Life, believes that inertia which delays a decent housing program for the nation's poor "is at its heart a lack of motivation on the part of the American people."

Writing a 4-part series on social issues for the national Catholic press, Father Finks states: "It is a moral problem for adult church-going Americans and their clergy to continue to tolerate millions of people living in inhuman conditions which can be changed."

The nation has all the material resources, the technology, wealth and industrial know-how to provide a more human existence for every American, he believes.

But, he writes, "The missing ingredient, according to the U.S. Bishops' Task Force Report is spiritual: the heart, the will, the desire to commit our nation to a program to end the ravages of poverty and discrimination within this decade."

"Do we as Catholic Christians have the will and the determination to look at the urgent human needs around us — education, housing, adequate job supply, family security, universal health care, racial and minority group relations? Do we want to devise effective strategies to aid in the solution of these human struggles?"

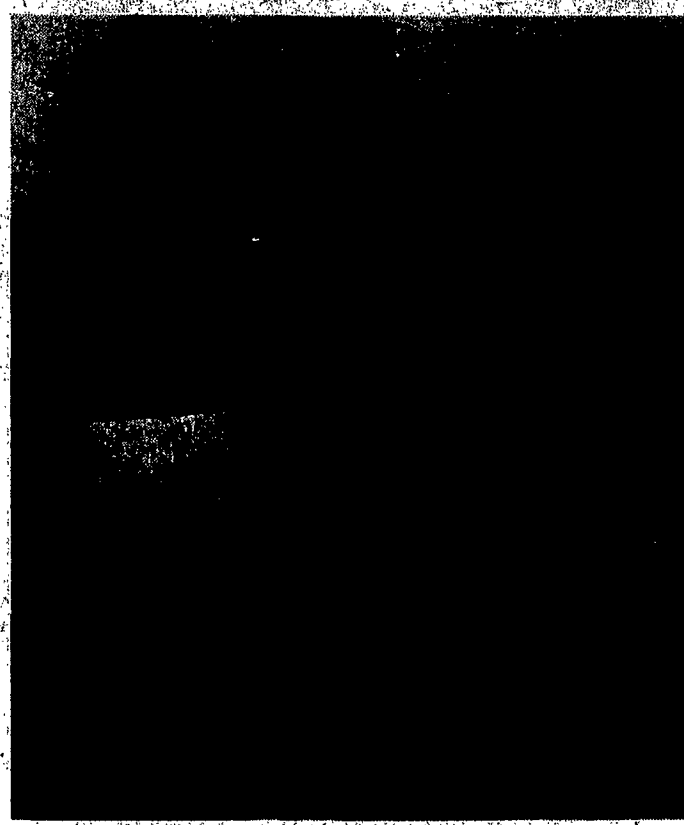
He warns that if Bishops and laity do not help when human society is being reorganized, the U.S. Church will be accorded the fate of an "irrelevant institution."

"Churches will become, as they have in so much of Europe, nostalgic haunts, the busy work of old women and very young children. The Church of Christ will continue in some form, but what wonderful opportunities for love and creative action will have been lost by default."

The Rochester priest charges that the Church's leaders and congregations have some responsibility for the "drift toward group conflict and violence" in our American cities, because they have shown "seeming callousness and indifference to human problems."

Father Finks first article explained the program of action set before the U.S. Bishops recently by the national Catholic Urban Task Force. Since being advanced to Washington last June as assistant director of the Urban Life projects of the American hierarchy, he has served on this task force and helped research its report on how poverty and racial tensions touch the Church.

The report, delivered to the national meeting of the Bishops in November, asked the Church leaders to give spiritual and moral leadership to the national crisis by such means as fundraising like the Bishops' Overseas Relief drive, a campaign to develop "social consciousness among



ARCHBISHOP HELDER CAMARA

"Any new idea or suggestion aimed at improving the condition of the poor is instantly and efficiently labeled 'communism.' This attitude leads to deadlocks that in turn lead to repression, despair and terrorism," he said.

Archbishop Pessoa, often labeled a "Red sympathizer," has been under constant attack by anti-Communist elements in Brazil. Most attacks have been fired into his residence and one of his closest priest-associates engaged in social reform was murdered by a so-called "death squad."

Declaring that "laziness" and "corruption" do indeed exist in the underdeveloped nations, the Brazilian prelate asserted, however, that it is the consequence mainly of "a pervasive evil which can be termed internal colonialism — a privileged few maintaining their wealth at the expense of misery suffered by millions of their fellow citizens."

"This privileged minority raises the banner of anti-communism and by resort to slander and violence strives to prevent any change in the socio-economic, political and cultural structures that guarantee its own survival."

Archbishop Pessoa said that what makes the problem so acute is the absence of an "alternative to victimization by the capitalist system's

economic power." Theoretically, he added, the Third World should be able to turn to the Socialist world.

"But in practice this is not valid recourse," the archbishop said. "For the guilt of existing socialist systems is only too apparent."

Citing the Soviet Union, which he claims resorts to "sins quite similar to those committed by any capitalist empire," the prelate said it continues to employ "dictatorship, purges, public insecurity, dogmatic interpretation of Marxism and anti-God propaganda" and crushes any evidence of pluralism within the Socialist world, in Czechoslovakia, for example.

Ruling out Red China even more obliquely, Archbishop Pessoa remarked that "new models of socialism will have to appear" if we are to believe socialization is a humane solution, safeguarding personal dignity, promoting human development, and achieving its ends without resorting to dictatorship.

Saying the evolution of his thinking about the "fragile giant" of the Third World of underdeveloped nations was influenced greatly by Pope John XXIII and Vatican II, the prelate said that Pope John seemed to him the "personification of the Christian ideal" and that Vatican II helped him understand the meaning of "the People of God" and the "pres-

veloped from this metropolitan focus of the mission of the Church in contemporary urban society."

Reflecting on his recent participation in a 5-nation tour of new towns and housing developments in Europe, Father Finks in another article says that the U.S. is only seventh in the world in providing decent living for its underprivileged people. About 16 percent of our total housing inventory is sub-standard and overcrowded, he claims.

"Churches can do very little to change the housing crisis directly," Father Finks says, "but they can do much by way of example and effective lobbying to provide this basic human right for every citizen."

Among the suggestions he makes for organized effort on local housing are:

ence of the Church in the world" — with the term "world" not used as a synonym for "sin."

Turning to his "three keys" for the development of the Third World, Archbishop Pessoa said that, first, "the real challenge is how to get the developed countries thinking in historical perspective, how to awaken their consciences so they will understand that changes cannot be made in the structures of underdeveloped lands unless... changes are made in the developed countries."

Secondly, he pointed out, there is a need to foster unity among the world's youth. He expressed conviction that beyond the diversities of race, language, and religion, there is in youth "a wealth of potential waiting to be released on behalf of justice and peace."

Finally, he said "we must try to unearth, encourage and foster the 'Abrahamic minorities' which God raises up in all countries."

He said God loves the world so much he inspires special "sons of Abraham" in the "most difficult moments." The prelate emphasized that such "sons of hope" must be sought out and encouraged to promote better understanding among men and to work toward building a new world — "to cooperate with the Father's plan for redeeming the world."

Seed money on a revolving fund basis could be made available to non-profit groups to bring a new housing development to a stage where federal assistance is available.

A diocesan Task Force could press government to use its power to overcome antiquated building codes and restrictive zoning legislation.

The private sector of industry and national labor unions should be encouraged to invest in new town planning to revolutionize urban living.

"The roadblock against decent housing," Father Finks contends, "is not technology nor economics. The problems are political and spiritual: fear, prejudice, lack of commitment and class struggle."

Word for Sunday

Accept or Reject; Rise or Fall

By Father Albert Shamon

In the Odyssey of Homer there is a touching story about Odysseus' faithful dog, Argus. For twenty years Argus waited for his master to return. When he finally sees him returned home, and recognizes him, he rejoices in the sight and dies.

So Simeon waited for years for "the glory of Israel" to come. When He does, Simeon is ready to lie down and die. "Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace."

But in the next breath, the singer becomes a seer. Turning to Mary and Joseph, Simeon blesses them and prophesies, "You see this child, he is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel."

Christ's coming into the world started to divide men. I think this division was precisely the point in the film The Parable. In the film, the clown could symbolize Christ. In the circus of the world, the clown went about helping everyone. And what was the result? His help divided men and women into either followers or his tormentors.

That is what Simeon said Christ's words and actions would do: they would divide men, cause the rise and fall of many. Like a detergent, they would separate the dirt from the polluted fabric of humanity—the evil from the good. Thus the Baptist had likened the Messiah to a farmer with a winnowing fan which he moved to and fro, creating a breeze. The chaff is blown away, whereas the heavier golden wheat remains, purified and cleansed.

Of the two effects of Christ's advent, Simeon mentions the fall of many in Israel first. Those who re-

main the same cannot be said to fall. Falling implies a change for the worse. This happens to those who hear the Word of God and go on unchanged. Such as these fall, for their state has become worse. In the first place, it is more hopeless. They have heard Christ, but in vain. So there is now less hope for them.

Secondly, they are in greater sin. Sin is not in the act but in the will of the doer. The more light a man has for not doing wrong, the more responsible he is. "To whom more is given, more will be demanded."

In one of the few fiery outbursts levelled by Christ, He said to the Jews, "On Judgment day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation and condemn it." Why? "Because when Jonah preached they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here" (Lk. 11:32).

But there is another side to the

coin. Christ came not to condemn, but to save. He is also destined for the rising of many in Israel. The more often Christ comes, the nearer one comes to Him. The nearer one is to Him, the more convinced he becomes of his sinfulness. The dawn reveals the feebleness of the candle's light. So the Light comes that "the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."

He comes not only to separate good from evil people, but to separate good from evil in our very selves—to make us so conscious of our sinfulness that we shall hate it and long for His redemption.

How greatly prized ought that gospel be which gives hope to the sinner even while detecting his guilt! How greatly loved ought that Child be who is to each what air is to the lungs. "Accept Him, we live; reject Him, we die. We rise or we fall — there is no middle course."



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Visitor

When Mary Louise left her home in St. Louis in 1943 to enter the Convent of the Cenacle, she prepared never to see home again and to very little.

This week, newly returned from Rome, Italy, an archbishop visited the Convent in Rochester and left for Boston, N.Y. He will travel around the world.

Part of Sister Moore's as one of four members of a council which assists the superior general of the Convent in

the Convent in

Lourdes Pupils

'Those

By JOHN DASH

'Twas the end of the week before Christmas all through the Mall glass-eyed shuffling homeward their shopping bags.

When quick as a flash kids started running the crowd shouting at top of their lungs.

A middle-aged matron, "Good Heavens."

Then the paragon hushed. The children, huddled on stage in front of Christmas tree and dancing and singing, "I people were for people everywhere, be a lot less people to about and a lot more people care."

"Those kids are cute," a man said; "chills ran up the back of my neck."

Kenneth Sarkis, a snapping his finger, swinging his arms, did the whole shebang.

The children call selves the UBA, the Builders' Association; ringleader is black 28-year-old Sarkis (or abeth Sabarakkabi, a called in Abtakk, a school language in which Sarkis speaks).

The UBA is comprised of the junior high school from Our Lady of School in Brighton. It marks their second-ance at Midtown. They tained at the 1968 dinner of the Com

Santa Claus (al than 250 child

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