



A new event. In the midst of the old, something new occurs. It is something like the resurrection — a sign, a beauty, a wonder that touches peoples' lives. They see — and hope. They reach out and are transformed. (NC Photo courtesy of Peace Corps.)

## Faith and Common Sense

By DR. MONIKA HELLWIG

Long ago our ancestors thought God intervened constantly in the affairs of the world, with thunder and lightning and plagues to signal his displeasure with what men were doing, and with fair weather, good harvests and fruitful flocks when they obeyed his will. Sooner or later, common sense prompted questions about these assumptions.

They began to notice the rhythm of atmospheric conditions that explained the irregular occurrence of thunder and lightning. They observed the fact that rats carried plague and that certain man-made conditions encouraged rats. In the name of common sense, our ancestors began to control these matters which had formerly been thought of as divine judgments.

In the early 16th century the Italian physicist and astronomer, Galileo Galilei, sat on the roof at night after night in the chilly starlight with a new telescope. He observed and recorded meticulously the movements of the stars he could see.



A road to follow? More and more people are deciding what road they will follow by asking: "What is most needed for the good of people?" (NC Photo by Christie McGue.)

After trying every combination of mathematical formulae he could think of to explain the pattern of movements, he realized something: All the data fell into place in his formula if he assumed that the earth from which he observed was itself moving and was not the still point at the center of the universe.

Galileo was told his theory was irreligious because it contradicted the doctrine of creation and the Christian teaching about man's relation to God. At that time many people thought one could not possibly accept the movement of the earth around the sun and still remain a Christian believer. It was a critical episode not only for Galileo but for all believers of modern times.

Does faith call on us to deny common sense, or to pretend that we have not heard or seen some of the evidence presented by science? Are faith and science in conflict?

In the 19th and early 20th Century these problems arose again. Science, especially archaeology, questioned many statements in the Bible. So did historical and literary analysis of the texts. A good example is the creation of the world in six days and the creation of Adam and Eve. Catholic scientists, including the great Jesuit archaeologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, were in trouble over the theory of evolution. All their evidence pointed to this as the best hypothesis to cover their observations. The biblical account of the origins of man and the world were different.

Not only in the world about us but also in human society, modern life-experience has challenged the believer. For instance, the question of sin and guilt is not as easy as it used to be. We have learned much about conditioning and the forces which influence human behavior. We also know that a person may feel very guilty and ashamed without reference to any moral decision at all.

Another example concerns authority and social customs. Democratic patterns of government and many changes in customs, have led us to be critical of law and traditions. We no longer hold them sacred. We question whether they serve their purpose, rather than assuming there is a greater wisdom in them that we do not understand.

We have "secularized" much that was formerly sacred. As a

matter of fact, we have secularized so much that many people are asking whether this is the age of the great falling away from the faith. In the name of common sense, or of science, we have reconsidered, reformulated, questioned. We seem no longer to be in the era of "simple faith."

Faith and science, however, cannot be in conflict if the God who redeems and sanctifies is also the Creator and Father of all things. A true man of faith cannot be afraid to look at the truth of science because it cannot possibly be in contradiction to the truth of faith. God is truth and all effort to know and understand in any field of human endeavor must lead back to the same source. In the end there can be no contradiction. In the long run science can hold no risk for the believer.

Yet, in the course of new discoveries there may very well seem to be contradictions because the picture is not complete. One has to take the risk of trying out hypotheses which may prove to be wrong or unworkable.

Science and religion do not offer the same kind of knowledge. They do not use the same kind of language. They can not be in conflict when they only claim to be giving their own kind of knowledge.

Science explains how, establishes predictable sequences of occurrences, offers theories by which one can control such occurrences, and build technology. Religion explains why and gives the basis for values and goals. Faith is concerned with the why in interpreting the world, rather than with the how of natural happenings.

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Wherever two or three people are gathered together, there is a context—a situation—for faith, where Christians can be what Christians really are. (NC Photo by Bob Smith)

# KNOW YOUR FAITH

## Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD MCBRIEN

**Q. Did the Second Vatican Council have anything to say about the women's liberation movement?**

**A.** The women's liberation movement was still in its embryonic stage, at least in the United States, when the council adjourned in December of 1965. Betty Friedan's book, "The Feminine Mystique," is often regarded as the theoretical inspiration of the movement, and yet the book itself was not published until 1963, just two years before the council concluded its work and several years before the movement gained any significant momentum.

The council did acknowledge, however, that women are often the victims of discrimination and it condemned such discrimination based on sex:

"For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 29; see also n. 60).

Pope John XXIII also devoted a major portion of his encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra*, to the place of women in the modern world. His arguments and those of the council were fundamentally the same.

There are, of course, some exponents of women's rights who imply that men and women should be regarded as if there are no psychological differences between the two sexes. Others have made disparaging remarks about the institution of marriage and, indeed, the whole sexual dimension of human life.

Neither Pope John XXIII nor the Second Vatican Council offered any support for these views. And apparently neither do psychologists.

**Q. What about the black power movement? Did the council have anything to say about that?**

**A.** Again, the black power movement is fairly recent in origin, at least in its American form. Until his death in 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, an advocate of nonviolence, was acknowledged within the black community as the leading figure in the struggle for human and civil rights.

While the council could not take into account the developments of the last three or four years, it did speak to the issue of racial prejudice and discrimination, although not nearly so forcefully or so fully as many Catholics would have liked:—"Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 29).

And elsewhere, in the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, the council wrote: "As a consequence, the Church rejects, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion" (n. 5).

**Q. Does the council, therefore, condemn all forms of violent protest?**

**A.** No. If it did, it would have had to condemn all wars and every kind of military enterprise, even in the cause of self-defense. The council did not make such a blanket condemnation. However, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World did reserve special praise for those people who willingly adopt a nonviolent course in the pursuit of justice and peace (n. 78).

Too often, unfortunately, people who counsel a nonviolent course for other people are themselves a disguised (or undisguised) form of violence to maintain their own economic, political, or social position in the world. Rationalization is usually easy.

**Q. Did the council have any ethical advice to offer military personnel who might be ordered to participate in the killing of civilians?**

**A.** The council insisted that "blind obedience" can never be justified, even in wartime. "The courage of those who openly and fearlessly resist men who issue such commands merits supreme commendation" (Pastoral Constitution, n. 79).