

Leisure Time and Celebrating Life

By FR. CARL J. PFEIFER

Thirteen years ago this month I was enjoying a brief summer vacation with a small religious community near Innsbruck in the Austrian Alps. The superior was an elderly man, warm and human, still bearing marks of sufferings endured in a concentration camp. Each evening as we gathered in the old farm house for dinner, he would ask the lay brother to bring wine so that we might celebrate.

We celebrated the coming of a guest, or the appearance of the warm sun after cold, bleak days, or the life-giving rains that fell on the parched garden. We celebrated feast days and birthdays, peaceful days and busy days.

As I recall those days I smile to think of the old superior's alertness to find plausible reasons for having wine with the evening meal. I recognize also that he possessed an uncommon appreciation of the goodness and beauty so easily overlooked in the routine of daily living. He preserved an extraordinary appreciation of the ordinary, and made each day an occasion for celebrating some experience of the day.

Recognizing God's goodness in life's daily surprises he readily celebrated with a prayer of thanks and with wine given by God to cheer men's hearts. (Ps. 104:15).

His spirit of celebrating life was contagious and truly Christian. It is a valuable spirit in today's tense, crisis-prone world. Celebrating life, with its joys and sorrows, is a way of affirming all that is good in human existence.

Christians down through the ages have periodically forgotten the art of celebrating, and focused more on the negative, threatening aspects of life in the world of men.

The liturgy contains remnants of an age when Christians even prayed to despise the things of earth in their efforts to seek the things of heaven. Fear, guilt, legalism tend to kill the spirit of celebration that is the normal outcome of a firm belief in God's continuing creation and providence, and in the Incarnation and Resurrection of His Son, Who through His Spirit, is with us always and everywhere (Mt. 28:20).

Celebrating life is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, which grows out of the more ancient tradition of the Jews. The Psalms are filled with expressions of praise and gratitude to God for almost everything in human experience. If you take up your Bible and read the last six Psalms of the Psalter, Psalms 145-150, you will sense something of the spirit of celebration which recognizes with thanksgiving and praise the loving presence and activity of God in the simplest of ordinary earthly realities.

From the days of King David, who danced with joy before the ark of Yahweh (2 Sam. 6:14), down to the present day, Jewish and Christian believers have prayed these Psalms. From the Psalms they have learned to celebrate God's power and kindness as it touches them in their daily experience: in food and drink, in freedom and health, in the warm sun and cooling rain, in human fellowship and love, in the achievements of human creativity as well as in sickness and suffering, and the other diminishments of life.

Even in personal suffering, and national crisis the believer can learn to find reason to celebrate God's active presence in man's life. The Psalms reveal motives for celebrating life with God even in the midst of death.

The early Christians, familiar with the Psalms, were so aware of God's happenings of daily life that they became known as "Alleluia People" because the prayer "Alleluia" — "Praise the Lord" — was so often on their lips. Their celebrations were so exuberant that the pagans came to call them the "People of the Dance."

Even in time of persecution, cramped with fear in damp catacombs, the faithful Christians continued to celebrate their life in Christ, knowing that "neither death nor life . . . nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Only people of deep faith in God's powerful love and in the Risen Christ's victory over death could celebrate the martyrdom of their relatives and friends.



"Celebrating life, with its joys and sorrows, is a way of affirming all that is good in human existence," writes Father Carl Pfeifer. We need to have people around who can look through shadows and discover the sources of joy. (NC Photo by John Sullivan.)

Scriptures Are for Evangelism

By FR. WALTER M. ABBOTT

Vatican II gave us a new element of policy when it recommended interconfessional cooperation in securing easy access to the Scriptures for all. Most people may not remember the exact words of the Council: "And if, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authorities, these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them."

What most people still don't know, however, is that Vatican II added another new element to our Bible policy when it endorsed the use of the Scriptures themselves for the work of bringing the good news to all men. We usually call that work "evangelization." Protestants usually call it "evangelism."

It is now our policy that we should use the Scriptures themselves as instruments of evangelism.

Until the Second Vatican Council, I think most Catholics would have called that policy a Protestant one. For a long time in the Catholic Church we had the idea that the handing on of the good news about Christ and the redemption of mankind was done by priests



who preached, religious who taught, and laity who lived what they were taught and in that way gave good example.

With the policy of using the Scriptures themselves as instruments of spreading the good news of salvation we also have another entirely new element of policy, namely, cooperation with other Christians in the work of distributing the Scriptures.

This statement of policy comes from a remarkable sentence near the end of the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation: "Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable comments, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another."

The guiding principles for the work, which we drew up together with the United Bible Societies, include the agreement that it is not necessary to have doctrinal notes in the interconfessional publication of the Scriptures resulting from the common Bible translation projects.

If there were doctrinal notes accompanying the new translation of the Scriptures the notes would be controversial among Christians. If a note were to say, for example, that Matthew 16: 18-19 contains the doctrine of papal primacy and infallibility, it would be controverted by most of the other Christian churches. The Bible societies cannot publish any such controversial helps for the readers of their publications.

If we were going to work with them, we would have to respect their policy of providing the Scriptures for all without any controversial material in the book.

"Good News for Modern Man," today's English version produced by the American Bible Society, has the Imprimatur, official Roman Catholic certification that the book contains nothing against Catholic faith and morals, and it has many of the features that will be found in the interconfessional projects now under way around the world. American Catholics, therefore, can be assured that they may use this book in implementing the policy of Vatican II.

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD MCBRIEN

Q. There has been much controversy recently about the morality of abortion. New York just passed a very "liberal" law. Did the Second Vatican Council have anything at all to say about abortion. Should we expect the same kind of switch on the part of Catholic theologians that we saw on the birth control question?

A. Pertinent material can be found in at least two council documents: the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World and the Declaration on Religious Freedom.

In the former document the council mentioned the subject of abortion twice: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as . . . abortion . . . are infamies indeed" (n. 27); and "From the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes" (n. 51).

Judging from these two citations it seems that the abortion issue is beyond dispute. The Catholic Church, speaking through an ecumenical council, condemns every form of abortion, regardless of circumstances.

Joseph Donceel, S.J., of Fordham University, suggests that this is not the only possible reading of the document. In a recent article in *Theological Studies* (March 1970), Father Donceel writes: "The Council does not say that the life of which it is speaking is the life of a human person; it does not say that this life has an absolute right not to be terminated. Might it not be terminated occasionally for very grave reasons, the reasons which the other Christian churches consider sufficient? As for abortion, I submit that it may rightly be called an 'unspeakable crime' only if it is really an infanticide, the murder of an innocent person."

Other articles in the same abortion symposium (e.g. by Father Robert F. Drinan, S.J., and by John G. Milhaven) suggest lines of thought which challenge an absolutist, unqualified rejection of all forms of abortion, under any and every circumstance.

They argue (particularly Father Drinan) that the Catholic Church need not always press for exact legislative expression of its own moral views, especially when these views do not represent the views of the community-at-large.

And this point brings us to the second conciliar text, the Declaration on Religious Freedom. Herein, the council insisted that every human person has a right to religious freedom "in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs. Nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits" (n. 2).

And elsewhere the Declaration on Religious Freedom states: "On his part man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created.

"It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience especially in matters religious" (n. 3).

The reader should not draw the conclusion that Catholic moralists are now prepared to take the same stand on the intrinsic morality of abortion as some have taken on the intrinsic morality of contraception. The two issues are not the same.

What is similar is the question of the extent to which the Catholic Church should go on enforcing its own view of morality on the larger political community.

In the meantime, many American Catholic bishops have spoken on the abortion issue, and they have spoken uniformly against liberalization of the pertinent legislation. The burden of proof, it seems, remains on the shoulders of those who argue for liberalization of the law and modification of the moral perspective.



There are those who seem to spark life in other people. When they are lost, their followers may experience a loss of hope, a feeling of frustration. This happened to the followers of Jesus after his death.