

Letters to the Editor

The 'Real' Stable

For centuries our culture has romanticized the Bethlehem story. In picture and music and writings we have used soft light and sweet words to hide the harsh realities of poverty and homelessness and loneliness which were the actual setting of the Birth of Christ. Should the stark truth be smothered?

We take the phrase, "there was no room for them in the inn," and imagine that Mary and Joseph were turned away arbitrarily. More probably they were singled out for exclusion for a special reason. The hard fact is that the Mother of God was refused a room with clean comfort she needed that night precisely because she was poor and because her condition promised inconvenience to the innkeeper.

The small town inn of those days was not much more than a walled square where most of the guests and their animals and baggage were bedded down on an earthen floor under the open sky. The few rooms where there might be some measure of privacy were only for the more relatively-affluent. But Mary and Joseph were poor, in the hereditary poverty of millions of the world's working classes. Even for the birth-hour of this special child they could not afford the seclusion of an inn.

Out to the hillside, to a stable-cave where farmers put their animals in storms, Joseph and Mary went for shelter. There, at least in privacy if not comfort, the Child was born. There was a holy atmosphere, but it was actually a miserable place for stables are filthy.

Yet how Christian art has romanticized that birth-place! Our imagination sees it as a quaint thatched cottage, or a dry stone shed. In the Christmas cards it looks dry and warm and happy. But more likely it was wind-swept, had cobwebs on the rough damp walls and animal dung in the dirty straw on the earth floor.

That stable was smelly and lonely and the people in it knew they were ignored and forgotten and helpless. But the Son of God entered the squalor of that cave willingly, with divine fore-planning.

No worldly mind would ever have expected that God coming to this earth could be so poor and dependent and outcast. But awareness of the reality of these handicaps makes the Incarnation incomparably more real and timely than the tinsel romance we have woven about the Christ Child's birth.

The Son of God did not come to skim the surface of humanity nor even to be an average human. He plunged to the dregs of deprivation not as a stranger just passing through, but as a sharer of the hardest burdens the poorest of men must bear: Poverty, which the world fears, He embraced; Homelessness, which only the most unfortunate suffer, He graciously accepted; Rejection, which corrodes the human spirit, He personally chose.

...Here at Home

The poverty, homelessness and rejection which the Christ Child bore when He came to live on our earth are still the daily crosses of hundreds of families in our diocesan communities. Christmas is a day to startle us to acknowledge that the Bethlehem story is still being lived in miserable tenements and cold apartments and lonely hovels only minutes from where we enjoy this holiday.

We have told the story of 40 area families in today's and last week's list of unfortunates who so suffer from poverty, loneliness and wretched housing that all joy of living is almost gone. We have pointedly solicited a Christmas remembrance for them — money, food, clothing, medical help, toys for their children.

We urge you to look over these family stories and move to help one of them this week. It could be like aiding the Holy Family in Bethlehem.

We also have printed today the second in a series of articles about the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation. This work of mercy — in tune with the homelessness of the Christ Child — needs more than seasonal encouragement. It has rehoused 26 families with some \$50,000 received from diocesan individuals and groups in the past three years. We hope that readers who care about the overcrowded, verminous and inhuman housing which Rochester's poor are forced into, after sending a Christmas check to the Housing Fund, will read our whole series and become concerned about housing for the poor in the entire diocese.

—Father Richard Tormey

Question School Subsidization

Editor:

Re Mr. Joseph A. Kelly's answer to my "protest against public subsidy of church-related schools." Mr. Kelly replied that "there is a long history of such subsidy in other countries."

I would ask: "What countries?" If they are the so-called Catholic countries like Italy, Spain, or Portugal, I would say that all their schools reflect the undeniable fact that the majority of the pupils in those schools are Catholic. Any change or increase in the non-

Catholic populations of those so-called Catholic countries would be so negligible that no taxpayer could expect any financial burdens.

Secondly, Mr. Kelly forgets that in almost all countries outside the U.S.A. most children terminate their education at 11 or 12 years of age. They face stiff tests which siphon off a small number into higher education and larger numbers into apprenticeships for trade or business. In other words there is no increase in numbers for those seeking higher education outside our blessed country. So the total amount of public moneys required would be small. In the U.S.A. pupils can fill our public high schools and

many colleges and universities at the expense of the taxpayers. There is no limit how long they may stay in such schools.

If all "church-related schools" ended their operations at Grade 6, I would not object as a taxpayer. Once the state generously supports such schools, who can say that it will include not only more elementary schools, but high schools, colleges and even universities without number? If the state must support "church-related schools", it can in no legal sense prevent the establishment of many more that as yet have no visible existence. It was the proliferation of such "church-related schools" and the inevitable financial support they will demand from the state that raised my protest. The matter as well as the manner of my protest had nothing to do with religion; I was just doing a favor for taxpayers yet unborn.

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The Word for Sunday

Growth Takes Time

By Father Albert Shamon



Holy Family Sunday is a dangerous Sunday, because it can easily lend itself to sentimentality and cliches. We can indulge in an orgy of jeremiads over the breakdown of the family, the soaring divorces, abortion, delinquency, and so on and on. However, it will be more helpful just to think about youth and parents.

Jesus was thoroughly a youth. Like all youths, and especially the modern songs of youth, Jesus's first recorded words were a question. "Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?" He sensed the obligation issuing from that relationship. If He was Son of the Father, He had to do what He did. There was no option to that imperious "had to!"

All through His life Jesus sensed this imperative. "I must preach the Kingdom of God." To Zacchaeus, "I must abide in your house." Again, "I must suffer these things." "The Son of Man must be lifted up." Because He was Son, He must do what He did. But what did Jesus actually do as a youth? He went down to Nazareth and for eighteen years sat at the feet of Mary and Joseph learning, growing in wisdom.

How impatient youth is! Youth pants to do good. And that is right. But youth must never be impatient. Growth takes time. You cannot make a tulip grow quicker by tugging at the stem. By tugging at the stem, you destroy it. If youth jumps the gun, drops out of school, marries too early, he courts failure. The prodigal became a prodigal because he left home too soon.

One cardinal principle of Marxism is to get students involved in politics, for students are idealists and inexperienced. Idealistic, they can be moved by slogans; inexperienced, they can be manipulated. Jesus upbraided Martha about being too, too busy; but He commended Mary for sitting at His feet as He Himself had once done, from twelve to thirty, at the feet of His mother Mary. Youth is so impatient to get into the heart of things. So was the Son of God. But He waited thirty years to teach youth that ten years of study and prayer are needed for each single year of activity.

To parents, Sunday's liturgy says, "Create an environment of love and security for youth." That is all youth really needs. They need love more than food. And love means to care for and to believe in. Joseph and Mary cared enough for

Jesus to see He got to Church when He was supposed to be at the age of twelve. They cared enough to see He got a good religious education: the teachers were amazed at His answers. And they believed in Him even when He caused them heartbreak, even when they did not understand Him.

Besides love, youth needs security: economic and moral. That was why Joseph worked as a carpenter. He provided a home for Jesus and Mary. That was why Mary was not a possessive mother. To grow in grace, youth needs freedom. In fact Joseph and Mary held the reins so loosely, Jesus got lost. Imagine!

I read in Dear Abby a prayer all parents might say — "A Parent's Prayer":

O heavenly Father, make me a better parent. Teach me to understand my children, to listen patiently to what they have to say, and to answer all their questions kindly. Forbid that I should ever laugh at their mistakes, or resort to shame or ridicule when they displease me.

Let me not tempt my child to lie or steal. And guide me hour by hour that I may demonstrate by all I say and do that honesty produces happiness.

Reduce, I pray, the meanness in me. And when I am out of sorts, help me, O Lord, to hold my tongue.

Let me not rob them of the opportunity to wait on themselves and to make decisions.

Bless me with the bigness to grant them all their reasonable requests, and the courage to deny them privileges I know will do them harm.

Make me fair and just and kind. And fit me, O Lord, to be loved and respected and imitated by my children. Amen.

Rhodes Scholars Also Serve

Editor:

In his column "God Bless America" (Courier-Journal 12/9/70) Father Shamon refers to "evil men," among others "those few, few Rhodes Scholar Senators who are always giving . . . encouragement to the avowed enemies of our country."

Sen. J. W. Fulbright is the only Rhodes Scholar in the United States Senate. He openly disagrees with the administration on United States involvement in Asia. This may in Father Shamon's opinion justify his being classed among "evil men" but, despite the innuendo, it is in no way related to his having attended, from 1925 to 1928, Oxford University as Rhodes Scholar from Arkansas or to his present membership in the American Association of Rhodes Scholars.

On the other hand, Father may be interested to learn, and persons who may have been misled by his reference to discover that there presently in one or the other of the four branches of the American armed forces 56 Rhodes Scholars. Moreover, many others fought and a number died in the various wars in which the United States has been involved since the scholarships were founded in 1904.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Courier-Journal invites reader comments in its Letters to the Editor section. To give everyone a chance to be heard some simple rules must be followed.

Letters must be signed by contributors. They should be no longer than one typewritten page and should be confined to one topic.

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