

Advent Is . . . Becoming

During a closing session of the recent Synod in Rome, a French bishop expressed his disappointment at the whole thrust of the Synod's statements. He thought that we should not continue to talk as if we really could uplift the condition of mankind or perfect the world. He felt that every Christian knows very well that an inevitable sinfulness of mankind will always stifle even the best laid plans for human progress.



There is much disillusionment in such an attitude. It could only have been said by someone who has tried hard to move men toward something better and has failed over and over again. To some extent we have all sensed the bishop's empty feeling. The tragedy occurs only when we succumb to the hopelessness which he expresses.

It is at moments like these when the temptation to despair of better days becomes strong, that we must remember that we are all co-workers of Jesus Christ Who did not say to the poor and disadvantaged: "I am sorry for you. But what you suffer is all part of the human condition this side of eternity."

Guest Columnist

In the old days — up to about 10 years ago — the solution to the problem of teaching religion to Catholic pupils in public schools was to turn over these children to "Father". "Father" was usually the assistant pastor.



So Father would go down the street to the public school at a certain time in the morning or in the afternoon and meet a whole group of children from the first to the eighth grade and then attempt to walk the children in an orderly fashion from the school to the Catholic church or church hall. The places provided for the classrooms were varied and always interesting. I have taught in boiler rooms, on the stage, in the corridor, in the sacristy.

One of the most interesting places I taught was in the old St. Mary's School of Nursing on Genesee Street in Rochester — since torn down. It was interesting because in order to reach the classrooms, we first went through the rooms where the student nurses prac-

You must await better days in a life to come." Rather, Christ reached out and touched. He made whole. He made clean. He forgave sins. And though the Gospels say that He too became discouraged at His inability to teach some men how to love, He never let this discouragement distract Him from His mission: to announce the good news that He had come to help man realize what God had planned for him at creation.

Many of us, I am sure, have let our own discouragement at never becoming better lead us to say, "What's the use of trying? We are hopelessly ourselves — incapable of becoming another and better self."

Advent offers us this grace of becoming what we are not now.

We are preparing to celebrate a Christmas that is present. Two thousand years ago God entered our history by assuming our nature as His own, and announced the beginning of a new age. "I have come that you may have life," He said, "and have it more abundantly." Mankind, now wedded to divinity, would never again be restricted by its old weaknesses. Its capabilities for becoming had been made as boundless as divine creativity.

We are now in the middle of this new age and we see that mankind has still a long way

to go before it perfects itself. Yet there is reason to celebrate. In some mysterious way, there is still an on-going Christmas. God is still becoming man — and He asks us to join Him in this process of becoming. He is calling us to become more fully human — to achieve our human potential through contact with Omnipotence.

This holy season should be for us a real attempt "to become." Merely "to be" is to be satisfied with what we are now; it is to be self-sufficient, not really in need of anyone or anything. It is to have limited horizons and to be turned in on oneself. Failure, hurt, and fear are the common causes of such a condition. But "to become" is to move out — to expand our horizons. It is to desire to grow and mature despite the knowledge that this may mean pain and suffering. "Becoming" is to reach out to others, to need, to give, and love. We who are afraid should take courage in the fact that Jesus travelled the painful road of 'becoming' before us.

Let this Advent mean for all of us the taking of a small step in the process of becoming more fully human. This is our only path to meet divinity. For it is in becoming more human that we share forever in the life of Him Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.

By Father John T. Gaynor

The New Look of CCD

Father Gaynor is pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Elmira Heights.

ticed making beds with the patient in bed. In place of patients, the students used dummies. As soon as our pupils spied the dummies, they snatched them out of the beds and went waltzing down the corridor with them.

We would attempt to teach all the children together, regardless of their age or year in school or their different interests or their different needs. We used this same wild technique with the high schoolers, lumping everyone from the 9th through the 12th years. The strange part of all this was that the parents were satisfied. Father was teaching and Father was an expert. Expert or not, Father couldn't accomplish much under these conditions and there was much frustration and very little learning.

Now we try to involve lay people in teaching religion to our children in the public schools. Most of these lay people are parents so they know many things about teaching little ones that Father doesn't know. Some of them are professional teachers who are willing to come back after a full day of teaching and use their talents in teaching religion.

We train these people, giving them courses in doctrine and methods. This is where the CCD coordinator comes in. The coordinator trains the teachers and supports them in their volunteer roles. This means that we have more teachers and thus we are able to break down the classes according to age groups, interests, abilities, and needs. This means too that the laity are taking their rightful place in the Church — not just serving on finance committees or advising on maintenance matters — but actually teaching and spreading the Gospel.

Many opportunities to do Christ's work are lost because of the complacent attitude of many parents. They feel that they have done their duty when they send their children off to be taught about their religion. Those who never think about religion, never read the Bible, never take part in parish activities are teaching their children that religion is not relevant in their life. If you take an active role in your religion — more than Mass on Sunday — you are teaching your child and other adults that your Faith has meaning for you and so must have meaning for them. An excellent way to fulfill your obligation to your fellow man is to take part in the parish religious education program.

Editorial

Christmas 1971: a Golden Opportunity

The Catholic Church has never been very good at public relations.

It has always been a mission church performing literally countless acts of charity. It has helped the poor, the infirm, the forgotten, the hopeless.

But because the Church has always disregarded self-promotion in this area it has fallen prey to unjust criticism. Not only do we hear the cynical charge that proselytization is behind all these good deeds but even that the Church really does not care for the downtrodden.

If any of this is to any extent true it reflects on us as individual Catholics. We are the Church and though this may not have been so clear in the past, such leaders as Bishop Joseph L. Hogan are crystallizing this fact. The prime present example is the formation of the Pastoral Council

to comprise laymen, priests and nuns which will be the top advisory body to the bishop.

There are other examples of the Church assuming its finest posture in the everyday world. The Office of Human Development, for example, helps people to help themselves through "bootstrap" programs which give worthwhile organizations a chance to make it on their own.

These and other programs give a boost to those able to carry on from there. But, needless to say, there are others so victimized by poverty, illness, mental anguish that they cannot help themselves.

The Catholic Family Center serves these people in many ways. To the best of the center's ability it helps them meet pressing payments, provides food and clothing, keeps their houses lighted and heated. At Christmas it does more; it pro-

vides love, care and attention as sheltering robes against the cold onslaught of impoverished isolation.

We all have heard ridicule of "hand-outs" but at Christmas the turkey dinner which many of us take for granted is a luxury to many. For the more destitute, it staves off hunger for a few days. That's difficult to knock. So are toys for kids who may otherwise get none while most homes are cluttered with them.

So the Courier-Journal is proud through its Christmas Fund to help the Catholic Family Center to provide the warmth of Christmas for society's "left-outs," and what is more important, the light of hope for their future.

We appeal on the Family Center's behalf for your assistance.