

# The Easter Theme — A Message of Hope

## PART I

Easter has removed all hopelessness from our life. "I cannot" has been erased forever from the Christian vocabulary. The only tomb that can enclose us is sealed with our own self-pity. I ask you to meditate with me for the next two weeks on what has been called "a dangerous theme" — hope.



Eighteen years ago (1954), as our contemporary world awoke from the atomic nightmare of World War II, the World Council of Churches met in Evanston, Illinois. It took little prophetic imagination for those leaders of the world's major religions to sense they were standing on the threshold of a new era. They chose as the theme of their discussions, "Christ — The Hope of the World," and gave approval when the President's opening remarks called this "a dangerous theme."

Since that eventful day in 1954, hope has been more than ever "a dangerous theme." It might almost be called "a subversive topic." Theology has since lived through a fad celebrating "the death of God," philosophy has been in search of "the meaning of nothingness," psychology has thrown into sharper focus "the dimensions of human frustration," and our current ecology crisis makes us wonder long and loud about the future.

Seven years ago, Juergen Moltmann, one of the leading European theologians, roused the theological world to a new level of awareness with his THEOLOGY of HOPE. His work is a warning not to neglect the in-between virtue, the one that tends to be crowded in by faith and by love. He was urging us to look to where the action is — and there is never any action without hope — the future.

Strangely enough, in that same year of 1965, the Beatles were monopolizing the

airwaves with their hit record, "Nowhere Man." Here's what they were saying to anyone willing to hear their wisdom set to rhythm:

He's a real nowhere man,  
Sitting in his nowhere land,  
Making all his nowhere plans for  
nobody.

Doesn't have a point of view,  
Knows not where he's going to.  
Isn't he a bit like you and me?

Nowhere man, please listen.  
You don't know what you're missin'.  
Nowhere man, the world is at your  
command.

Four Christmas Eve's ago, three American astronauts, on lunar mission, were hardly "nowhere men." They certainly knew what they were about. Whirling in space on lunar orbit, they read back to earth the first eleven verses of Genesis. One of our finest poets, Archibald MacLeish, memorialized the event by celebrating the 3-billion inhabitants of the planet Earth as "brothers together . . . in the eternal cold." He struck a wistful note of mankind living in solitariness, in hopeless anxiety, on borrowed time. And yet three men in outer space chose the theological affirmations of Gen. 1 to announce to our world a message of the renewal of hope, hope in man's creative technology, hope in the power of the Creator.

More than ever before in history, two realities disturb the heart of contemporary man: the complexities of human life and the remoteness of God.

One has only to scan the daily paper, or perhaps even look into his own heart, to determine that life is full of contradiction, frustration, indecision, perhaps even absurdity. The anxieties of our technological world are driving us to . . . narcotic escapism. Drugs, liquid or capsule, legal and otherwise, are creating a culture meant to fill in the evident gaps in human experience. On all sides we discover people suffering from real and imaginary evils, from remembered pain and anticipated agony.

And because our technology reflects more and more the ingenuity of man the creator, the Creator (with capital C) "in the beginning" becomes less and less transparent, in our work-a-day world. Caught up in the assembly line productionism, the consumerism craze, the computer magic of our times, contemporary man has little interest and less time for reflection on God. The fantastic powers of contemporary man and the impersonalism of our society have dulled our sensitivity to God both as Person and as Power. Little wonder that Harvey Cox chose as the two symbols of Technopolis, the cloverleaf of our highway systems and the complexities of the switchboard. Never has man moved so rapidly — all too often going nowhere. Never has man communicated so extensively — all too often saying little that matters much.

We must not think, however, that the solution to our problem lies in a flight to the simplicities of the past. How often the superficial Christian withdraws from the challenge of "In these days" for the false security of "In those days." In other words, no follower of Jesus Christ has the right to retreat to the past and the enjoyment of its imaginary "peace", if this is done at the expense of genuine faith in the present and honest hope in the future. In fact, I would put a genuine challenge before you: read the Gospels carefully and try to determine whether Jesus' basic thrust was toward the past, or whether he challenged people to look to the future. You know as well as I that he urged anyone who would hear him, that the future was what counted. If we can catch that sense of urgency about the future and its unfolding possibilities, we will have understood that the Christian calling is primarily one of "looking forward."

What I am trying to express here is this: we must resist the temptation to equate our Christian calling with a serenity and a security grounded on the past. To be a Christian means to know where one's rootedness lies, of course, but our major emphasis must be in responding to the challenge of the present and to strike out boldly in the direction of the future.

## Editorial

# No Devil? Don't Kid Yourself

Speaking of the devil these days may seem quaint. Surely there are many people who see him as merely mythological and others who feel that evil, and thus the devil, exists merely in an abstract form.

Of course he exists; not to believe in him would also deny the existence of angels. And it certainly fits in with his modus operandi to have certain people forget he is about.

However, on the other hand, there is a rising Satanic fad gaining impetus in the United States wherein people not only admit the existence of the devil but in many cases worship him.

Looking at a world which has become a panoply of devilish horrors it is difficult to attribute it all to chance evolution.

There are those, such as Father John Malley at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield who see the devil as a real and present danger. He has incorporated the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel into the Sunday liturgy. It is read right after the Prayers of the Faithful.

At the Gregorian University in Rome recently, the devil had his day as 35 seminary students gave a panel of newsmen a two-hour rundown on Church teaching on Satan and demons.

"We held our 'Devil Day,'" said Father John Navoni, an instructor in the theology of history, "in response to the great contemporary interest in satanism, the occult and the diabolical."

He said, according to Religious News Service, that too many Catholics and

other Christians shy away from discussing the devil because they are unsure of the teaching of their Church.

"But the Church is very clear about it all," he said, . . . "there is Satan and the demons, that is, the leading fallen angel and the other angels that fell with him. And any study of angels must include the devil because he was at first an angel."

As for his particular manner of calling attention to the danger, he noted the day was enough, "I think one day for the devil is enough at the Gregorian."

It is ironical that the Satanic cults springing up may accomplish something to cause the devil himself anguish. They may finally bring him into the consciousness of many who for too long have been convinced that he is nothing.