

The Easter Theme – A Message of Hope

PART II

We must resist the temptation to barter one Christian virtue for another, one Gospel value for another. We cannot choose



to have self-centered consolation at the expense of creative courage. We cannot stop to defend the past, if by so doing we cop out on building the future. We cannot plead Christian resignation at the expense of wronged justice. The point is: hope is not a fanciful indulgence of what can never be, but a strong commitment to what can be — and should be. Hope is

an investment of time and talent in making happen what, under God, should be happening. Hope is a fusion of faith in God and the freedom of man, so as to make our world, however big or small it be, an arena where we can correct our mistakes, undo our sinfulness, and opt for the fuller life.

To be hopeful is to face the infinity of possibilities that lie open before us, and to make the choices that, in our best moments, need to be made. Doesn't that sound something like "The Impossible Dream"? Well, that's precisely what the Christian mission is all about — One Man and his friends setting forth to teach the world to hope, because God cares. That's the "Good News." Anything else is "bad news."

In living our lives as Christians, we might learn a lesson from the truly great artists. As the creative genius goes about incarnating his concept, whether literary, musical or architectural, in three-dimensional expression, he is struck by a moment of terror. In these very terms Igor Stravinsky described the process of creating music. As he faces the unlimited options before him, the artist must encounter the urgency to express himself. He must realize the limitations of his actions against his splendid, inner experience. He must externalize that inner vision of beauty — he must make that moment of beauty a thing of permanent value. To achieve this, the true artist always surmounts that terror by hopefulness, and does not retreat from it in fear.

Do not think of hope as a surrender, but as a rising to the struggles of life. Hope is not an entry into a Walter Mitty world of fantasy. Rather it is the recognition of the hard realities of life, a willingness to work out meaning amid complexity, a yearning to bring the emerging possibilities of the present into the fullest value of the future.

To hope is not to solve the problem of evil, but to soften its impact. To hope is to harness the pressures of life and convert them into creative tensions. To hope is to be constructive about the world's wrongs for there is little virtue in the deluge of negative oratory that, like another Noah experience, tends to cover the face or our earth.

There is no set formula for Christian hope, no shortcuts to its abundant rewards. But here is a simple recipe:

a cup running over with genuine love for men;

a generous sprinkling of the presence of the Spirit,

and garnish with the peace that the world cannot give.

All three ingredients are necessary.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast (heart)," said the poet.

Hope, enforced by faith and love, transfigures the transitory nature of time into eternal significance. How eloquently Paul described the dynamics of hope when he wrote: "We may be a dull and tarnished mirror, even distorted and distorting sort of glass. Inasmuch as we behold the glory of the Lord, however, we also reflect it, and by reflecting it, we are being transfigured day by day, from glory to glory."

That's hope: to see our imperfect world transformed, charged with the grandeur of divinity.

Robert F. Kennedy, quoting George Bernard Shaw's famous saying, ended most of his political speeches with a precious insight into hope: "Some men see the things that are, and ask Why? I see the things that are not, and ask Why not? To do this . . . is to have a vibrant hope!"

Editorial

No Time for Hiding

There are those who say the Church should remain out of the public stream, that it should avoid getting its hands dirty in such pursuits as politics, that indeed to take part in the world is to become worldly.

They are wrong because, whether for the good or not, the words of the old cartoon apply, "Those days are gone forever." The Church must take public stands now, whether or not it wants.

For instance, the recent report of the Presidential Commission on Population Growth recommended abortion as one means of population control. We who live in New York State should have learned the folly of sitting by and letting others decide on such moral issues. We have been given more than 300,000 reasons in the form of aborted babies since the law was liberalized.

But the population commission report also affects the Church in more subtle ways. At a time when Catholics are strongly committed to ecumenism the

report has stirred up some interreligious antipathy.

Msgr. James T. McHugh of the U.S. Catholic Conference immediately attacked it as an "ideological valley of death." The U.S. Bishops urged "benign neglect" of the report.

Some days later a group of Protestant and Jewish leaders called for the President and national leaders to endorse the report. They expressed regret at the "immediate condemnation of the report by some on doctrinal grounds."

Now such rocks are to be expected on the road to religious unity. Even those most directly involved in ecumenical pursuits know this. However, here a governmental report has sparked some dissension among religions. To avoid taking part in government does not mean you will be safe from it.

As the Church cannot shun involvement in public affairs neither can it shrink from cooperation with other re-

ligions. To draw back may be comfortable but it would be unwise.

It is unfortunate that some religious leaders can accept abortion as a population control measure — even though the leaders mentioned here did not explicitly do so, they merely called for further consideration of the report. Still as long as there are serious moralists who do not find abortion repugnant, the role of the Catholic Church as a gentle persuader becomes more imperative.

If we sink into a self-righteous shell we will not be doing our Christian duty by our neighbor who disagrees with us. Christianity is an expansive body of thought, not a self-centered one.

If the Catholic Church possesses the truth about such issues as abortion then it must not keep it; it stands duty-bound to get it around by whatever moral means available.

Some may call this pragmatism. If it is, then let's make the most of it.