

Renewal: Hope That Looks to the Future

(Second in a series on "Basic Attitudes for a Year of Renewal.")

Over the past few years, the American church scene emerging from the news media has been less than "good news." One worried friend recently borrowed Thomas Hardy's unhelpful phrase to describe the situation.



The phrase-makers have blended reality and rhetoric: "sharp fall-off of church attendance patterns," "withdrawals from rectory and convents," "critical bankruptcy of moral leadership," and "widespread permissiveness in sexual behavior in the under-30 set." To which a recent report from

the National Opinion Research Center (Chicago) on Catholic attitudes and trends (America, 10/28/72) added: the defensiveness of the hierarchy, the "post-adolescent identity crisis" of clergy and religious, the decline in Sunday Mass attendance from 71 per cent to 55 per cent between 1963 and 1972, and a categorizing of the neo-Pentecostal movement as "emotional" and "appealing only to a minority."

The same report tagged these and similar trends as "shifts that the official Church neither recognizes nor appears to care very much about." A key statement saw the Catholic Church as destined to "blunder into the future with only the haziest notion about its present condition."

The year of Renewal is our basic strategy to head off that last prospective. If any one doubts the seriousness of our commitment to the programs planned or in progress, let him reconsider the multi-level efforts being expended in the various diocesan regions. These programs, specifically in liturgy, education and human development, represent weeks (and in some cases months) of painstaking organization and evaluation. Let me once again plead for cooperative effort at all levels: pastors, regional coordinators, religious, parish councils, parishioners young and old.

At the root of all our Renewal efforts lies a special gospel value: hope. If faith is primarily a heritage from the past and an attitude of present trust, hope is the future dimension of faith.

Too many of us see hope as a patient waiting collapsed into faith, an effortless acceptance of whatever God will provide. Such a stance tolerates comfort, security, a do-nothing satisfaction at odds with the vibrancy of Christian expectation.

To hope is to recover and embody a selfless concern for the common good — just as Moses sacrificed his personal comforts to become a prophet to his people. To hope is to work for social and structural Renewal, as did the prophets. Their efforts at reconciliation, their embodiment of the Word of God — these were genuine expressions of an abiding hope. Hope is some-

thing more than a blissful wishing. It is more in the nature of casting seed in the Spring with an expectant eye towards the harvest season — and in the harvest season, to be part of the ingathering.

Rightly understood, the Christian leads a life that has been invaded by a new, unknown and unpredictable future. Rather than care-taker of the past, the Christian is a steward of the future. The future that has surrounded us, that presses upon us, affords many specific ways in which the best interests of that future can be served and our stewardship proven worthy. The choice lies before us: to be a pilgrim setting out for a future hope, or a gravetender. If the reader wishes to grasp the urge of the future upon the Christian heart, he should read Paul's excellent description in Philippians 3: 10-16.

There are three basic vices: unbelief, despair and anger. And the worst of these is despair, for while the unbeliever and the angry man suffer a form of alienation, despair is an ultimate situation. One cannot go beyond it; it is the affirmation of non-being.

The full significance of hope is realized when we acknowledge that God is not above, or beneath us, or even just "within" us. God is ahead. More than ground of our being, he is the "pull of the future." He guides and protects us on the way from "already" to the "not yet." Christian existence is defined by hope, and the Church is the community of God's tomorrow, forever discontent with today.

The Slot Man

Everything's on the Record

By Carmen Viglucci

What probably ranks as the most intriguing and readable reference book extant is the Guinness Book of World Records which Lincoln Rochester is distributing to call attention to its name change to Lincoln First Bank of Rochester.



Among its 608 pages of "world records" are a couple devoted to popes and bishops. There one may learn that the last non-Italian pope was Adrian Dedel of the Netherlands who became Pope Adrian VI in 1522.

The slowest election of a pope occurred in 1271. According to Guinness, "After 31 months without declaring 'Habemus Papam,' the cardinals were subjected to a bread and water diet and the removal of the roof of their conclave by the mayor before electing Teobaldo Visconti the Archbishop of Rome as Pope Gregory X."

There are oodles of less important

achievements, for instance:

"The world's 'best best man' is Wally Grant a fishmonger, and a popular one at that, from Wakefield, Yorkshire, England, who became a best man for the 50th time in 1964. Wally is a bachelor.

Or how about the "world's greatest miser?" Reputedly it is Henrietta Howland Green who left an estate of \$95 million, including \$31 million in one bank. "She herself lived off cold oatmeal," according to Guinness "and died of apoplexy in an argument over the virtues of skimmed milk." It all happened circa the turn of the century.

It's not in Guinness, but the Fleischmann Commission Report's three volumes weigh in at 8½ pounds.

And the longest streak of rotten weather was recorded from late October through early November 1972 in Rochester, N.Y.

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Hear about the local high school teacher

who told the class that he (or she) knew the meaning of every word in the language and as a test told the pupils to bring in a word. If the teacher didn't know the meaning, the pupil would be excused from homework for the day.

One pupil brought in these five words—quidnuc, sybarite, garboil, coking, prolix (the reader is invited to take part in this test, definitions are below).

The teacher knew when she (he) was defeated so excused the whole class from homework for the day. I hear the dare still is open — except for the one smarty-pants.

Where did the pupil get the words? His father got them all from one book — "Tallulah."

Quidnunc — a gossip or busybody; sybarite, a person who likes luxury; garboil, confusion or uproar; coking, converting coal to coke, prolix, unduly wordy.

Okay for the teacher, how many did you get right?

Editorial

A Joyless End to Unpopular War?

"War no more; war never again!"

Pope Paul's famous words again were significant during the latest talk about the "imminence" of peace in Indochina. Whether or not peace, or at least a ceasefire, is really near there was a strange reaction on the part of the populace to the administration's announcement.

The seeming cessation of one of the most unpopular wars in history should have been greeted by celebrations at least outranking those in baseball cities when their teams win league championships.

But there was not even a hint of joyousness. It seems that this distasteful war is heading for an ignominious finish.

Why? There are some obvious rea-

sons. The announcement came in the midst of a presidential election and skeptics both in and out of politics questioned its timing. This attitude is symptomatic of a growing cynicism among Americans as to the operations of their government.

Then too the announced agreement was greeted as a "sellout" by those who see it as a concession to Hanoi in particular and communism in general.

Then, too, perhaps this old world has become too used to wars and their comings and goings that the ending of any particular one is only commonplace. What with other kindling spots as the Mideast and Latin America heating up just off-stage despair gains credence.

Despite all these things, when and

if this war does come to a halt there should be at least relief in the sign of hope that if this stubborn conflict can be resolved then perhaps others can be prevented. Such a happening, incredible as it may seem to a world used to conflict, could more easily be realized if the combatants in the Indochina War would announce that not only is the conflict over but they literally join hands and announce to the world that their war was useless, that 10 years of bloodshed were settled by a meeting of the minds and that in the future let the conference table be the entire battleground.

If such would come to pass then there is indeed hope for mankind and reason to celebrate. We would all be closer to realizing the Pope's fervent wish of "war no more."