

FR. HENRY ATWELL

Toward Tomorrow



Father Paul Cuddy called at the Avon rectory recently but I was at work in Rochester. He left a book for me to read, "The Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism." This gentle Jeremiad is the report of "a disillusioned liberal" who claims "the radical Catholics" dashed "the great hopes" of a decade ago to leave the Church in a shambles, its members "now totally alienated."

James Hitchcock, the book's author, proposes no remedy. He concludes with nothing better than a list of "twenty-six heretical notions characterizing radical Catholicism," including: "Religious beliefs have meaning insofar as they can be translated into wholly human terms; otherwise they are meaningless and distracting," which, Hitchcock says, is heretical.

I suppose we could haggle for hours about who is to blame for dashing "the great hopes" born a decade ago which have withered and died since then.

I must admit that I too had "great hopes" when ten years ago I sat in St. Peter's at the Vatican Council and listened to the discussions and the decisions about new liturgy, religious freedom, ecumenism, the role of lay people.

I had thought that a new liturgy in the language of the people would open the door to far more devout, far more beautiful, far more enthusiastic participation in the prayers and chants of the Mass.

Those "great hopes" obviously have not been realized to the extent I had dreamed of, but who really would want to go back to the drone of the rapidly recited Latin Mass, the priest "back to the People" making repeated and often hasty signs of the cross, and the law to fast from midnight for Communion?

I had thought that Father John Courtney Murray's masterful statement, adopted almost without change by the world's bishops, would open the door to a deep respect for the responsible freedom of all people to stand before God as He called them in their own individual conscience. Instead, so

many, rather than be free for God, have chosen to be free from him, and churchmen still too often resort to subtle pressures to limit freedom. Again "great hopes" have not been realized but who would want to go back to an era when faith was too often linked to threats, warnings and scoldings, as if God were some all-seeing spy in the sky to note and punish us for every infraction of churchmen's rules?

I had thought that the cluster of Orthodox and Protestant delegates close to the Pope at the Council were a promise that all Christians would soon be one, as the Lord prayed we should be. Perhaps this was the greatest of my "great hopes" but this too is still far from being attained. But who would want to go back to the pre-Council days when Christians eyed each other with suspicion if not with contempt, when Catholics were judged as sinners if they attended another church or even prayed a Protestant prayer?

I imagine there have been other eras of church history when "great hopes" were born but never quite attained.

Peter and John at the empty tomb on the first Easter must have had "great hopes" of victory and triumph, but how soon their hopes were dashed by the persecution which made them martyrs.

The bishops at the Church's first council at Nicaea must have had "great hopes" that they clarified the Christian faith with their creed, but how soon their hopes were dashed when almost each word of their creed became the stepping off point for another new heresy.

The architects and artists of Europe's great cathedrals must have had "great hopes" when these jewels of faith were dedicated but how soon these hopes were dashed when war and riots and revolution destroyed or desecrated them.

Yet through it all, hope didn't really die after all. Perhaps that is what Christianity is all about, it gives us hope to keep trying, and I'm glad it does and I still have "great hopes" for the future.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side



It's only 47 days to Christmas. Here are a few hints to keep Christmas holy, to prepare for the season's amenities of card and gift giving, and to save wear and tear on the nervous system.

Christmas Greetings: preferably religious, unless one sends a picture of the family, which is a form of Incarnationalism. When possible, a personal note is appreciated. But do not expect personal notes from people who are as much an institution as persons. For example, the President, bishops, managers of industries, heads of institutions and the like. Even if a card is not very personal it is nice to be remembered; but it would be bad if anyone should take offense because he didn't get a card. With cards from a dime to half a dollar plus stamps, Christmas greetings can become expensive. Many buy Christmas letter paper for a few cents each, and write a note or even mimeograph a message, adding a handwritten message.

Christmas Stamps: Do use the religious stamps exclusively. If the Post Office is out of them, refuse the secular season stamps and use regular stamps. This indicates to the P.O. a preference for next year too. (Boomerang. Last February a mother from St. Catherine's parish, Addison stopped me in the hospital lobby. "Father, I usually agree with your column, but I could not agree with you about using the religious Christmas stamps." I was stunned. "Good heavens, why not? They commemorate the birth of Our Lord!" She answered, "I simply couldn't endure having those beautiful religious pictures all marked up by that black post office ink." So, we don't all react the same.)

Return Addresses: Each year I am puzzled by people who do not put a return address. With people moving about so, and address books so easily lost, friends lose track of one another. An old Latin ditty reads:

"Amore, more, ore, re
Servanture amicitiae."

This means: "By love, by custom, by word, by deed, Friendships are preserved." The annual Christmas greeting keeps many a friendship alive.

Gifts: The cost of the gift is but a shadow next to the heart of the giver. One of the best, and easiest gifts is a good book, or a subscription to a magazine or a weekly paper. For example, I have twenty two nieces and nephews who have a total of around eighty children. I should never be able to buy gifts for all, so I sent The Catholic Digest and Our Sunday Visitor to each family. Most of them find the reading interesting, since it is geared to family reading. Some who teach CCD use material they find helpful. Also I subscribe to the Courier-Journal for several friends who have left the diocese. One wrote: "I look forward to it each week. It really is about our only contact with home excepting mail from the family."

Especially recommended: Catholic Digest, Our Sunday Visitor, Ligourian, Courier-Journal.

Spirit of Christmas: When "God gave His only Begotten Son to us," (John 1) He could not have given a greater Gift. In that spirit may we be sensitive to those who need to be remembered: the sick and aged; those in the Armed Forces; people in nursing homes, prisons, hospitals, rooming houses. The highlight of Christmas for us, of course, is our Christmas confession and Mass with Holy Communion. The bacon and eggs of Christmas morning will be tastier if we have made Christmas a memorable birthday. One of the nicest memories I have of Clyde was dropping into the church Christmas afternoon and finding a father with a couple of little youngsters at the Christmas crib; with the father describing the birth of Jesus to his children. Isn't that the spirit we all talk about?

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