

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Advent is a Coming is a Coming is a Coming

[The first of three essays]

A few years ago, I asked two friends a hard question: "What does Advent mean to you?" The first snapped back: "Nothing at all!" The second was less decisive: "Nothing much!"



I was frankly disappointed.

"Why?" asked the first.

"I expected more — much more!"

"Not really?" baited the second.

"Yes! In fact, I was anticipating something rather different."

Oddly enough, time has brought perspective to that conversation. Today I can see it as a "parable" of Advent itself. Our dialogue, abrupt, probing, peevish, disguised some of Advent's deepest meanings. Let me explain.

In its truest sense, Advent is "nothing" — and so it must ever be. As a no-thing Advent points forward to a something-to-be. As absence, Advent looks to a Presence. As emptiness, Advent looks to a fullness. As silence, Advent looks to a word. As solitude, Advent looks to a communion. In a word, Advent is "nothing much" — were it truly something important, self-contained, it would forfeit its very identity.

From a different viewpoint, anticipation is the "price" one pays for the joy or realization. Promise is the prelude to the gift. Translated into biblical terms, the spoken word of the Lord in the Old Testament

becomes the fore-Word — the "Great Expectations" of a faith-community, waiting, listening, longing. Little wonder, Israel's faith so often took the shape of an ongoing, agonizing cry of "Come!" And God's covenant-love took on a mysterious affirmation: "I will!"

But Advent-faith does not end when, in Christian belief, the spoken promise of God becomes the living Presence of the Lord. The coming of Jesus onto the stage of human history re-focuses the original Advent into a prelude for yet another Advent — the second coming of Jesus at the end of the ages as Lord of glory.

Thus, from a biblical standpoint, three events mark God's intervention into history. "In the beginning, God said . . ." (Gn 1:2) and that creative word gave birth to a life, human life, that imaged forth the Life that is God. And history began. "In the fullness of time . . . the Word became flesh." (Jn 1:14; Ga 4:4) and the first Advent in history came to a close. Finally, in the end, the Lord Jesus will return — the Lamb who will break the seventh seal (Ap 8:1) — and God's plan for our world and His judgment upon our history will be revealed in their fullness. This will mark the second Advent in history.

But there remains yet a third Advent, this one having personal dimensions. This "Other Advent" occurs wherever and whenever the hollowness of a human heart is filled with the life-giving breath of the Spirit. This occurs under the work of divine grace. A seeking God transforms a searching faith — and a dialogue of love begins, as the mystery of a divine birth is once again renewed.

Some practical reminders may be in order. Let us not make too much of Advent, by destroying its identity as a season of patient waiting, longing, yearning. Our technological age has blinded us to the

blessings of creative waiting. Perhaps the current energy crisis will teach us to be more willful and less whimsical, more resolute and less impulsive, more thoughtful and less reckless. And creative waiting is the twin sister of reflection, a value we all desperately need.

Advent this year should also re-introduce us to the mystery of time. The present moment is not a cancellation of our past, but, in God's plan, each now is meant to redeem the limitations of the past. As creatures caught up in the gravitational pull of time, we need to keep looking to, not just more segments of time, but to a Sacred Future. This is that moment when, beyond piling up fragments of existence, we are able to savor God's nearness, His plan for us, His presence to us. This is not only for us a true coming, it is a true becoming.

Finally, Advent 1973 might remind us that God's kingdom is not a reality beyond time and space, or even that it is the sum-total of an historical process. The reign of God in men's hearts and at the heart of human history will be guaranteed only when we are ready to commit ourselves to God as Ultimate Concern, Fullness of Life and Lord of History. And each of those ways of looking at God is interwoven into the very pattern of Advent: a sacred season which points beyond every human horizon.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!" And the first Advent was ended.

"The Word is exalted in glory and will return among us!" This is the second Advent yet-to-come.

"The Word transfigures hearts and Christmas is forever!" This is the third Advent, the Advent of everyday people, any day of the year, any hour of the clock!

What will this Advent mean to you?

vatican news

Patriarchal Status Still the Major Issue

Ukrainian Catholics Hear Papal Address

Vatican City [RNS] — Amid "rumors" of "disloyalty" and "even of schism" within the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Pope Paul called on members of the Ukrainian Rite hierarchy assembled here to maintain a "working union" between the Ukrainian and Roman Catholic Churches.

Speaking on the 350th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Josaphat Kunsevyn who died upholding the union between the two Catholic Rites, the pontiff expressed "deep affection" for the world's Ukrainian Catholic communities in an address to Cardinal Joseph Slipyi, Ukrainian Rite Major Archbishop, and 11 other Ukrainian prelates.

"Day by day we share the anxieties and problems of your faithful," Vatican Radio quoted the Pope as saying. "We have a continuous interest in the Ukrainians who have emigrated as well as for those who stayed in their country . . . knowing how faithful they have remained to the same cause for which St. Josaphat gave his life."

would represent a retreat on the part of Ukrainian Catholics in their struggle for papal recognition of patriarchal status for their Church.

"No question exists in the mind of the Ukrainian hierarchy or faithful that their Church is already constituted a patriarchate," she added.

the anniversary of St. Josaphat, Miss Piddubcheshen said in Rome that the letter was "curiously addressed to Cardinal Paul Philippe, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches, rather than to the Ukrainian primate (Cardinal Slipyi) and his hierarchy."

She said it was viewed by some Ukrainian Catholics as an indirect way of snubbing Cardinal Slipyi.

Vatican Denies Reports It Will Abolish Rota

Vatican City [RNS] — Vatican press officer Federico Alessandrini has denied that Pope Paul intends to abolish the Sacred Roman Rota.

constitutionality of the nation's 1970 divorce law.

The implication of this news emphasis — implicitly denied by Alessandrini — was that the Catholic Church, feeling threatened by the existence of legal divorce in Italy, was taking measures to streamline the procedure of marriage annulment, the only dissolution of marriage recognized by the Church.

The Vatican has consistently charged that the 1970 divorce law is unconstitutional, because it allegedly conflicts with the 1929 Lateran Concordat which gives Catholic marriages the force of law in Italy.

In 1971, the Constitutional Court upheld, by a majority of one vote, the constitutionality of that law.

In June 1972, however, Italy's Supreme Court reached a different decision, and referred the matter back to the Constitutional Court.

Vatican Radio said that Cardinal Slipyi, during the audience with Pope Paul, "renewed his pledge of filial love, faith and loyalty to the Pope," but also stressed the need to "defend the Catholic Church in the (Soviet) Ukraine."

Earlier, a spokesman for a 400-member delegation of Ukrainian Catholics — known as the Society for a Patriarchal System in the Ukrainian Catholic Church — noted that the presence of the Ukrainian Catholic hierarchy, led by Cardinal Slipyi,

Eva Piddubcheshen of New York, a member of the society, pointed out that the fourth synod held in 1969 solemnly proclaimed patriarchal status for the Ukrainian church and named Cardinal Slipyi to be the first patriarch. These decisions were submitted to the Vatican but have not yet been approved.

Stating that "rumors have been rife since the announcement of the . . . Synod that there is talk of disloyalty and even of schism within the Ukrainian Catholic Church," she declared that "any talk of schism within the Ukrainian Catholic Church," she declared that "any talk of schism

Italian Radio said that Cardinal Slipyi and the Ukrainian prelates came to Rome for their six-day synod in "defiance" of the Vatican's refusal to allow them to draw up their own constitution and to regulate their Church's internal affairs, as other Eastern Rite Churches in union with Rome are allowed to do.

Some broadcasts reported that Ukrainian prelates have told newsmen that the Vatican refuses to grant autonomy to the Ukrainian Rite so as not to upset relations with the Soviet Union. Some years ago Moscow announced that the Ukrainian Rite Catholic Church had ceased to exist and had been incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church.

Although the Ukrainian Rite is the largest of the Catholic Church's Eastern Rites, its affairs are governed by the Vatican Congregation for Eastern Churches. Despite continuing protests and agitation by Ukrainians, the Vatican has thus far denied the Ukrainian Rite a patriarchal status on the grounds that it has no territorial basis.

Commenting on a recent letter by Pope Paul, commemorating

"Speaking of that same letter during his meeting with the Ukrainian prelates, Pope Paul stated that "our letter was directed to all the universal Church but our thoughts were of the Eastern communities and first among them yours which has special and unique rights to commemorate St. Josaphat."

Speaking of St. Josaphat, who was killed by a mob at Vitebsk in 1623 for upholding the Ukrainian Church's union with Rome in 1595, the Pope described him as "the sublime model of total dedication to souls and to the truth."

"Here, dearest brothers, is the example that in these circumstances reaches us from St. Josaphat. It teaches us about religious life and spiritual vigor, strength in faith, and a working union — a union of bishops and of the Ukrainian faithful with the Roman pontiff," he said.

DEADLINE

The deadline for submitting notices to the Courier-Journal of parish events is the Thursday noon preceding publication.