

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

A Compassionate Jesus — He Never 'Had It Made.'

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

It is a common temptation for all of us to reject words of wisdom which disturb our conscience by saying in self-defense that the speaker or writer is operating in isolation from reality — that he doesn't understand our problems. "If he only knew what we had to endure," we say, "he would alter his ivory-tower philosophy of life."

Many of us have been shocked by recent portrayals of Jesus Christ which have depicted Him as so utterly human. Though the same faith assures us that He is true God and true man, we have instinctively put greater stress on the first part of our Credo. We are tempted to say, as the adolescent responded to the high school teacher of religion who was trying to teach the humanness of Christ, "Aw, Jesus was never really like us. He had it made. He always knew He'd win out. Who else had life that easy?"

St. Paul gave the answer to this objection — and surely he was at a greater vantage point for refutation:

"Since He was Himself tested through what He suffered, He is able to help those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:18) "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are." (Hebrews 4:15)

"Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8)

The temptations of Jesus presented to us in a Gospel of early Lenten reflection assure us that Jesus was subjected to the pains of growth which are the common human experience. The devil suggests that Jesus use His power as "Son of God" to do the bidding of His people to give them the bread they thought they wanted, rather than the bread that Jesus knew they needed. At this point, He was tempted to be the wonder-worker to provide the physical food that a hungry people obviously needed. He could have settled by acceding to their request rather than by offering a promise of eternal life.

The second temptation was to perform the spectacular — and all would take notice. This was the temptation to bypass the human — to say, "Who needs fishermen and tax collectors as props in the drama of My spectacular epiphany?" But He replied, saying that His preference was to be like Jonah, emerging from the depths of obscurity to be belched forth after submergence in a sea of trials.

The third temptation offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would only worship Satan. Jesus' answer indicates the nature of the temptation. Once He removed His attention from the glory and praise of His Father, much could be easily justified as service to His mission.

It was the Spirit that led Him into the desert to be tempted — to see the subtle perversions of His person and ministry that would be suggested to Him during His life. He was free to succumb to them or to resist them; otherwise, our redemption has been won at the price of coercion. The fact that He did not compromise His person nor pervert His mission gives us reason to praise Him.

Recent dramatizations of the life of Christ shocked many people because they depicted Jesus as so utterly human. (Jesus Christ Super-Star and Godspell.) Without analyzing the merits of these productions, they did handle Jesus' humanity more correctly than some overly pious religious books which place Him on a pedestal far-removed from the reality of the struggles of our lives.

The Gospels indicate that Jesus' youth was normal — that He progressed steadily "in wisdom and age and grace before God and men." (Luke 2:52) In His public life He is described as professing ignorance at times, and as seeking information. (Mark 5:30; 13:32) He found the need for prayer to discern His Father's will and regularly sought seclusion from the distractions of life. And it was the natural human reaction to the Cross that forced Him to cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The same faith that teaches us that Jesus was truly God, also assures us that He was but one person and that full manhood is integrated with divinity in Him. To believe in the incarnation means to believe that the Son of God actually became one of us except in sin, that is, in saying, "No" to His Father's will. He saved us, not only by His death and Resurrection, but also by confronting human life moment by moment, weathering small and great crises that arose from one day to the next. He was tempted. He experienced disappointment, frustration, and real loneliness.

Lent is a good time to remind ourselves of the nearness of the Lord to our needs and our trials. He can say, "I have compassion on the multitudes" because He has literally suffered with us.

Fellow Bishops Support Basque

Madrid [RNS] — The Permanent Commission of the Spanish Bishops' Conference — headed by Cardinal Vincente Enrique y Tarazona of Madrid — has given its full backing to Bishop Antonio Anoveros Ataun of Bilbao in his dispute with the Madrid government.

The government has accused the bishop of undermining national unity by authorizing a sermon calling for greater freedom for Spain's Basques to preserve their cultural identity.

Following an all-day emergency session of the episcopal standing committee March 8, the bishops issued a statement affirming their "fraternal and cordial communion with the Bishop of Bilbao" and proclaiming the right of any bishop "to the free and full exercise of his spiritual power and of his jurisdiction," as well as the right "to project the light of Christian principles on a concrete temporal problem which concerns the Catholics of his own diocese."

Members of the commission include Cardinal Narciso Jubany Arnao of Barcelona and Archbishop Marcelo Gonzalez Martin of Toledo, the Roman Catholic Primate of Spain.

Offering a virtual challenge to the government, the bishops emphasized that it was "the competence of the Holy See to judge with authority the pastoral actions of the bishops."

If civil power believes it finds in any concrete action a violation of juridical order, they said, "it is up to it to bring action, using concordatory channels."

Under the Spain-Vatican Concordat of 1953, bishops can be brought to trial by civil



BISHOP ATAUIN

authorities only with the authorization of the Holy See. The government threatened to abrogate the church-state agreement, following its unsuccessful attempts to force the ouster of Bishop Anoveros.

The Basque prelate, who had been under virtual house arrest at his residence in Bilbao in the wake of the reading of his sermon Masses throughout the Province of Vizcaya on Feb. 24, was allowed to come to Madrid for meetings with Church authorities, including Archbishop Luigi Dadaglio, the papal nuncio.

He attended part of the emergency session of the bishops' Permanent Commission, making a formal report on the Feb. 24 sermon, which was entitled, "Christianity — Message of Salvation for Peoples."

The commission's statement summarized the bishop's report. It said the bishop referred critically to "some interpretations

of the homily," a reference to a government note that accused him of attacking national unity and sowing civil discord.

Bishop Anoveros said that such charges were "especially painful and unacceptable" to someone who had demonstrated throughout his career his "constant love of Spain and respect and loyalty to national unity."

The commission's statement concluded that Bishop Anoveros' homily had "no political intent," and was aimed only at "illuminating in a Christian manner the consciences of Catholics on a theme, which, in the opinion of Bishop Anoveros, required pastoral guidance."

The case of the Bilbao bishop, involving the long-standing grievances of the Basque ethnic minority in northern Spain, has been getting wide attention, and he has received wide support throughout the country.

Pontiff Hails Pius XII As Vatican II Forerunner

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul paid warm tribute to Pope Pius XII when he addressed a crowd in St. Peter's Square for his customary Sunday blessing on March 10.

It was Paul's first public appearance after suffering a recent attack of influenza. He spoke from a window in the Apostolic Palace overlooking the square.

Noting that March 12 marked the 35th anniversary of the coronation of Pope Pius XII, "our venerated predecessor," Pope Paul recalled the fact that he had served in the Vatican Secretariat of State under Pius.

"For many years," said Paul, "we were at his direct and daily service and could enjoy his authoritative, but at the same time, very simple and paternal conversation."

Paul said his predecessor was a man of wide-ranging interests. "He was always studious and open to modern ways of research and culture, always strong and coherent in his fidelity both to the principles of human

rationality and to the deposit of the truths of Faith."

"Indeed," Paul affirmed, "it is under this aspect that we still consider Pius XII as a forerunner of the Second Vatican Council."

"Finally," said Paul, "we must remember Pius XII as a strong and loving man in his defense of justice and peace, in his concern for every human misfortune — especially during the period of World War II."

Pope Pius XII, Paul emphasized, never consciously failed to intervene any time "the supreme values of the life and dignity of man were in danger."

"In fact, he always dared, in concrete and difficult circumstances, to do as much as was in his power to prevent any inhuman and unjust gesture."

Pope Paul's last remarks were seen as alluding to controversy over the wartime role of Pius XII, stemming from charges that he did not speak out against Nazi persecution of Jews and other atrocities.

'Healing' Focus Of Chrism Mass

Regional coordinators, the three bishops and the director of pastoral ministry will celebrate this year's Mass of Chrism and blessing of the holy oils, slated for Tuesday, April 9, at St. Stephen's Church, Geneva.

To develop the theme of this year's celebration, which is the varieties of healing ministry, the regional coordinators have been asked to make people in each region aware of one area of concern, according to Sister Margaret Mary Mattie of the diocesan liturgy office.

The liturgy office has been working with parishes, demonstrating ways they may develop the idea of Respect Life, a theme carried over from last year's Family Life and Human Development campaigns.

Sister said each region would contribute a banner bearing words suggesting the different healing ministries.

Also present at the ceremonies will be representatives of various service organizations.