

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Who Needs Reconciliation?

In the year 57 A.D., St. Paul issued an urgent message to the Christians of Corinth. It was a trumpet call to reconciliation: "If



anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come! All this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

On May 9, 1973, Pope Paul proclaimed a Holy Year for 1974 and 1975. For its inspiration, it reaches back to the Jubilee year as prescribed by God in the Book of Leviticus when the land rested, property was restored and slaves were freed. The proclamation of Pope Paul had the same urgency and the same message as did that of St. Paul — reconciliation is frightfully needed now!

To reconcile is to reunite, to bring back to harmony. It implies that division has taken place, separation, rupture. If there is any word that sums up the 70's it is disunity — confronting us on four levels: **between man and nature; within man himself; between man and man; between man and God** (the basic rupture).

This is the first in a series of articles on **A Theology of Reconciliation**. The theme was suggested by a recent publication of the **United States Catholic Conference** written by the distinguished American theologian, **Father Walter J. Burghardt, SJ**. This column for the next five weeks will be a summary of his sensitive insights on the meaning of reconciliation.

These four levels of disunity will be given special analysis in this series of articles.

The first rupture between man and nature has come to a focus today in ecology. The land we have plowed and plundered, the chemicals that feed our life and heal us, the air we breathe and the ground we walk, the very wealth of our world threatens to strangle us. It has become more and more difficult to discover God in His creation, difficult to touch Him in the works of His hands which He fashioned to reflect His beauty and goodness.

This disunity between man and nature is a symbol and an effect of the disunity that exists within man himself. St. Paul spoke of this internal warfare to the Christians of Rome: "My own actions bewilder me. What I do is not what I want to do; I do the very thing I hate . . . it is not the good my will prefers, but the evil my will disapproves, that I find myself doing. In my inmost self I delight in God's law; but I see in my lower self another law at war with the law of my conscience, enslaving me to the law of sin which my lower self contains." (Rom. 7:15-23) Have you ever found yourself like two persons — confused and confounded, tor-

mented and distracted, unglued and unhinged?

And this internal-disunity is a symbol and a cause of the disunity that prevails between man and man. Half of the human race is at war with the other half. It is more than a war between nations. It is the cold war that rages between those who have and those who have not, between the powerful and the powerless, between employer and employee, between white and black, atheist and believer, Protestant and Catholic, between a man and the woman who is one flesh with him. A terrifying feature of our times, from the human ashes in Dachau through the living corpses in Calcutta to the whispered words of hate everywhere, is "Man's inhumanity to man." Like the pagans of St. Paul's day, men and women whose law of life should be love have turned "ruthless, faithless, pitiless." (Rom. 1:31)

And then there is the most basic disunity of all — the rupture between man and God, which is the cause of all other disunities. There are literally millions of men and women who say in their hearts, "There is no God." There are millions more who say in their hearts, "There is a God," yet exile Him effectively from their everyday living. And there are the uncounted millions whose experience of God is an experience of absence; God does not seem to be near.

A theology of reconciliation has to reflect on these four critical ruptures that have their ultimate origin in our sinfulness, and their ultimate reconciliation in God's grace. Indeed, the Holy Year is a personal summons to painful and prayerful self-analysis.

vatican news

Church Once Ex-communicated Dictator

Pontiff Offers Mass for Juan Peron

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul's celebration of a Mass at the Vatican for the repose of the soul of President Juan D. Peron and for "the well being of Argentina" has called to mind the see-saw relations over the years, between the Catholic Church and the controversial political leader.

The 78-year-old chief of state died July 1, after a serious bout of infectious bronchitis with cardiac complications.

General Peron, who had returned in triumph to Argentina in June 1973, after 18 years of exile, was elected President in a free election landslide in September.

He had earlier served as President from 1946 until his ouster by the military in 1955, after he had alienated the Catholic Church, as well as the military, the middle classes, and the intellectuals.

During the first term (1946 to 1951), with the help of his second wife, Eva Duarte, he brought into the political and economic life of the country the "descamisados," the shirtless ones of the working class. Even before becoming President, while Minister of Labor, he hiked wages, expanded social security, built workers housing and reformed the General Confederation of Labor into a powerful instrument.

At the outset, General Peron, a Roman Catholic, made Catholic religious instruction mandatory in the national schools and was on such excellent terms with the Church hierarchy that Pope Pius XII awarded him, in 1947, the Grand Cross of the Order of Pope Pius IX for "outstanding services for the Church and society."

Despite his progressive reforms, General Peron began to stir up strong opposition because of alleged corruption of government officials around him, the widespread use of arbitrary detentions that brought charges of torture, and fear that his "extravagant" economic programs would bring the country to bankruptcy.

Opposition mounted as General Peron entered his second term of office in 1951. Chief among the groups to voice discontent was the Catholic Church hierarchy, which disapproved of legislation legalizing divorce and prostitution, and providing close regulation of Catholic education.

These acts turned against Peron large sections of the population which was predominantly Catholic.

A few months before his downfall he fell under a ban of excommunication for his part in the arrest and deportation of the Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires and the Vicar General of the archdiocese.

By all accounts, the military coup that deposed General Peron in 1955 was supported strongly by the Catholic Church, as well as by the numerically important university students. The students had rebelled against attempts to incorporate the autonomous universities into the Peronist movement.

In 1963, the exiled leader's associates in Madrid (where Mr. Peron had been living since 1960), announced that Mr. Peron had addressed a letter to Pope John XXIII in which he stated he was a "repentant and faithful" member



Peron's Wife Calls on Pontiff

Pope Paul VI greets Madame Isabel Peron, Argentina's first woman president, during a private audience at the Vatican earlier this year. The meeting between the pontiff and the widow of Argentina's President Juan Peron lasted 40 minutes. [RNS]

of the Church, and wished a "reconciliation."

The informants said the "necessary steps" were taken by the Papal Nuncio to Spain, and that Mr. Peron had received the Sacrament of Penance and had been absolved and brought back into communion with the Church.

In November 1972, during a stop-over in Rome en route for a brief visit to Argentina, Mr. Peron

was rebuffed in an attempt to have an audience with Pope Paul.

Instead, a top papal aide, Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, met with Mr. Peron in the latter's downtown hotel suite, and explained that a private audience with the Pope at that time might easily be misinterpreted as political endorsement of Mr. Peron and unwarranted interference in Argentinian affairs.

Last October, a month after Peron's election as President,

Argentina's Catholic bishops, in a strongly-worded pastoral letter, again — as they had in 1951-2 — warned against a possibility of government-sponsored divorce laws being introduced in the country.

The pastoral said that any efforts to "bring about disintegration of the family" would be gravely harmful at a time when the government was embarked on a program of "national reunification and integration."