

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Between God and Man

A THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION
PART II

A theology of reconciliation must first address itself to our own sinfulness — the rupture of our relationship with God. All other conflicts and disunity stem from this source.



Sin has become, for some time now, an uncomfortable word in contemporary society. But it is interesting to find that some prominent people are beginning to remind us of its reality — and they are writing without embarrassment or apology. I refer especially to two works I have recently read. One comes from the pen of the well-known psychiatrist, Karl Menninger. It is a heavy volume entitled: "Whatever Became of Sin?" (New York: Hawthorne, 1973). He is not afraid to speak of sin and does not hesitate to quote the First Epistle of St. John (1:8) "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The other work is simply entitled "SIN" and was written by the American Biblical Scholar, Father Eugene Maly (Dayton: Pflaum, 1973). "To accept sin," he writes, "man must believe in sin, since faith alone can accept the kind of God against whom man can sin. Outside the context of faith, sin has no meaning."

In the Old Testament, sin was seen as a rebellion — a willing, deliberate and conscious resistance to the Will of God. For Israel, sin meant to play the harlot, to break a Covenant, to offend against a personal God.

The New Testament builds on the Old and Luke, Paul and John provide valuable insights. St. Luke's parable of the prodigal son is a vivid reminder of what sin really is — to break a bond, to destroy a relationship, to withdraw myself from God, my Father, and from His love.

St. Paul tells us of a sin that is almost a personal force. It entered the world through one man's rebellion. It is more than a single act: it is an evil force that tyrannizes every man born into this world.

For St. John, sin is a separation from God. It implies that a sinner is enslaved to the devil, that he dwells in darkness, that he is spiritually dead. Sin, for John, has this frightful facet: I hate God.

These biblical concepts of sin theologians are trying to recapture and deepen. These aspects of sin can be most fruitful for our self-analysis:

1. Sin is not merely an individual act which introduces moral disorder into the world. A sinful act is less important for the disorder it creates than for what it says about me as a person. Our acts express, give the shape of, **Who I am, Whom I love.**
2. While some of my actions where I am not so much a master of my freedom, do not engage me as a whole person, there are others where I completely commit myself. I am aware of God's invitation to Communion with Him. I sense that what I say or do here is crucially important. I am remarkably free — and I say **NO.**
3. Such sin stems from what the Gospel of John calls "the sin of the world" John

1:29, the virus of evil that entered the world (Paul says) "through one man" Rom. 5:12, that dynamically unfolds itself and tightens its grip on humanity and on the world in an escalating fashion down the ages of history.

Reconciliation calls for a personal conversion until I can give to God a total yes that is expressive of **myself.** And this reconciliation comes through Christ. It all began in Bethlehem where God's Son became what we are that we might become what He is. In Bethlehem forgiveness was born, a new Covenant. The tyranny of sin was leveled on Calvary and the victory of the Risen Christ gives us a new Covenant with God and makes it possible to rise again from the death of our sinfulness.

For most of us, the assault against God is not direct. Few of us curse Him with utmost seriousness. Most Christians are turned radically to Christ in mind and will — but we are dreadfully weak in living the logic of that conversion. We may not be sinners because our faces are set towards Christ — but we are sinful because so many of the actions that should express who we are, committed lovers of Christ, give the lie to that expression. So much in our lives is superficial — never committing us as a total person.

I believe our best reflection for the Holy Year would be to look less at our individual sins and look more at the person these sinful acts express; look less at our endless Acts of Contrition and more at the kind of person our remorse reflects. While total alienation from God may be rare among us, there is an ominous peril that overhangs most of us whose faces may be Godward but whose hands and hearts are earth-bound.

vatican news

Pontiff and Kissinger Confer on World Peace

Vatican City [RNS] — Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met here with Pope Paul for a 70-minute audience on July 6.

Kissinger briefed the pontiff on the recent American-Soviet

summit talks in Moscow and discussed Middle East problems with him. The future status of Jerusalem and proposals for a Palestinian state were among the topics discussed, Vatican sources indicated.

Vatican press officer Federico Alessandrini described the audience as "open and cordial."

He said the U.S. official had "amply reported to the Holy Father on the major problems concerning world peace, with special reference to the talks that have taken place between the United States President and the Soviet leaders during the last few days."

Alessandrini said the Pope, in his talk with Kissinger, had "stated some views of the Holy See and encouraged the United States government to persist in its commitment to peace despite its numerous and grave difficulties."

The Vatican spokesman added that the Pope had expressed "his particular appreciation of the United States initiatives and of the efforts that Mr. Kissinger personally is expending for the sake of peace."

President Nixon's personal envoy to Pope Paul, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, was present during the audience. Also present was Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, the pontiff's chief foreign affairs aide.

An American official said that, regarding the Middle East and the future status of Jerusalem, "the Pope certainly did not request the United States to 'do anything' specifically."

It was understood, however, that Pope Paul reiterated "the view of the Holy See" that Jerusalem represented supreme values for the three great monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — and that any future deter-



Pope Paul and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger are shown as they completed private talks in the pontiff's chambers at the Vatican on July 6. Their discussion, which reportedly centered on the Middle East and the Holy Land, lasted over an hour. In the background is President Nixon's personal envoy to the Vatican, Henry Cabot Lodge. [RNS]

minations of its status should take this into consideration.

At the conclusion of the audience, the Pope gave Kissinger a set of medals commemorating the papal visit to the United

Nations headquarters in New York City in 1965, an autographed copy of his World Peace Day message of last Jan. 1, and an autographed souvenir volume on his journey to the Holy Land in 1964.

COURSES COMPLETED

Hammondsport — Sister Alice McLaughlin, SSJ and Sister Mary Kruckow, RSM have completed the courses of The Elementary Formation Program offered by the Office of Human Develop-

ment for parishes beginning human development committees. The classes were held at St. Gabriel Rectory.

Mrs. Marion Schirmer was chosen as chairperson of the committee.

Vatican, Poland Will Establish Working Contact

Vatican City [RNS] — Communist Poland and the Vatican have agreed to set up "permanent" working contacts to "normalize" church-state relations.

The agreement was reached after two days of talks on July 4 and 5 between Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Josef Czyrek and Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, Pope Paul's top foreign affairs aide.

Both sides expressed their conviction that "permanent working contacts" would produce "useful exchanges of views" and contribute towards "normalization of relations between church and state" in Poland and "collaboration in favor of detente and pacific cooperation in the world."

The Rome talks were the latest in a series of Warsaw-Vatican contacts since 1970. Last February Archbishop Casaroli traveled to Warsaw for meetings with Foreign Minister Stefan

Olszowski and other Polish officials.

Mr. Olszowski met with Pope Paul last November at the Vatican. He was the first official Polish representative received by a Pope since Communists came to power in Poland.

In June, Polish Roman Catholic Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński criticized what he said were the prevailing pressures from Polish authorities to persuade workers to do "voluntary" work on Sundays and Holy Days.

Recalling the "divine precept" that Sundays "should be sanctified in rest and worship," the cardinal called on all Catholics in Poland "to show courage and strength in defending their rights as Christian citizens."

In the same month Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Cracow, also questioned the right of the regime to demand extra Sunday work from workers and urged Polish authorities to halt "atheist" education of young people.