

PLO... No Easy Answers

By JOHN DASH

Last week's presentation by Yasir Arafat that a Palestinian state be established, whose citizens would be Moslems, Christians and Jews, has placed the American Catholic on the alert to the divergent policies of the United States and the Vatican.

Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, addressed the United Nations on his dream of "one democratic state where Christian, Jew and Moslem live in justice, equality and fraternity."

The political and moral issues of that dream were spelled out a day later by Father Henry Atwell, executive secretary of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, pastor of St. Agnes Church in Avon, and Courier-Journal columnist.

Father Atwell, who with the help of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) has seen first hand the condition of the Palestinian refugee, said in an interview that "American Catholics are posed with the paradox. America supports Israel, and the Vatican has not recognized Israel and is more or less pro-Arab."

To give an example of the Vatican's stance on the troubled Mideast situation, the priest referred to the Winter issue of a new publication, Catholic Near East Magazine, in which the following statement of purpose appears:

"The Association supports the Church in Afghanistan, Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Dodecanese

How could any man in his position (or in any position of great responsibility) not wonder whether things would have been different and better if he had taken exactly the opposite steps than those he in fact took?

As Gus Weigel remarked near the end of his life, all human efforts given sufficient time, go badly. Often it doesn't take much time at all.

A cry of worry and pain is not the kind of behavior we expect from a pope — any pope. But somehow I find it admirable. He said what he thought and felt in the depths of his soul. By so doing he may have lost a little bit of the aloof dignity that is supposed to be appropriate for the papacy. I think that such is a small loss. We are well rid of that sort of dignity. A pope who can be so utterly honest — even only in a fleeting comment at a public audience — is more human, more attractive, and more effective as a pope. It might have helped both him and us had he spoken thus much earlier.

If he is worried about the future of the Church, then he is surely welcome into the club.

The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. But that consolation does not guarantee us protection from terrible loss. Maybe mistakes have been piled on mistakes during the last fifteen years; maybe the price will have to be paid for generations; maybe the Council was a mistake to begin with and the implementation after it a compounding of the error. Maybe Pandora's box (or Pope John's window) ought never to have been opened in the first place. Maybe the imps that have been let out (or let in) will work havoc for decades or centuries.

I don't think so. Over the long haul the Council will have a massive positive influence in the Church. Short range mistakes or misjudgments cannot prevent the immense long run benefits that still seem likely. There is no way you can have an easy transition from a counterreformation to an ecumenical age. Maybe the historians will be astonished, not over the chaos and the loss, but the relative ease of the transition compared to what it might have been.

I don't know for sure, but I suspect the Pope feels this way most of the time, too. Still, if he suffers moments of deep and painful doubts, I don't blame him.

Who in his right mind wouldnt?

islands, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Turkey."

Father Atwell pointed to the word Palestine.

He said that the Vatican's non-recognition of Israel may be due to the reason that in the whole area "there are remnants of a once thriving Christian faith with their own hierarchy — but not many Jews who are Catholic."

He suggests that the Vatican is hesitant on the issue for fear of "retaliation" in the strongly Moslem communities against those remaining Christians.

He cites Lebanon as having "an impossibly delicate balance" between the faiths. He noted that the two chief executives of the country are alternately Moslem and Catholic and that a census "hasn't been taken for nearly a generation" because the government does not want to establish which faith has a majority of its citizens.

The diplomatic tension for the Church is further dramatized, he said, by the fact that the Vatican delegate to Palestine, until only recently insisted on flying the Palestine flag on his limousine. He has since been persuaded to fly the Israel flag while in Israel.

An analogy, he said, "Would be if Cardinal Cooke refused to have New York State license plates and flew the flag of the Five Iroquois Nations instead."

UNWRA figures reveal that more than 1.5 million Arab refugees and displaced persons are encamped in territorial Israel. UNWRA is the United Nations agency which maintains the camps. Father Atwell called the camps places which "fester the Fedayeen." The Fedayeen are Arab commandos; the word

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translates "one who sacrifices himself."

He scores both the United Nations and the Soviet Union for "maintaining a balance of terror" in the Mideast in which "the Palestinians continue to be the victims."

"When we think of the multi-millions of dollars we spend to pour weaponry into the area, whole cities could have been built, poverty eliminated."

With that money, he said "Palestinians could buy property from Israel, instead of bombing a place so it won't be worth going back to anyway."

He sees the situation on "a trajectory of repeated war efforts to maintain the status quo, which

only produces the conditions for the next war."


The only hope for the area is a "bold and international resolution of the refugee problem," he said.

And American Catholics had better recognize that "they are betting on both horses," by giving support to both the Vatican and the United States in the matter.

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Fr. Andrew Greeley

I have felt great compassion for the Pope in his recent cry of anguish over the Church. As his papacy comes to its end, he seems greatly troubled about where the Church and the world are going. Perhaps he is worried that all he has worked for will be lost, that his immense efforts have been wasted, and that he may have made mistakes to cause great harm in the years ahead.

I do not believe in psychohistory or in trying to analyze the emotional state of a given leader. I don't know how the Pope feels or what he thinks. I fear that all of us must come to the end of our lives with feelings of frustration and failure. If Paul VI feels that he has failed, I can understand the emotion because I feel the same way myself.

My colleague Eugene Kennedy has recently written in Atlantic a "revisionist" analysis of the reign of Paul VI. He sees the Pope executing a "grand design" for modernizing the Church while keeping the ancient religious symbols alive. Within this model much of the criticism directed against the Pope from "progressive" Catholics would indicate a profound misunderstanding of the Pope's goals and purposes, a misunderstanding which history will presumably correct.

Father Kennedy's model is an interesting and useful one. It fits a lot of the data. I am not totally convinced, however. The secret trial of Hans Kung, for example, doesn't seem to fit (although Father Kennedy has suggested in conversation with me that there may well be a failure of communication between the Pope and Kung so that the Pope does not understand that Kung is in fact a conservative who is trying to protect the power and influence of the papacy.) I also wonder if the too hasty — and unsuccessful — attempt to end the birth control debate can be made to fit the model.

Still, the Kennedy theory may well be closer to the ultimate judgment of history than is the present strongly negative one that one hears in many Catholic circles. We may wonder, but will never know how a more enthusiastic and less anxious response to the forces let loose by the Council would have worked. If any interpretation at all is to be made of the anguish recently expressed, Paul VI must wonder the same thing. How could he not wonder?

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