

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Advent — Season of Hospitality

I have often wondered if the innkeeper of Bethlehem ever sensed the significance of his decision to say 'no vacancy' to the weary travellers of the first Christmas Eve. Surely, the welcome mat could have changed the pattern of his life, his family's and all of his guests. Closed doors promote sentimental kindness, bland conversation and a general atmosphere of coziness and serenity from all disturbance. Surely, the Christ Child would have been a disturbing guest — and Mary and Joseph would have presented a life-style to challenge self-centered priorities.

Advent is a season which challenges us to open doors — to offer room to Him whose presence can disturb us and shatter our security patterns and challenge our treasured priorities. I wonder if we really understand our message of invitation, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Are we truly inviting Him to come into our lives? If so, we are offering Him space where painful change can take place. And that is why Advent is a personal challenge. The call to Advent renewal was first uttered by John the Baptist in his urgent cry to "make a straight highway for our God across the desert of our emptiness to let every valley of our deficiencies be filled in, every mountain and hill of our bold assertions be laid low."

Advent invites us to check the authen-

ticity of our faith in Jesus Christ — to test the sincerity of our welcome to His coming now — into our lives. When we really celebrate Advent, we anxiously await His coming to transform us into someone better than we are now. And that is pain before it becomes joy.

Johannes Baptist Metz writes this reflection about Advent which, I believe, sadly reflects the welcome we usually give to our Divine Guest:

"What have we done to our faith in Christ? Have we not frequently manipulated it to keep God's expected coming at arm's length, to push it into a distant past or a distant future? We have split up God's coming into two distant episodes, relegating one to a distant date in the past and the other to an unforeseeable future. Then we have provided ourselves with a profane, secularized, in-between period where we are free to run away from the pressing claims of God's coming and to construct a new image of man for ourselves."

There is little of personal demand in a faith that only leads us to the Christmas Crib to kneel before the Infant and to utter a prayer of thanks for God's entrance into human history 2,000 years ago. And faith in His final coming does not seem demanding either. Unlike the early Christians who had beheld the human face of God and were impatient and restless for His return, we do not share their anxiety. We have allocated that Advent to some future generation which

we feel is surely not ours to worry about. But to celebrate the Advent that is now is demanding. To be open and receptive to His coming now means that we have to become more than we are at this moment. It means expanding our horizons, desiring to mature despite the pain of growth, reaching out to others, to give, and to love.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." And that first Advent is an awesome fact of history.

"The Word is exalted in glory and will return among us." And this is the Advent yet to come.

"The Word transfigures hearts and minds and that Advent is now — this hour — this day — for all who offer hospitality to Christ."

Let us phrase our welcome in these words:

"Father, the day of salvation draws ever near; your light grows steadily around us to pierce the darkness of our minds and open us to your promise of life. Your Son, Jesus Christ comes in the midst of us, now in Spirit where once He came in flesh. Open our eyes that we may see His presence and our ears that we may hear His call, in all the events that fill our lives today. Give us courage to say YES to him, to carry on the work of love and service for which He was sent and for which He calls us. Give birth to your Son in our lives that through us He may give life to the world."

vatican news

World's Jesuits Meet to Face Crises

By Fr. Robert A. Graham, S.J.

Rome [RNS] — The Jesuits' top decision-making body is meeting here to grapple with the crisis that has beset most other religious congregations since Vatican II.

Pontiff Responds To Jewish Units Over Peace Prize

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul has awarded the \$40,000 Pope John XXIII Peace Prize to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

At a presentation ceremony at the Vatican on Nov. 30, the Pope described the "Apostolic See" and UNESCO as two bodies meeting on "the road to peace," and celebrating together "this lofty ideal which ever more resembles a lighthouse guiding civilization."

Following the first public announcement (Nov. 14) of the award, the American Jewish Congress urged the Vatican to reconsider and "withhold" the prize from UNESCO because of that UN agency's vote to exclude Israel from its European regional grouping. The AJC was joined later by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in the U.S.

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, president of the Jewish Congress, citing the UNESCO vote, said that "nothing could be more incongruous or incompatible with the memory of Pope John XXIII than the announcement by the Vatican of an award in his name to UNESCO."

The General Conference of

Nearly 250 priests, chosen from provinces in 103 countries, have been convoked to a general congregation by Father General, the Spanish-born Very Rev. Pedro Arrupe, to consider more than a thousand proposals or petitions in view of adaptation and

UNESCO recently condemned Israel for allegedly persisting "in altering the historical features" of Jerusalem during excavations. Israel has strongly denied the charges.

Referring in his address to UNESCO's actions, Pope Paul said they were "unexpected" and had disturbed "the serenity of this happy moment."

"Thus," he said, "we express the wish that this unforeseen situation may find appropriate solution, confident as we are in the common desire of the parties in the dispute for justice and peace."

The pontiff said the Pope John Peace Prize was being given in recognition of UNESCO activity for peace "over many years."

The award was established by Pope Paul using funds from the Balzan Peace Prize given to Pope John in 1963. It is aimed at encouraging "all those in the world who untiringly dedicate themselves to the great cause of peace and to the relief of peoples in need."

The Pope John Peace Prize was first awarded in 1970 to Mother Theresa of Calcutta, India, world-famed apostle of the poor.

renewal of the 400-year-old body founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The crisis mood, however, is spiced with optimism. At a press conference called a few days before the formal opening, Father Arrupe did not conceal the grave problem of the crisis of identity, that has struck the Society of Jesus.

At the same time, he emphasized his confidence that the meeting will confront the challenges of the new age successfully. Good signs, he added, are not lacking.

He cited the apparent revival of interest in the religious vocation and apostolate. Queried about the number of priests who have left the order, he stated that these have averaged not even 1 per cent per year, that is, eight-tenths of 1 per cent.

On the other hand, in some regions, vocations have shown signs of a consistent rise. In the United States this Autumn, said Father Arrupe, 140 novices have been admitted to start their training for the religious life.

This figure, it was stated later at Jesuit headquarters here, represents twice the number of last year and a rise for the third successive year in the United States.

The forthcoming general congregation, or general chapter, is only the 32nd in the history of the order. This long interval between top leadership meetings, and the lifetime tenure of the superior, general is one of the points about which discussion may turn.

At his press conference, Father Arrupe did not conceal from the large turnout of Italian and foreign correspondents that his own generalate has been and is

the object of criticism within the order.

He observed only that he could not please everyone. And, alluding to reports in some quarters that he may resign, he dismissed the reports as "gossip."

The principal motivation for calling the congress, he said, only six years since the previous congregation held after Vatican II, was "the necessity to discover and to search with precision and to determine concretely what kind of service the society should offer the Church today in the face of the onrushing transformation of the world."

Delegates to the congregation will have before them "postulata" or petitions submitted by local provincial organs or by individual groups. Father Arrupe indicated that almost all the current problems of the Church and of religious communities are included, such as poverty as a social as well as an evangelical ideal, community life, obedience, and the system of democratic conduct in decision-making, and above all, forms of the apostolate.

Father Arrupe noted in particular that the special charge that Pope Paul VI gave to the Society of Jesus to carry on the struggle against atheism remains one of the key emphases before the congregation in its consideration of the forms of the apostolate.

He noted, however, that atheism is not synonymous with atheists and that the struggle is not against persons but against ideas.

As a former missionary to Japan, he noted that the finest friends he had there were, in force of their traditions, also "atheists" and that in the "West" there is also

atheism that is not Marxist. He said that the papal mandate is to be considered within the evangelical framework confided by the Church to the Society of Jesus.

Queried by correspondents about certain liberty of expression by some European Jesuit-edited reviews in such matters as birth control and abortion, the Jesuit superior declined to enter into detailed discussion.

He noted that of the "postulata" coming before the congregation some deal with such questions.

The problem he said, would have ample and free consideration during the congregation.

Pontiff Asks For Reason In the Church

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, calling for renewed emphasis in the Church on a reasoned defense of Christian truth, warned the faithful against preferring experience to reason or "charismatic spirituality" at the expense of "rational dogmatism."

He urged Catholics to maintain an "authenticity of doctrine," which, he said, is guaranteed by three "unquestionable" sources, "Tradition, Scripture, and the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church."

"Today," said the pontiff, "everything seems to be invested with inexorable 'problematics'. It is no longer fashionable to champion a logical and reasoned defense of religion. The modern mentality avoids an intellectual approach to Christianity, preferring 'experience to reason.'"