

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

On Being an Ark-Builder

Isn't it interesting how the Church speaks to us! Not only does she ask us to read from Sacred Scripture, but she also chooses certain passages to be read at certain times of the year. The first Sunday of Advent was a good example. This year as we gathered for the Eucharist on that first Sunday of the Church's year, our minds turned to meditate on the coming once more of the Saviour. Many were the images that might have been presented, but the Church chose the intriguing figure of Noah for our consideration.

The Gospel of Matthew, read on that Sunday, places these words on the lips of Jesus: "As it was in Noah's time, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark." (24:37-38). Jesus was recalling to his listeners the time of long ago described in the book of Genesis. In that wonderful story, filled with theological rather than historical meaning, Noah is shown to be in preparation for the terrible coming of God's wrath. Imagine the

ridicule to which he was subjected as men and women passed by his workshop and saw him building an ark. Imagine the laughter when he told them that a terrible flood was coming upon them. Imagine the ease with which these people forgot this eccentric man as they hurried to do their shopping and everyday duties.

But Noah worked on. He was perhaps often tempted to ask himself why he bothered. But God had spoken. He had told Noah that He would come and that Noah must be ready. So Noah worked and believed. And when the flood came, the faith and hard work paid off.

And so it will be, says Jesus, when the Son of Man comes again. Some will be ready and some will not.

What is in the mind of the Church when she places this Gospel reading before us during the Advent season? I would suggest that she is asking us to become ark-builders.

Our lives as Christians should proclaim a message to all people. It should say that God is with us, but that God will come again. We cannot continue to go about doing our everyday thing while God in our neighbor has needs. We cannot continue to act as if God is not, when we need only look to see Him.

Instead, we must act as if we have heard the Word of God which says that He will come again, and that we are accountable for our use of His creation. Thus, we must be willing to build arks — arks of love and reconciliation, even if for doing it, we be mocked and made fun of. We must work, knowing that soon God will return and will say: "Whatsoever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it unto me." Our ark must be built not to save ourselves but to save the world.

Perhaps some of the families in the diocese might wish to take this idea and work with it during this Advent season. After some discussion among the family members, each one might undertake to do some act of ark-building. Extra kindness and sacrifice might be done in preparation for His coming. It will also make us more aware that in the time in which we live, we cannot do business as usual. Perhaps a small ark might even be fashioned as a decoration for the Christmas tree, reminding everyone during the Christmas season of their need for preparation.

So we must build our ark. It is only after that task is accomplished that we would dare to pray with St. Paul: "Maran atha!" "Come, Lord Jesus!"

vatican news

Pontiff Stresses Thomism's Validity

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, in a special message marking the year of the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Thomas Aquinas, has underscored the "permanent validity" of the Medieval Dominican's thought and its relevance for modern man.

St. Thomas, whose writings significantly shaped Western thought, died March 7, 1274.

In a 29-page document in Latin, addressed to Father Vincent de Couesnongle, Master General of the Dominican Order, the Pope hammered on the theme of the

validity and relevance of Aquinas' thought, urging contemporary thinkers to cut through its historically-conditioned setting and get to its "substance."

"It is the duty of cultivators of the works of Saint Thomas to explain the doctrine, not in a formalistic manner, but in an updated form, open to the orientations of the Second Vatican Council," the pontiff said.

This problem, the pontiff explained, posed a two-fold danger: "From one side, a naturalism which emptied the world . . . of every reference to God, and from the other side, a religious attitude that blocked the legitimate claims of reason."

world and the radicality of the Gospel on the basis of the happy principle: 'Grace presupposes and perfects nature.'

Fidelity to the implications of this principle, the pontiff explained enabled Aquinas to develop a balanced doctrine, one that took account of the authoritative teaching of the Catholic faith, side by side with the demands of reason.

St. Thomas met this problem head-on, said the Pope, "reconciling the secularity of the

Vatican 'Sorrowed' At Prelate's Sentencing

Vatican City [RNS] — The Vatican, voicing its "profound regret and sorrow" over the sentencing by an Israeli court of the head of the Melkite Catholic Church in Jerusalem, said the court action could only "aggravate" tensions in the Holy Land.

fortunately cannot but aggravate the tension in the complex situation of that territory where — it must be said — despite praiseworthy efforts, just peace is still far from being established and where the population lives in a climate of anxiety, distress, and uncertainty."

Its position was made plain in broadcasts made by Vatican radio.

Vatican Radio then asserted: "The Holy See will not fail to continue to follow the case of Archbishop Capucci with all attention and interest expressing the hope that it would be possible to find a solution to favor, rather than impede, the reconciliation of peoples in the Holy Land."

Syrian-born Archbishop Ilarion Capucci, spiritual leader of some 4,500 Melkite Catholics, most of them Arabs, was sentenced Dec. 9 to 12 years in prison after being convicted of smuggling arms and explosives — for Palestinian guerrillas operating in the Israeli-occupied West Bank of Jordan.

Visit Slums, Vicar Urges

The 52-year-old prelate could have received a maximum sentence of 35 years, since he was found guilty on three counts involving arms smuggling and making contacts with "foreign agents" leaders of Al Fatah, the largest of the Palestinian guerrilla organizations.

Rome [RNS] — Pope Paul's vicar for the Diocese of Rome said here that pilgrims coming to Rome for the 1975 Holy Year should visit the city's suburbs and slums if they want to find "the real face of today's Christian Rome."

Vatican Radio, in multi-language broadcasts, said it was "with profound regret and sorrow that the Holy See received the news of the sentence passed on Archbishop Ilarion Capucci, after the Holy See had shown its great concern for his case."

"What pilgrims are looking for is the city of faith," said Cardinal Ugo Poletti in an interview with the Daily American. "They can find it most of all outside the old walls, in the parishes of the outlying districts and on the outskirts of the city where people live a life of poverty, but also of participation in religious practice and (a life) of mutual help."

"The episode," the radio said, "wounds and saddens one of the glorious Eastern Catholic communities — the Melkite Church — in which Archbishop Capucci has for years exercised episcopal function."

The cardinal said his office had already made arrangements for pilgrims to be shown around various parishes chosen for "their mixed social make-up, ranging from the middle bourgeoisie to those living in shacks."

At the same time, he went on, students and proponents of Thomism should "imitate the great Master in his efforts to understand contemporary thought and see themselves, like him, capable of gathering truth from any valid source."

Pope Paul observed that not everyone shared a conviction of the enduring value of the thought of the "Common Doctor of the Church," suggesting that this derived from "a superficial and imprecise approach" to Aquinas' work, "and in some cases, from a complete absence of direct reading and study of his work."

Recognizing the current validity of the teachings of St. Thomas, the Pope insisted, did not imply "a conservatism closed to all sense of historical development and fearful of modern progress."

It implied, rather, "a choice based on objective reasons intrinsic to the philosophical teaching and theology of St. Thomas," and a realization that his intellectual labors marked "a decisive turning-point in the history of Christian thought."

Describing the socio-cultural and religious context of Aquinas' life and labors, the Pope said that "the initial use of the experimental method and the first developments of physical sciences raised the problem of how to conceive the relationship between reason and faith and between the whole range of earthly realities and the field of religious truth, especially the Christian message."



Blessings

Pope Paul VI waves to people as he is driven to Rome's St. Ambrose Church to celebrate a Mass on the occasion of the 16th centennial of St. Ambrose's consecration as Bishop of Milan.