

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

The Heart of Man—Renewal and Reconciliation

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Robert Burns, the Scots poet, wrote: "The heart ay's the part ay, That makes us right or wrang." In a single line Burns sums up the cause of human disharmony whose effects we considered last week — separation from God, from our fellowmen, from nature and from ourselves. Rightly we ask ourselves, "Why does the heart go wrong? What causes man's disunity within and without himself? What can be done about this sad situation?"



Such questions have been asked time and time again. The ancient Greeks and Romans invented myths, such as that of Pandora's box, to explain the presence of evil in the world. Myths, however, do not tell us enough because they offer no solution to the problem they seek to explain. We must look elsewhere for an adequate solution.

The inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments are more helpful. The Genesis account of the Fall tells us about man's original turning away from God through disobedience. By this action man introduced chaos, division and disharmony into the world God created in order, unity and love. The Hebrew writers came to understand the meaning of the Fall more and more fully as the history of Israel unfolded. For them sin means "to miss the mark," "to fall short of what we ought to be," "to rebel," "to be unfaithful to God." Thus Hosea's experience of his unfaithful wife Gomer becomes the symbol of Israel's infidelity to the covenant with God. Just as Hosea forgave Gomer, so

too God will pardon Israel if she repents and turns again to the Lord.

The New Testament builds and expands our understanding about what sin is and what it does to men. St. John views sin basically as separation from God, turning from light to darkness, from life to death. For St. Paul, sin is weakness within us which disposes us to evil and, unless we resist, subjects us to its tyranny. St. Luke sees sin as a withdrawal from God which the parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates. The prodigal goes astray primarily because he withdraws his love and obedience from his father. His dissolute life is not the cause but the result of this ruptured relationship. Before the son can be reconciled with his father, he must first realize his sin, repent, and determine to change his way of living. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you: I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Repentant and renewed to "what he ought to be," he is then welcomed by his father, who rejoices because "thy brother was dead and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found." The parable embodies both the meaning of renewal and reconciliation and the ways necessary to bring it about.

However we look at sin it breaks the friendship between man and God. Such fundamental alienation, as we saw, disposes men to disharmony in the other spheres of their activity, making them "slaves to divers desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." The awesome truth is that we can turn from God by our own will, but not by our own will can we turn back to Him. Once separated from God, man cannot pull himself up by his own bootstraps because the supernatural is not

his to command. The gift of reconciliation rests in God's hands. The history of Israel is the record of longing and waiting for God to act. "Let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Savior," Isaiah prayed; and in the fullness of His time God did act.

The renewal and reconciliation began at Bethlehem with the birth of Christ. In no uncertain terms John the Baptist announced who Christ was and the purpose of His coming: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world." From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: Reform your lives, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. . . . And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom; and healing all manner of sickness and every infirmity, among the people. . . . Curing the sick in mind and body demonstrate both the divine power of Christ and His reconciliation of man with nature and himself as well as with God. Again and again St. Paul stresses this: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," "And through Him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of His cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven."

It is most fitting, therefore, that Pope Paul chose Christmas Eve to open this Holy Year of renewal and reconciliation. Our personal spiritual renewal in Christ and reconciliation with God must come first, if we hope to bring about renewal and reconciliation within our family, our society and our world. Christmas makes the year holy because in its miracle of "admirable exchange" the eternal Word of the Father took on our human flesh and became what we are in order that we might become what He is.

vatican news

'Israel' Problem Cited By Vatican Spokesman

By Father Robert A. Graham, SJ.
Vatican City [RNS] — The new Vatican guidelines on Catholic-Jewish relations did not address the question of the state of Israel because it is not in the "competence" of the Catholic Church to comment on the conception the Jews have of Judaism, particularly the relationship of the Jewish people to Israel.

This was the view expressed by Father Pierre Marie de Contenson, OP, secretary of the newly-established Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, during a press conference here (Jan. 3), at which time the

guidelines document was formally released. The document, dated Dec. 1, was issued by the new commission as a move to implement the 1965 Vatican II directives on Catholic-Jewish relations.

Father de Contenson said the Jews know their own view of Judaism, Israel and the self-identity of the Jewish people, and the Catholic Church "in this document, displays its readiness to listen."

Later in the press conference, the French Dominican said the document did not enter into "political questions" specifically because it must necessarily be

studied and applied to a great variety of situations, particularly where questions of justice and peace arise.

"The guidelines did not intend to impose precise and concrete solutions to questions," he stressed, adding that with respect to the relationship between religion and politics "this is one of the questions on which dialogue is necessary since Christians and Jews have differing conceptions."

"The perspective," said Father de Contenson, "is essentially religious but the concrete applications do not exclude other exigencies."

Father Carlo Martini, SJ, rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, presented the document to the press. Entitled "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration 'Nostra Aetate,'" the document was signed by Cardinal Jan Willebrands, president of the new commission on Catholic-Jewish relations, and by Father De Contenson.

(The new guidelines document, characterized by Cardinal Willebrands as a "charter" for the new commission, is the last in a series of documents issued to implement Vatican II decrees. It follows by five years a "working paper" on Catholic-Jewish relations which did address the question of Israel along with other issues.)

U.S. Chorister Dines With Pope Paul

Ridgefield, Conn. [RNS] — It's not every day that a young Catholic boy gets an invitation to dine with the Pope — or to sing a solo at the high altar beside the pontiff.

For Francisco Morales of Ridgefield, one of five choir boys who lunched with Pope Paul VI on New Year's Day, the event was even more special. Francisco got a treasured seat next to Pope Paul.

"Pope Paul's very nice. He's easy to get along with," said Francisco, a mature-sounding 11-year old in a telephone interview. "I was very nervous at first, but when he came in, I stopped being nervous."

Richard Strillowich, 13, also of Ridgefield, stood beside Pope Paul at the altar under the huge bronze canopy in St. Peter's Basilica and read and sang as a soloist before a congregation of 25,000.

Francisco and Richard were among the 34 choir boys from St. Mary's Parish here who were taken by the rector, Father Francis J. Medinsky, to the International Choir Boy Congress in Rome. It was attended by some 10,000 boys.

Pope Paul's invitation asking representatives of the major continents to lunch with him, came unexpectedly. Francisco Morales was chosen to represent North America. The others were from Africa, Europe, South America and Asia.

Francisco said that lunch began with hors d'oeuvres of ham

and crackers. "Then we had soup — chicken broth with balls of noodles. Then a very good meat dish; it tasted like turkey, but different so it must have been something else. We had a red cabbage salad; champagne and cake; and fruit."

During lunch, Pope Paul asked the boys about their families and their schools. Francisco asked the Pope to bless some rosaries for his friends. "We spoke in English," he said. "The Pope is a master of 11 languages."

Birth Control Issue in Italy

Rome [RNS] — Two rival bills calling for the establishment of government birth control information centers and clinics throughout Italy have been introduced in the Senate.

One bill, introduced by two members of the dominant Christian Democrat Party, which has strong ties with the Vatican, proposes setting up "institutions of family consultants" to advise clients about various available methods of birth control and to ensure that methods be practiced under medical supervision.

The other bill, drawn up by two members of the Socialist Party, calls for the establishment of "centers of preventive medicine and birth control."

An introductory paragraph of this bill asserts that "birth control" is "a fundamental human right."

ADL Leader Lauds Paper

New York [RNS] — The national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith, praised the new Vatican guidelines on Catholic-Jewish relations as "an affirmative step forward" and characterized the guidelines as "a good world-wide working document" although "disappointing" because it did not refer to Israel or the land of Israel.

Seymour Graubard, in a statement of response to the release of the guidelines in Rome, pointed out that in the U.S. the Catholic Church has developed guidelines which are "in some aspects more specific and advanced" than those issued by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

He said the 1967 guidelines issued by the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations and those of dioceses around the country call for a variety of grass-roots programs involving mutual understanding, social action, and the examination and removal of texts and prayer books not in keeping with Vatican II directives on Catholic-Jewish relations.

Graubard said the ADL "believes that the steps already taken by the Catholic Church in the United States will serve as examples for the implementation of the new world-wide guidelines."