

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Cost of Discipleship

PART II

One of the truly influential books of this century is entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship*. The author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote from personal experience, for the Lord had tested the authenticity of his discipleship in the days of the Nazi persecution. He had personal experience of the Lord's invitation to follow Him up to Jerusalem. In a celebrated passage on the meaning of discipleship he draws a distinction between what he calls **Cheap Grace** and **Costly Grace**. He offers us a worthy Lenten meditation.



Many people in their approach to the practice of religion are looking for Cheap Grace, whereas the Gospel offers only Costly Grace. Cheap Grace means wanting to achieve salvation without undergoing a true conversion of heart. Cheap Grace means accepting the truth of the Gospel, while avoiding the demands of the Gospel. Cheap Grace means saying I believe without the corresponding willingness to say I do.

It costs very little to assent with our minds to the truths revealed by our Lord; it costs much to live by these truths. Costly Grace — the only grace that the Gospel offers — is grace that makes unconditional demands on a man. Costly Grace calls a man to risk his own self-security. It calls him to live by the Gospel wherever it may lead. It calls a man to take the next step.

You recall the story of the rich man who came to Jesus with the question: "What must I do to obtain eternal life?" He was a good man. He was telling the truth when he said that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. Indeed, the Gospel tells us that Jesus looked on him with love. But Jesus will never let a man rest content with where he has arrived. For, Jerusalem is on a mountaintop. Hence, the Lord's Lenten invitation reads: "Let us go up to Jerusalem." Jesus is always calling a man to take the next step. So He invites the young man: "Go, sell what you have, give to the poor and come follow me." Jesus invites him to give up his own security; to give up that absolute control of his life and destiny that his wealth afforded him. In a word, Jesus offered him Costly Grace. But because the young man had come looking for Cheap Grace, he was unequal to the challenge. His question had been: "What must I do to get eternal life?"; in other words, "How far do I have to go to get what I want?" He saw religion as a means to a goal. He

wanted a simple program to follow; but Jesus offered him not a program, but a way of life. His question to Jesus was: "How can I get what I want with a reasonable minimum of effort?" Jesus' question to him was, in effect: "How much are you prepared to give?"

It is good for us during the season of Lent to reflect on this story of a man who came in search of Cheap Grace and was met with the offer of Costly Grace. It is the story of every man. There has always been a tendency on the part of Christians to cheapen grace, to water it down, to make the Christian life a life of comfortable security, to reduce the unconditional demands of the Gospel to a program of rules that one can follow without too much discomfort.

May we not say that this is precisely what in past years had happened to our observance of Lent? For many of us Lent involved the pursuit of Cheap Grace. We were very careful to receive the ashes on Ash Wednesday, but often with little thought afterwards of what this ceremony committed us to: We were very careful to observe the Lenten fast, we were meticulous about not eating between meals; but at the same time we were happy to receive dispensations from the fast as often as we could think of reasonable excuses for requesting such dispensations. We gave up something during Lent, because we would feel guilty if we did not; yet we breathed a great sigh of relief when Holy Saturday noon arrived and we could say good-bye to another year to the season of repentance.

It was precisely for this reason — namely, that so many of us had turned Lent into a reasonably comfortable program of rules aimed at achieving Cheap Grace — that in the past few years the Church has mitigated so many of the external practices that had become for us the essence of Lent. But the Church has done this, not to make Lent less meaningful, but to restore its true meaning. Lent is a time to seek Costly Grace — the only grace which the Gospel offers.

And what is this Costly Grace? It is a call to conversion. It invites us not simply to do certain things, or to abstain from certain things, but also to undergo a radical change of heart, to change our way of thinking and acting.

The conversion to which Costly Grace calls us forces us to face up to the reality of sin in our lives. One of the difficulties of our past attitude toward sin was that we tended to see sin only in isolated actions. We were almost morbidly concerned about particular sinful actions; at the same time we were inclined to ignore attitudes of heart and mind that breed sin. Sin many find its expression in individual actions, but it finds its source in

the minds and hearts of men. So often when we go to confession we express our sorrow for isolated sinful actions; but we tend to be quite oblivious to the self-centeredness, the self-seeking, the selfishness that is at the root of our sinful actions.

The message of the Gospel is that Jesus came to deliver us; not so much from our sinful actions as from our sinfulness, not so much from sins as from sin. This is why the Gospel's call to conversion is not simply or even primarily a call to repentance and reparation for this or that particular transgression. Rather, it is a call to restructure our values, to remake our hearts, to accept the priorities of the Gospel.

This change of heart affects the multiple relationships in which man finds himself. The message of the Gospel is that in Jesus Christ God offers us forgiveness for our sinfulness. But this forgiveness that God offers us is no mere legal reality. It demands a response on our part. It requires of us a profound rethinking of our lives — a rethinking that will manifest itself in the attitudes we take toward others. The disciple of Christ is taught to pray: forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us. The forgiveness that God offers us cannot be isolated from our daily life and the daily relationships that make up that life. We cannot hope for God's love and mercy, if we close our hearts to the problems of our neighbor and the problems of the world in which we live.

Lent, then, is a time of conversion, of heart-changing. It is a time to break down the barriers that separate us from one another — in the family, in society, in the Church. It is a time to uproot the prejudices — conscious or not — which prevent us from truly seeing all men as our brothers in Christ. Lent is a time to realize that we cannot exclude anyone from our love and concern. Indeed, it is the unlovable, the lonely, the neglected, the suffering, the mistreated who have the greatest claim on our love and concern.

May I invite you to daily participation in Holy Mass during Lent, not as an external practice undertaken simply that we may have the satisfaction of feeling that we have done something; but rather as an opportunity to open our hearts to the divine power that alone can make true conversion possible.

The Mass is the supreme example of Costly Grace. It is grace, because it is God's gift to us. It is costly because it cost the death of God's own Son. It is my hope and prayer that this daily Lenten contact with the Selfless Redeemer will bring us to a fuller understanding of the joy He intended for us when He invited us to the painful discipleship of the Cross.

vatican news

Pontiff Rejects Jesuit Restructuring

Rome [RNS] — Pope Paul has rejected proposals that allegedly would "democratize" the structure of the 435-year-old Jesuit Order.

At issue is the three-tiered system of the Society of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1540. Following final vows there are three distinct groups of members in the Society: the "professed," "spiritual coadjutors," and lay brothers.

The first two groups are ordained priests. The members of all the groups take final solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

One group — the professed — however, take in addition, a solemn "fourth vow," promising "special obedience to the Supreme Pontiff with respect to

accepting assignments anywhere in the world."

The professed also take five simple vows. They promise never to seek or allow any mitigation in the vow of poverty, never to solicit or receive any ecclesiastical dignity outside the Order, unless directed by obedience to do so, and never to try, even indirectly, to win any dignity within the Order.

But, only the professed may hold certain higher posts, such as superior general or head of a province, or participate in top-level decision-making.

At one time, most of the Jesuit priests were professed. Today less than half are permitted to join that rank. A key factor in the determination as to who shall be admitted to the rank is the Jesuit's

academic record during his course of studies in the Society.

The question of this three-tiered structure has been amply discussed during the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, a gathering of nearly 250 professed priests from all over the world in session here since last December.

The General Congregation is the top decision-making body of the Jesuit Order.

Earlier, test votes showed that a majority of the Fathers of the congregation supported proposals to do away with the distinguishing marks of the professed and allow all Jesuits to take the "fourth vow" of special obedience.

The press office of the General

Congregation announced on Feb. 26 that Pope Paul, in a letter to Father Pedro Arrupe, the Jesuit superior general, said he wanted no such change.

The press office also said that the Pope requested that when the congregation had completed its work on all the documents under deliberation, they be sent to him for his consideration.

The reason for this request, the press office explained, was the pontiff's concern "for the general welfare and because of the great importance that the decisions of the Society could have, not only within the Order itself, but also in the Church at large, particularly among other religious institutes."

The current Jesuit parley is only the seventh General Congregation in the Society's

history called for reasons other than to elect a new Superior General.

This 32nd assembly was called by Father Arrupe to deal with "very serious matters pertaining to the whole Society."

The Fathers of the congregation have discussed a wide variety of questions related to adaptation and renewal of the Jesuit Order, based on over 1,000 "postulata," or proposals sent in by the individual Jesuit Provinces and by individual Jesuits.

The proposals run a whole gamut of problems including the training of Jesuits, the style of Jesuit community life, the life of prayer and the priorities of the apostolate, and the need of identifying with the poor and oppressed.