

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Advent's Challenge to the Prophets of Gloom

The Christian Community assembles in response to a common vocation to be a sign of joy to the world and to be messengers of hope. Joylessness and hopelessness are sure signs that the Lord **has not come**. A believer is **never** permitted to indulge in even the slightest degree of pessimism. For the Gospel of the Lord Jesus is Good News to those who embrace it wholeheartedly.



Advent nullifies the message of the prophets of gloom and doom.

Unfortunately, their number seems to be legion in this age of **transition** and **becoming** in the Church. Those who have captured the Advent spirit know that our energies cannot be spent in longing for the 'good old days,' but should be directed in hope to 'better days to come.'

St. Augustine proclaimed the Advent message when he wrote in the V Century, "The Church walks onward like a wayfarer stricken by the world's hostility but comforted by the mercy of God. Nor does this state of affairs date only from the days of Christ's or the Apostles' presence on earth. It was never any different from the days when the first man, Abel, was slain by his ungodly brother. So it shall be until the world is no more."

A person who lives in the Advent spirit is well aware that the Church has, throughout the ages, waxed and waned from periods of decadence which seemed to announce the imminence of her death to moments of renewed life and great vitality. Those who live in the hope of Advent believe in and are prepared for the long struggle for better days to come. For men of faith are always aware that whatever is evil has no permanence and

that the Lord will come to make all things new. To His stated promise of renewal we respond with the Advent prayer, "Amen, Come, Lord, Jesus." (Apoc. 22:20)

Believers are always prepared for the painful struggle that announces His advent among us. This season assures us that we are saved by hope and by nothing less than that. A prophet of doom can easily spend his energies in unveiling an endless tale of woes about the condition of the Church today. But one who lives in the Spirit of Advent is well aware of the many signs of a second Spring assured by His victory which has overcome the sting of every death and burial in the tomb of human despair.

Advent assures us that there is a new day dawning for the Church. Despite all that seems to announce her death, there is a bright future and a star in the East that calls us to go in search of Christ.

Advent tells us never to indulge in pessimism but to apply to the Church what the priest-poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, once wrote of the world:

"There lives the dearest freshness deep down things—

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink Eastward springs

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and With Ah! bright wings."

As I write this Advent message, I reflect on these words which paraphrase the Psalmist (Psalm 113): "It is amazing, even fantastic,

how our God permeates every facet of our lives

And can work out His purpose through them

despite our human faults and failures.

He creates beauty out of the dust of our fallen natures,

Out of the ashes of our failures

He brings forth meaning and purpose.

Renew your Church, O God

Give us new life and new vision

that we advance your kingdom

in our disjointed world.

Renew your Church, O God,

and revive your servants,

so that the whole world may know

of your love."

I live in this Advent spirit of hope. For I believe in the future of a Church that has its human element but is also surrounded by divine promises and the spirit of God working within it.

The baptismal question, "Do you also believe in the Holy Spirit?" calls for our continued 'Amen' for the question is still addressed to us. It is asking us now, "Are you prepared for a new Advent of the Lord?" How fervent is **your** prayer, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel?"

Pope Offers FAO the Resources of Prayer

Pope Paul recently talked to members of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization on the topic of world hunger. His address:

It is always with special joy that we welcome the members of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. We have a very lively awareness of the importance of the work which brings together political leaders and experts from the whole world, to consider the crucial problems which condition people's lives. This session also coincides with the 13th anniversary of FAO: we are happy to renew to this organization our fervent good wishes and the confident hopes that we came to express in its own headquarters, five years ago.



The idea of an international agricultural adjustment, which is the central theme of this session, belongs to the insight which presided over the birth of your organization. The fact that this idea now influences many with the quiet power of an evident need is surely the best compliment which could be paid to the quality of the work already accomplished. And it is surely the best stimulus for yourselves, at a time when repeated dramatic alarms and the awareness of the precariousness of the world food situation and of general economic balance confer upon you a fresh responsibility.

In fact, in the course of your present studies you are concerning yourselves directly with the most numerous and too often the most despised and forgotten part of humanity: the rural community, particularly in the Third World. Henceforth, and this may be paradoxical, the elementary economic task that consists in feeding people con-

stitutes a valuable regulator for economic life as a whole. It puts the accent on the scandal of waste — a scandal whose intolerable nature people are becoming more and more aware of at a time when numberless human beings are dying of hunger; it directs efforts towards the real needs, in places where too often the economy is stimulated and diverted by artificial needs; and it invites people to establish new relationships with a view to the true service of man, of every man and of the whole man, in his integral development.

The Church in her turn brings the light and energy of the Gospel to all human activities. Her teaching on the unity of the human family, all the members of which come from God, are created in his image and called to one single end, which is God (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 24), enlightens and strengthens what your experience causes you to discover with ever greater clarity: human problems such as international agricultural adjustment, and, more widely, the establishment of more equitable relationships between nations, can only be solved if they are placed within the framework of the effective solidarity of the whole human family.

This does not mean that a universal framework must be imposed, denying the more individual manifestations of solidarity and seeking to imprison human effort within a single model of development. Universal living solidarity is built up little by little, starting from the more immediate manifestations of solidarity whereby people and nations develop their personalities in line with their particular creativity, within the environment for which they have more specific responsibility, in the forward movement of a history which enables them to reap the cultural heritage of previous generations and to incorporate it in new constructions.

The "world conceptual framework" of which your documents speak is therefore first of all a question of a mental attitude, an interior dynamism in people and nations

which widens their horizons and makes them conceive and achieve their objectives in a setting which provides universal solidarity. This movement from within calls for a true conversion of attitudes, and in this the Church is playing her part. But this movement is endowed when universal solidarity succeeds in taking flesh in shared institutions, with shared orientations.

You are one of these institutions which already expresses something of the unity of the human family. We trust that the work of your session will enable you to select orientations capable of bringing about the progress of human solidarity in the common struggle against hunger and for development. This will be your valuable collaboration in the building up of society. Such a building up demands that the quest for more just structures should be rooted in a political desire for peace and brotherhood, both of them being fostered and guided by a firm conviction of the incomparable dignity of the human person; for the human person deserves our tenacious efforts and, when his freedom is respected, reveals a creativity capable of mastering the great problems of our time.

For our part, we offer you, for this great human work, the inexhaustible resources of the Gospel. These resources have developed, during this Holy Year, new powers of reconciliation, rooting Christians ever more firmly in God and giving them a renewed experience of their brotherhood in God — a spiritual experience which is being lived here and which throughout the world is preparing men who are better able to place their efforts in the perspective of the unity of the human family reconciled in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the Church's contribution, this is the meaning of our prayer. We ask the God and Father of all people to assist you in the heavy task which is yours in the service of humanity, in order that the earth may bring forth its fruits in abundance and that these fruits may be available to all.