

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Pentecost—No Room for Gloom or Doom

Prophets of doom seem to flourish in every age. Their audience tends to increase when the rhythm of life changes from the security of the static to the mobility of the dynamic — especially when the change has been sudden as it has in recent years.



There is a human temptation to prefer the voice that says, "There's bad news tonight" than to listen to the one who announces: "There's good news now."

A Christian 'prophet of gloom' is a contradiction — a negation of everything he professes in his commitment to the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus Christ. St. Peter said it all when he stated that a disciple of Christ should always have a ready answer for people who questioned his hopefulness. (1 Peter 3:15)

Much has been written about faith and charity but relatively little about hope — that in-between virtue that somehow seems to have been forgotten. Faced with the vast problems of cosmic proportions that scream for attention and solution and are headlined by every avenue of communication, we desperately need a theology of hope and even more so people whose lives reflect hope and offer personal assurance that there is no finality in any human situation — no matter how desperate it appears to be.

The atomic nightmare of World War II seemed to trigger a universal sense of hopelessness. Despair was promoted by a theology of "the death of God," a philosophy in search of the "meaning of nothingness," and a psychology that focused on the "dimensions of human frustration." People grew increasingly suspicious of hope which seemed to be a tranquilizer or excuse, a distraction diverting our attention away from the gravity of the reality of our problems. In 1954 the World Council of Churches chose as the theme of its convocation "Christ — the Hope of the World." The President of the Council, aware of the prevalent pessimism, admitted that this was a dangerous theme — perhaps, even, a subversive topic.

But, thank God, beginning with Moltmann's "Theology of Hope" written 13 years ago, a new

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awareness of God's precious gift of hope has emerged. Since then several writers have focused on this theme. To me it is interesting that this happy trend coincides with a growing interest in Pentecost and the power of the Holy Spirit to RENEW THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

Just as the first Pentecost moved frightened disciples huddled in fear and gloom to become fearless and joyful heralds of 'good news,' so today we need a Pentecost and the fire and wind of the Spirit to replace the coldness of our gloom and to move us from our paralysis and immobility.

Hope is a dynamic reality — the Spirit's gift which makes a mockery of our weighty and gloomy statistics, our probability charts and our threatening prognostications about the future. Hope is the servant of the Spirit who is the "master of the impossible" and who draws straight even with crooked lines. Hope is the daughter of the Spirit who blows where He wills, refuses to be categorized and who overwhelms all obstacles by making them His servants.

Dan Herr, the Editor of the Critic, once asked Cardinal Suenens, the Archbishop of Brussels-Malines, Belgium, why he was a man of hope despite the confusion in the world today. His reply was

"because I believe in the Holy Spirit." When asked to elaborate further on this statement, he said:

"I am a man of hope — because I believe that God is born anew each morning, because I believe that he is creating the world at this very moment. He did not create it at a distant and long — forgotten moment in time. It is happening now: we must, therefore, be ready to expect the unexpected from God.

"The ways of Providence are by nature surprising. We are not prisoners of determinism nor of the sombre prognostications of sociologists. God is here, near us, unforeseeable and loving. I am a man of hope, not for human reasons nor from any natural optimism.

"But because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church and in the world, even where His name remains unheard. I am an optimist because I believe the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Creation.

"To those who welcome Him, He gives each day fresh liberty and renewed joy and trust.

"The long history of the Church is filled with the wonders of the Holy Spirit.

"Think only of the prophets and saints who, in times of darkness, have discovered a spring of grace and shed beams of light on our path.

"I believe in the surprises of the Holy Spirit.

"John XXIII came as a surprise, and the Council, too.

"They were the last things we expected.

"Who would dare to say that the love and imagination of God were exhausted?

"To hope is a duty, not a luxury.

"To hope is not to dream, but to turn dreams into reality.

"Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true."

I pray that this Pentecost Season will help us make this Creed our own.

Human Life Is Sacred!

Pope Paul delivered the following address during the General Audience on April 26.

The time has come when we pupils of Christ, both teachers and disciples, must remember, and not only remember but observe, this fundamental Christian law: human life is sacred.



What does sacred mean? It means that it is put beyond the reach of man's power, but protected by an authority superior to that of man, and defended by the law of God. Human life, over which man exercises his authority in so many ways, for reasons of kinship, or for reasons of social superiority, is, as such, put beyond the reach of man's authority.

Let us listen again to the Gospel: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." Jesus does not condemn the Old Law, but says it is incomplete, and promulgates the New, the Evangelical one, and raises it to the level of perfection. One's brother is due complete respect complete in interior sentiment from which respect is born and expressed, and complete in the exterior protection due to the brother's dignity, as such; we can say, as brother-man.

That is the Gospel teaches us to profess in sentiments and acts a respect for men our neighbors, our

brothers, such as a social system which admits class hatred or class selfishness as logical and normal certainly cannot claim in its own legitimate and exclusive favor.

What vision does the world scene offer us today?

We will not be radically optimistic. In fact we will recognize that man's life on earth is again exposed to serious dangers, in fact, is attacked by new and aggressive troubles. We will recognize this, not in order to placate the anxieties and fears that certain inferior phenomena of human society easily arouse in hearts as if to discourage them about the civilizing effort made and being made, but to strengthen this very effort, to recall the vigilance of civilization to its wakeful duty. And always in order to repeat: man's life is sacred!

Here we speak only in incomplete and brief references.

But can we pass over the episode still going on, of the kidnapping of the person of a man of the moral, political, academic and social stature of Mr. Aldo Moro, without fearing and trembling for the stability of our modern-civil world? Can we witness as passive observers the agonizing misadventure regarding his individual safety? Is it possible that the innocent and eminent life of a statesman should be staked in a wicked way as is happening? Can the peril to life reach the point of eluding all means of defense which the state has at its disposal and which it is pouring forth with such generous heroism in a good and civilized country such as Italy? We still hope, in God's name, that the epilogue of this drama will be, in the interest of the aggressors themselves, a peaceful and tranquilizing one.

And this episode is sadly symbolic of a situation that fills the heart with bitterness. How could we fail to feel deep grief at the assassination of so many policemen, barbarously killed only for faithfully carrying out the tasks entrusted to them by the state, in other words by the common will of citizens desirous of tranquility order and peace? How could we fail not to express our disapproval, all the firmer the more it is disarmed, of the attempts on the lives of journalists, workers and professionals, aimed at suffocating their free voices in blood? And, in particular, what can we say about the many kidnappings for the purpose of extortion, which do not stop even at innocent children?

In this rapid but dramatic list of attempts on life, we cannot be silent about those often perpetrated, (alas!), with the approval of legality. Our thought goes in the first place to abortion.

Comments are superfluous, and restrained by the political situation which is just being unfolded. But the spirit shudders at the very thought that, as unfortunately happens in other countries, such a crime may obtain legalization, even more, the protection of public services. The pretext for all this is consideration for unhappy women, who would then bear in their hearts irremediable remorse at having agreed to offend the most august and ineffable thing that it has been given to woman to possess in the natural order, her own motherhood! Poor and innumerable lives about to be born swept away in your weakness, in your innocence! How can a civil society, and what is more a Christian one, authorize and remain impassive, dry-eyed, in the presence of such a "slaughter of innocents?"