

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

October's Focus on Mary

October focuses our attention in a special way on our Blessed Mother. I dedicate this column to her in personal gratitude for her motherly care for me. There are and have been in the history of the Church aberrations in devotion to Mary. I have much assurance that this is true.



More than four years ago (March 22, 1974) Pope Paul expressed his concern about a balanced devotion to Mary in an "Apostolic Exhortation addressed to all the Catholic bishops of the world." In the introduction of the letter, he clearly speaks of his intention to write a document directed to the "right ordering and development of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary." The body of the letter makes it equally clear that he is prompted to write from a deep pastoral concern about excesses in Marian devotion that called for a corrective voice. He expresses an awareness, too, that the cult of Mary needs continual updating to keep her a woman for all ages. Among the extremes he cites those who scorn all devotions of piety and never do anything to replace them; and at the opposite extremity, those whose devotion is filled with sentimentality and vain credulity and superstition. Devotion to Mary, he warned, has to be in the spirit of the Gospel which is personally demanding and calls us to perseverance and practical action.

Some eight years ago, Father Eamon Carroll, a faculty member of Catholic University and a prominent Marian scholar, was asked to comment on the quality of American devotion to Mary. After a six month tour around the country and 160 lectures on Mariology, he expressed the same pastoral concern that Pope Paul had voiced: "I would regard the chief drawback of the American attitude toward our Lady as an overdependence on apparitions and private revelations. This has prevented for many the growth of a deeper Scriptural devotion to our Lady. People nourished on an approach to our Lady that has secret messages, hidden letters, apocalyptic threats, seem inclined to find the Biblical portrait of Mary somewhat less interesting or nourishing."

A recent book, SAINTS for CONFUSED TIMES, by John Garvey (The Thomas More Press — 1976) has an interesting chapter on Mary. The author



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contends that there has developed a great gulf between the Mary we encounter in Scripture, and the one presented to us by a later Church tradition. She became so exalted and remote from us, that it became practically hopeless to imitate her. And, after all, that's what saints are for. Phyllis McGinley calls our pursuit of holiness, "Saint-watching." While the Reformation brought an end to devotion to Mary among many Christian denominations, the original intention of its chief leaders was to purify a devotion which had become overlaid with superstition. Martin Luther, for example, wrote: "The great things are nothing less than that she became the Mother of God, in which work so many and such great good things are bestowed on her as pass man's understanding. For on this there follows all honor, all blessedness and her unique place in the whole of mankind. It needs to be pondered in the heart what it means to be the Mother of God." In protesting abuses of devotion to Mary, Calvin wrote: "We truly do not want to take in the least from the honor which is due her, but nothing is withheld from her by not making her into a goddess. On the contrary, people do Mary a great disservice when they disfigure her with false praise and rob God of what belongs to Him." Calvin recommended the imitation of Mary: "We must not just praise her in words, we must follow her example. The greatest praise we can offer is when

we recognize her as our teacher and we her pupils. Realizing that God in grace has looked on her, we wish to see in her, as in a mirror, the mercy of God."

One wonders, then, how the sects that claim these reformers as their founders later rejected all Marian devotion. The history is complicated and it would require a lengthy treatise to analyze it. Heated accusations served to promote new efforts on one side to strip away as many remnants of the old faith as possible, and on the Catholic side the distortions were maintained more firmly than ever because of the attack.

Now that calmer heads prevail and respect for one another is deepened, Christian scholars are thoughtfully searching the Scriptures and are finding the great woman of faith presented there — a model for our imitation — and a sign and hope of our salvation.

The sentimentalists in Marian devotion forget the reality of the pain of her pilgrimage. She has rightfully been compared to Abraham whom the liturgy calls "our father in faith." Both faced a God they had known as a God of mercy and justice Who keeps faith with His promises. But the same God makes terrifying demands when we say, "Thy will be done." God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son. Mary is asked to bear a child without a husband. To have a child that comes from God apart from human generation had to be interpreted by her contemporaries as an absurdity. She must have endured ridicule from the so-called "respectable people" of her day.

God chose to take what the world ridicules and despises, the world of respectable people and the institutions which support their self-righteousness, and make it the vehicle of His Son's entry into the world. This is an uncomfortable picture of Mary. We are tempted to drag her into the world we prefer — the world of respectability in which we worship a predictable God who could never make His children uncomfortable.

Kierkegaard once remarked: "I think it will not be found difficult to explain why she became the Mother of God. It is because she could say, and mean it, 'Be it done according to your will.' It was because she was able to say this that the Word became flesh in her." Despite the dread, the risk, the strangeness of the God she faced directly for the first time, she was able to accept the will of God completely and God was free to act. Redemption needed her cooperation.

It is a model of what faith means, that Mary can matter to us now. For the Word to become flesh in each of us, we have to be prepared to meet a God as strange as the one Mary met. It is only through prayer and attentive listening that we open ourselves and become able to say wholeheartedly, "Be it done as You will."

The response that made her great is the response that we must make to the Lord Who has called us to be members of a Community of Saints. Surely, the inspiration of the real Mary is needed to assist us in our common vocation. May she help us to say "Yes" to the Lord each day as we face the inevitable pain of our human pilgrimage.

Jews Heartened with John Paul II

By MARC H. TANENBAUM

Rabbi Tanenbaum, a leader in Jewish-Christian relations, is national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee.

"He was the friendliest of the Polish Catholic bishops toward the Jews of Poland, and he was among the most vigorous in his rejection of anti-Semitism."



Special

That was the description of Karol Cardinal Wojtyla of Cracow given to me by a Polish Catholic priest in the United States three days following the election of the Polish prelate as the 263rd Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.

This evaluation of Pope John Paul II's attitudes towards Jews and Judaism should be taken seriously, I believe, for several reasons:

First, those views come from Father Henri d'Anjou of Portchester, N.Y., who lived in Poland and personally helped save the lives of a large number of Jews from certain death at the hands of the Nazis. Second, Father d'Anjou was a personal acquaintance of the new Pope when he was a priest and with whom he met frequently between 1952 and 1956. And, lastly and importantly, Father d'Anjou's positive impressions were confirmed for us in an overseas telephone conversation this week between the new director of Foreign Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, Abraham Karlikow, and the president of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, Maciej Jakubowicz of Cracow.

From these conversations and from others conducted with reliable sources in the Vatican this week, the following portrait of "the track record" of Cardinal Wojtyla toward Polish Jewry emerges:

Around 1964, there were a series of desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in Cracow, including defilements of tombstones over Jewish graves. It was widely believed

that these anti-Semitic actions were inspired or carried out by agents of the Polish Communist party and/or the secret police. Archbishop Wojtyla called upon Catholic students attending the University of Cracow to clean and restore the defiled tombstones and to repair the Jewish cemeteries.

Subsequently, Archbishop Wojtyla delivered a public sermon during a large Corpus Christi procession in which he condemned the Communist functionaries for their anti-Jewish acts, and called upon them to desist from any further hostile actions against the remnant Jewish population.

His Chancery published a journal of high academic quality called *Common Weekly*. Archbishop Wojtyla personally authorized the publication of a series of articles in that journal commemorating the victims of the Nazi holocaust, specifically the Jewish victims, as well as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of April 1943. In addition, he supported the publication of a series of articles and book reviews on Jewish history, religion and culture.

Much has been made of the fact that the new Pope studied at "an underground seminary." Father d'Anjou, who attended the same seminary, told me the significance of that fact lies in knowing that that seminary, and other underground schools like it, were vigorous centers "of anti-Nazi ideology and resistance."

In terms of his anti-Nazi and anti-Communist positions, Pope John Paul II appears to hold the same ideological orientation as did his predecessor, Pope John Paul I.

According to the president of the Jewish religious communities in Poland, Maciej Jakubowicz, "Throughout his years as Bishop of Cracow, Karol Wojtyla was always approachable by Jews and, periodically, he used to inquire what was happening to the Jews, particularly in relation to their religious life and their religious institutions."