

Catholic Press Month

voice to be heard' . . . Pope John Paul II

What's Good About the 'Good News?'

By Bishop Norbert F. Gaughan

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An important development coming from Vatican II is the scriptural revolution, especially the revival and growth of love among Catholics for the Gospel. Thanks to the work of truly talented scripture scholars, this generation of Catholics has the opportunity to know more about the scriptures than any other in the history of the Church. Now each Sunday we proclaim that "this is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus." Lest the people miss the point, some enthusiasts will hold up the book and say, "This is the Good News of the Lord Jesus."

What is this Good News that we proclaim? Good news for whom? Good news about what? Good news for what purpose? In their attitudes, people provide a variety of responses.

Unfortunately some have a tendency to read into that phrase, "Good News," what they mean by good news. Others take the word "good" to mean happy. The Gospel means happy news. We are called to happiness.

Thus, for these the mark of the Catholic should be that he is a happy person. But to them that means one who goes around bubbling over, or one who, ostrich-like, denies that there is anything bad in the living out of the human life in the world and in the Church. They would say to those who insist, "But there is something called 'sin,' there are things called human frailties, there are faults and shortcomings in all the members of the Body of the Church," that such Catholics are traitors to the Good News.

Still another segment would like to believe the Good News should mean only "joyous" news. They point to the Scriptures where Jesus says, "I have come that you may have joy and have it more abundantly." That's true.

But does it mean that joy all the time and in every situation is to be the hallmark by which we should be known? Because joy means — at least for some — a simplistic kind of reaction: no tears, no pain, no hurt, no awareness of the fact that because of sin in the world some bad things will happen even to those who believe.

Thus, they would see a Catholic who is occasionally impelled to tears, as one who insults God, is ungrateful to Him, denies the spirit of Vatican II, and is unfaithful to his Christian calling. Like some modern characters from Alice in Wonderland, they would say that we should turn our attention away from these things' even ignore them, and concentrate only on the joys.

Then there are those for whom the Good News signifies that all our tasks will be successful, all our projects will be easily done, all our victories be gained without serious effort.

The Good News means that in everything God is on our side and all will turn out the way we want it. Because, after all, would God let us down?

There may even be a few who would think the Good News means, good for us, good for me, good for my views, my opinions, my choices, my personal beliefs. If there dare be any who do not agree, they must be enemies of the Good News.

All Catholics have a duty to examine themselves on their understanding of the "Good News." We in the Catholic press should do that regularly. Our task is to report what happens because the Good News came into the world through Christ, and what possession of it means in our day to Christians, to the local churches, to the Church in the world.

Should we be surprised there are some who would believe that the Good News encompasses some of the attitudes described? There are indeed some who want the Catholic press to automatically deny all wrongdoing, to conceal injustices even when it is claimed they are done for the good of the Church, not dwell upon our projects which were misdirected, badly done, or which might bring some unfavorable publicity (as they might view it) upon the Church and its works.

There are yet a few in the Catholic press who will only report the happy news, or treat some irrelevant or minor church doings as a major, describe the comings and goings of the clergy as if these were the signs of the Parousia, the coming of the Lord.

Yes, we have met those who want the Catholic press to be like the song, "Home on the Range," with no discouraging word ever to be heard, or mentioned, or hinted at.

Possibly we should look at the words "Good News" and see exactly what it is to which we are called.

The Good News means that by His passion, death and resurrection Christ has overcome sin,

our anxiety, despair, doubt and death. It states that if we are true to Him these victories He will win for us. Not that we shall win them by ourselves, but that He will be the One Who will overcome, and we in Him.

What is the Good News? That the Lord Jesus has made it possible for us to accept hurt and pain and even betrayal. To those who think that the sign of peace and our words about it are all that is needed to bring peace to the Church, Christ reminds us these are not meant to be grand, sentimental gestures.

In each Eucharist the priest/celebrant says just before that sign of peace, "Lord Jesus, You said, 'My peace I leave you, My peace I give you.'" Christ had said of that peace, "not as the world gives do I give."

So the good news of the world is not the Good News of Christ. It is not a celebration of the glories of man, but an understanding that in uniting our works with the passion and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we can go about our tasks and duties in this world with the sure knowledge that He will transform pains and hurts.

If we in the Catholic press are to proclaim the Good News, we are called to do this as Christian realists. We are asked to remind our readers and ourselves that the Word unfolds in our midst, that Jesus and His Father are never far from us, and how, O wonderful event, even our flawed human errors can be used by Him to achieve His peace and His kingdom.

What is Good News? Our first reading from Deuteronomy tells us: "God is near." We learned later in salvation history that God was always close to His people and in time became One with them through the Incarnation.

The Good News is that this God is One Who dialogues with us. He invites us to talk with Him; yes, even to talk back to Him so that He can then respond in love and comfort.

The Good News is that God desires to hear our words responding to His Word.

What message can the Catholic press tell about the Good News as we apply the lessons of Vatican II?

First, it can continue to remind Catholics that the conflict and tensions in the Church are not always unhealthy. The debates of the last 20 years have helped the Church understand the basic call of the council. It invited all Catholics to the dialogue, with each other and with the world. By this we were enriched.

The Catholic press can keep reminding the members of the Church that Vatican II declares our interdependence: all members of the Church, all persons involved in its tasks, ministries and offices are for the building up in love of that Church. All are needed to do that task, and together, not singly.

The Catholic press can renew the call of the Vatican Council to greater participation in the life of the Church by all its people. Each of us is Christ's disciple; everyone has a task to speak out the words of faith to one another. We, the press, can provide the means, the forum, the starting point.

Finally, the Catholic press in its call for Christians to participate, must make clear the difference, that the officers and those who perform duties in the Church as representatives, not substitutes.

A substitute supplants the other person and never allows him to do his job. A representative acts in a provisional way — that is, until the other is able and ready to do that to which he has been called.

The clerical office is not to substitute for the lay disciple. It merely helps prepare the layman to do that to which he has been called.

That, too, is true of the Catholic press. We can help Catholics think; we are not to do their thinking for them, in place of them. We can, however challenge them, invite them to grow in their discipleship.

Above all, we carry on the dialogue in charity.

This is the first law of the Church. Note how lovingly did the Word become Flesh. See how He won over His disciples. He did not demand, coerce, threaten. He spoke with authority, the authority of love. He only showed in His person how beautiful and gentle the Word of God can be, and told us this was an image of the Father's love. Because He loved them until the death, Christ won forever His disciples, His little flock.

That's what we in our ministry of communication are also called to do. We do this with the belief we are proclaiming the Good News in deed, not in word.

Good News for the People of God

By Father Norman J. Muckerman, CSSR

This year the theme for Catholic Press Month is "Good News for the People of God." For all of us who work in and for the Catholic press, this message should be not only encouraging and stimulating but also as binding as a rule of life. A contract. A mandate from on high.

The message itself is as old and momentous as the first Christmas and as new and precious as Christmas past. When it was first proclaimed by Christ of angels upon the night air of Bethlehem, not many of God's people heard it — only a few shepherds of the region. St. Luke tells us, who were "living in the fields and keeping night watch by turn over their flock."

What is significant is that, again according to Luke, once they heard the Good News they acted on it, went over to Bethlehem to "see the event" and, having witnessed what had happened, reported it to others. These in turn were astonished by what the shepherds told them.

Do we have here perhaps a hint of the heavenly Father's plan for spreading the Good News? His messengers to announce it, his people to receive it and in turn transmit it to their own world, their neighbors, friends, relatives, all who would have ears to hear and eyes to see.

And just to push the image a little farther and carry it through the span of 20 centuries, what

sort of messengers are we called to be, we who through the Catholic press directly or indirectly bring God's Word to his people?

Here, I think, is where the notion of mandate must take over, to affect not only our sense of ministry but also our sense of responsibility. As modern-day messengers (angels, if you will), we in the Catholic press are called to present the Good News clearly and correctly, even when — as sometimes happens — the news is bad. We are also called to truly care about the Good News, which means that we take it to our own hearts and make it part of our own lives. It means that we also do whatever we can to see that the news is presented interestingly and intelligently so that our readers make it a bigger part of their lives, and then extend it to anyone who will listen to them.

Catholic Press Month makes serious demands of all of us. Certainly, it calls for better promotion of the Catholic press. It likewise calls for better production. It is a good time to remind ourselves that it is God's Good News which in so many diverse roles we bring to his people. It is also a good time to remember that we must always handle it with care.

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