

worldview

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THE POPE AT THE U.N.

The principal question to ask, after Pope Paul has returned to Rome, is whether his visit had more than ceremonial significance. Did his visit merely occasion a high emotional peak, as one commentator suggested, from which there will be a rapid descent to normalcy and a business-as-usual routine? Has the cause of peace in the world been *actively* furthered by his visit?

No one can offer a complete answer to these questions now, but some definite and some speculative answers are possible. Pope Paul came on a visit to the United Nations, not the United States, and this is important to remember. Nevertheless the warmth of his welcome when he arrived in this country confirmed and, as it were, ratified the improved relations that now exist between Catholics and other American citizens. This is a consequence, it may fairly be said, of an increased maturity and sophistication on the part of both the papacy and the American people. One hundred years ago the fortunes and reputation of the Catholic Church were at a low ebb. Many people derided the First Vatican Council and declared that the Catholic Church had outlived its usefulness; Pius IX in turn bitterly opposed any accommodation of the Church to the modern world. The intervening years have been marked by religious fights and factionalism. But increased understanding, good sense and ecumenical efforts gradually prevailed. Americans were able to elect a Catholic President and a Pope was able to address an encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, to all men of good will and see it readily accepted. It is this vastly improved relation that was confirmed by the visit of Pope Paul.

Beyond this the Pope's visit drew American Catholics further into a consideration of international affairs. Modern Popes could fairly be described as internationalists; American Catholics could not. The actual presence of a Pope speaking before the united assembly at the U.N. will have a greater immediate impact on American Catholics than any of the series of encyclicals and admonitions that have issued from the papacy

during this century. It has always been clear that numbered among the detractors of the U.N. are some prominent and articulate Catholics. They will, no doubt, continue their attacks, but they will no longer be able to argue that they are moving with the main current of Catholic thinking today.

But to dwell only on the reaction of Catholics to the Pope's visit is to narrow the significance of his visit to highly parochial terms. By his trips abroad, almost more than any other single action, Pope Paul has shown his desire to overcome the limits of a narrow parochialism that has for too long been the home of the Catholic Church. When Pope Paul said to the members of the U.N. that "this organization represents the obligatory path of modern civilization and of world peace," he indicated clearly that other pilgrims on this path would have for company the Church he represented.

This is to draw the Church itself into the mainstream of contemporary life, to engage it in the perplexing search for peace and justice, for a life that is worthy of the inherent dignity of man. In affirming that the Church makes her own "the voice of the poor, the disinherited, the suffering, of those who hunger and thirst for justice, for the dignity of life, for freedom, for well-being and progress," he further assured the world that the Church would not be, as it has sometimes been in the past, an agent of reaction or the status quo.

But what the Pope himself termed the highest point of his speech was his call to peace. "Peace, it is peace that must guide the destinies of peoples and of all mankind." This marks a hope, a goal, an aspiration that is shared by many. But even among these there is a measure of skepticism that remained largely untouched by the lofty terms of the papal address. Some point out, for example, that although this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the U.N., it also marks

the twentieth year since the first military use of the atomic bomb. And if the U.N. has grown since its beginning, so has our armaments system. Is our thermonuclear deterrence composed of offensive weapons (which the Pope said we should forego) or is it, they ask, based on defensive weapons (which the Pope acknowledged to be presently necessary)?

Such questions, which could be extended and developed, are not lightly to be dismissed. They constitute the rough, seemingly intractable material with which the statesmen, politician and technician must work. But speaking from a long historical experience, the Pope is not unaware of the practical problems that must be overcome along the path he marked out. Nor is he unaware that man is often a "weak, changeable and even wicked being." Nevertheless, in full possession of this knowledge, the Pope spoke of peace as a goal that it is possible for man to attain. "Peace,"

he said, "is not built up only by means of politics, by the balance of forces and of interests. It is constructed with the mind, with ideas, with works of peace."

It is worth noting that he did not here slight political action and the balancing of forces; he simply said that these are not enough. The cruel, simplistic choices which others would impose upon any approach to the political order, he rejected. His approach, at least as it is stated in his message to the U.N., parallels that of John XXIII. If changes cannot be made suddenly, yet they can be made. But in order to work for them with full effectiveness one must be convinced that such changes are possible. In this context resolute hope is a sturdy virtue. The full measure of Pope Paul's speech will be the extent to which he persuaded and supported the best realistic hopes of those who attended to his message.

J. F.

in the magazines

"Can War Be Just in a Nuclear Age?" Thomas Corbishley, S.J., takes a look at the development of traditional Catholic teaching on the just war and finds that any discussion of the subject must include consideration of both "practical possibility" and the "Christian ideal" (*New Blackfriars*, September).

"It seems to me fair to suggest that the just war doctrine arose precisely because Christians felt almost instinctively that war needed to be 'justified,'" Father Corbishley writes: "In other words, Christians believed that the Christian ideal demands that men should live at peace with one another, since only so will Christ's own teaching about brotherly love be fully realized. To this extent the primitive Christian attitude was a reaction both against the Jewish tradition of a militant religion and, of course, against the Roman tradition of wars of conquest. In this, as in other matters, the Constantinian settlement was something of a mixed blessing. *In hoc signo vincas* can hardly be taken as an authentic interpretation of Christ's attitude to warfare. It seems necessary to maintain that the pure theory of the Christian ideal can be maintained in its perfection only by keeping alive the teaching of the complete pacifist."

But "on the other hand," Father Corbishley con-

tinues, "the insistent question poses itself: what is to be done in practice? The Christian living in this only partially Christian world is faced with the sort of dilemma which faced the Jews at the time of the Maccabean revolt. Their law taught them that fighting on the Sabbath was wrong. Yet, this put them at such a disadvantage in face of their unbelieving enemies, that they found it necessary to depart from the requirements of their law in order that they might survive. And indeed, Christ himself whilst teaching the ideal of non-violence, turning the other cheek and so on, nevertheless implicitly, and indeed explicitly, recognized the practical necessity of the use of power. 'The strong man armed,' the soldier and the centurion were not held up to reprobation" by Him.

"In a sense then," the author says, "the doctrine of the just war represents a compromise, a compromise, if you like, with something which is of its nature un-Christian. It should be seen as representing a genuine attempt to *limit* the degree of evil to be found in *any* human situation. Clearly the purpose of the Christian is to bring about in this world a state of good will, justice and peace. The end is clear. The debate is about the means to that end.