

# CORRESPONDENCE



## Mass Audiences

Liege, Belgium

To the Editors: Please do not take "à la lettre" Henri Fesquet's assertions, "Today few French citizens enter a church unless for a christening, a marriage or a funeral." [News & Views, May 12].

Here we do not consider Henri Fesquet as a prophet. The attendance at Mass has diminished in France as everywhere since Vatican Council II. Personally I am surely more often in French churches than Fesquet and everywhere I find a good audience at Mass, even in the suburbs of Paris.

(REV.) JEAN OGER, O.P.

## Chesterton

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

To the Editors: I hope it is not too late to add a comment to the interesting exchange of opinions between Professor Jeffrey Meyers and Robert Knille about Chesterton and Margaret Canovan's new book on him (*Commonweal*, 26 May, 1978).

Professor Meyers is wrong if he thinks well-informed modern critics would accept his jibes about Chesterton's "anti-semitism" and "fascism." The alleged anti-semitism is too vast a subject to be dealt with briefly. But it is worth pointing out that there is no evidence that Chesterton had any personal anti-semitic feeling of any kind. Although anti-semites always claim that some of their best friends are Jews, this, of course, is seldom true. But it is true that almost half of Chesterton's closest and life-long friends really were Jews. One of his earlier poems was a protest about the persecution of Jews in Russia. And as Rabbi Stephen Wise has pointed out, the essays Chesterton wrote towards the end of his life, made him one of the first English authors to protest the Hitlerite persecution of the Jews in Germany.

The charge of fascism against this

(Continued on page 543)

NEWS & VIEWS: 514

THE DEATH OF THE POPE: THE EDITORS: 515

WASHINGTON REPORT: Death Near and Far; Frank Getlein 516

DEFENSE AND THE WARSAW PACT: Bogdan Denitch 518

AMERICAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: Bernard J. Cooke 520

DEATH WITH DIGNITY: Jim Castelli 525

THE NAZIS AND THE POLICE: John Druska 527

VERSE: Winston Weathers 524; Sr. Mary Ellen Dougherty, S.S.N.D. 530;

Joseph Payne Brennan 519

THE SCREEN: *Estival Festivals*: Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. 531

THE JUST WAR: REVIVING AN OLD DEBATE: James Finn 532

TROMPING ON BABIES: Martin Green 535

BOOKS: Eugene Hillman, Colman McCarthy, Robert Miola, Daniel M. Murtaugh,

Thomas S. Klise 536

ILLUSTRATIONS: Front cover: *Upper, New Haven, Conn., 1786, from The Church of Our Fathers by Roland H. Bainton (Scribner's)*; lower, from *Mortal Lessons by Richard Selzer (Simon & Schuster)*.

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COMMONWEAL

232 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016

Telephone: (212) MU 3-2042

A review of Public Affairs, Literature and the Arts. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Printed in the USA and published bi-weekly by Commonweal Publishing Co. Copyright © 1978 Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc.—US and Canada: \$18 a year. Foreign \$20. Single copy 75c. Special two-year rate \$32. Foreign \$36.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, and Book Review Digest. Microfilms from Vol. 1, 1924; to date available through University Microfilms; 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. Serials Data Program No.: ISSN 0010-3330.

## THE DEATH OF THE POPE

It was the moment he had predicted often—even five days before—over the past several years, a moment for which he, as well as any man alive, was indeed prepared. Sunday morning's paper said his doctor had ordered complete rest. The afternoon's radio announced that he was dead. And the day Giovanni Battista Montini—for 15 years Pope Paul VI—passed from this life, Catholics celebrated the feast of the Transfiguration and heard the gospel where, on the mountain top, the apostles Peter, James and John suddenly see the face of Jesus shine bright as the sun and his clothes as white as light. It is both a symbolic hint of the true natural glory hidden within every human life and a promise of eternal life to those who suffer for the Kingdom.

Historians, in the long run, will most likely speak well of Pope Paul. We say "in the long run" not just because any great man's life demands perspective to be understood, nor because the Vatican as a not-very-open society is slow to let historians know the full truth, but also because the areas in which he lost the support of so many Christians—those dealing with sex—are so personal and so powerful that it may be a little while before we can best say what kind of a leader and shepherd he has been.

But at his best, though physically frail and personally withdrawn, he was a big man. Intellectually brilliant—though perhaps too committed to one French theological tradition—his heart and mind reached out to the whole world. He embodied the best of the Catholic Action movement which flourished after World War II and struggled to bring Europe social and economic justice through Christian Democracy. In the tradition of the

great social encyclicals he taught—to a compromised church and a capitalistic, gluttonous, secular society that the earth's resources were destined for the use of all and that the hoarding of land, wealth and food and the unbridled arms race went against reason and the laws of God.

Then, when the ideal of Christian Democracy failed to materialize, he was also tolerant of the new accommodations with the Left. Indeed, the picture of Paul with his arms outstretched is an apt symbol of man—offering the embrace of peace to Christians and Jews, believers and unbelievers, especially the poor and oppressed, and to children.

But if some of his central insights in *Humanae Vitae*—the value of each human life and the need to link sexual expression and procreation—were valid, this unfortunate cyclical condemning all forms of contraception also represents his two greatest failures in understanding. First he acted, against the advice of his own theological commission and against the consensus of the faithful about how love is best fostered in marriage, because he was trying to maintain the authority of the papacy. Indeed it was this exaggerated notion of the papacy's authority that made him cling to the job years after the age he required other bishops to resign and after he could no longer give the vigorous leadership the church needs.

Second, in his absolute opposition to birth control, married priests and women priests, he failed to com-

prehend the world's and even the church's new and more positive understanding of married love and the dignity of women.

Personally, though he seemed aloof, he was extremely sensitive and emotional. But he worried too much, remained too isolated from the ordinary experiences, and seemed too willing to hear the curial tale-bearers who warned him that everything was falling apart. Thus, ironically, one of the holiest and most loving of Popes may also be remembered as one of the saddest.

If Paul VI was a transitional pope who held the institution together and consolidated the moderate reforms of the Council, today the church needs a strong prophetic leader who will really bring the church into the modern world, someone who will once and for all escape the bonds that in modern times have kept the first figure of the universal Church a "prisoner of the Vatican"—the spiritual and cultural bonds that have constrained as thoroughly as the physical isolation and refusal to travel which Paul did at least overcome. Someone, consequently, educated outside the narrow Roman canon law training most bishops receive; someone confident enough in the Spirit's presence not to be threatened by change; someone who, by his simple, open lifestyle, devotion to personal and intellectual freedom, justice and human rights, can help a non-believing world and a half-believing church look to Rome—or to wherever the Pope may be—and see the face of Christ shining bright again.

## WASHINGTON REPORT

### DEATH NEAR AND FAR

The military aid to Turkey has been solved for the moment at least and, as is depressingly usual with problem-solving these days, nobody seems to have learned a thing from it.

When the Turks invaded Cyprus in assistance to the Turkish-Cypriots in their endless struggle against the Greek-Cypriots, this country cut off military aid to the invaders because U.S. military aid is supposed to be used only to defend the recipient country—and thus by extension, the rest of the Free World, including us—against the Soviets who are thought to be lurking just over the frontiers of most countries in the world awaiting only the time when U.S. military aid falters for a moment to come down like the wolf on the fold.

In the Turkish-Greek-Cypriot instance, it was the Turks who came down like the wolf on the fold and they came down on the Greeks. We were astounded. When we gave the Turks the arms, we were certain they would be only used to defend that free country

from the encirclements and other threats by the dread Russians. What a shock to see the Turks use them to shoot up the Greeks.

To be sure, if anyone in government had had any notion of Greek and Turkish history, he might have suspected some such outcome from arming the two nations. For at least 500 years, the Greeks have regarded the Turks as their worst enemy and the Turks, on the record, have regarded the Greeks as placed upon the earth for the Turks to slaughter and otherwise oppress. On the other hand, of course, it is worth remembering that the present situation on Cyprus was initiated by a Greek invasion in favor of the Greek-Cypriots over the Turkish-Cypriots, as a last ditch stand of the former Greek junta, the classic dictatorial gambit of solidifying domestic control through foreign adventure. In that case, it didn't work and the Turks have been in effective occupation of what seems to anyone as more than the fair share of the island ever since.