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The Third Sunday of Advent

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites (to him) to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Messiah." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

U.S. Anglicans and Catholics discuss "The Gift of Authority"

WASHINGTON — Meeting from September 12-15, 2002, members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States (ARC-USA) concluded an in-depth discussion of The Gift of Authority, the last document released by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The text is the third major agreed statement on authority in the church released by the international commission and is known for suggesting 11 points on which agreement has been deepened or extended, naming a number of specific issues related to authority facing Anglicans and other issues facing Catholics, and recommending ways for Anglicans and Catholics to make more visible the communion they already have.

ARC-USA began a paragraph by paragraph review of The Gift of Authority at its March 2002 meeting in Menlo Park, California. That review was not completed, and so at the September meeting at the College of Preachers, Washington, DC, members spent an entire day summing up their views and making plans for a draft response to be prepared. They were aided in their discussion by materials prepared by Professor Mary Hines and the Rev. Dr. Ellen Wondra. The task of drafting a response to be discussed at the next meeting has been handed over to the Rev. Dr. Robert Imbelli and Dr. William Franklin.

On the exercise of authority in the church ARC-USA is conducting its own study. In 1999, the U.S. dialogue released an Agreed Report on the Local/Universal Church. Over several meetings, the dialogue has discussed papers on the authority of the independent provinces of the Anglican Communion and the role of episcopal conferences in the Catholic Church. With the help of Professor Jon Nilson and an overview of the authority project which he had prepared, members of the dialogue at the September meeting identified the need for additional work on the history of these structures in the Catholic Church. They also agreed to review an outline of the next agreed report which Professor Nilson and Rev. Wondra will draft for the next time the dialogue meets.

Two members of ARC-USA, Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers and Professor Joanne Pierce, are drafting a study guide on the agreements on Eucharist and ministry which have already been received by the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church. A detailed outline of that study guide was presented by Rev. Meyers for a thorough discussion by ARC-USA at this meeting. The dialogue is expecting to review a draft when it meets again.

At the beginning of their meeting in September, Bishop John Chane of the Epis-

copal Diocese of Washington welcomed the members of ARC-USA to Washington, DC, and the College of Preachers, located on the grounds of the Washington National Cathedral.

Archbishop William Levada of San Francisco and Bishop Edwin F. Gulick, Jr., of Kentucky serve as co-chairmen of the U. S. dialogue. In addition to the co-chairmen, attending the September meeting of ARC-USA were: Bishop Barry Howe of Kansas City (MO), Bishop John Dunne of Rockville Centre (NY), Rev. Dr. Michael Battle, Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers, Rev. Dr. Robert Pichard, Rev. Dr. Ellen Wondra, Dr. Marsha Dutton, Dr. R. William Franklin, Rev. Canon Dr. J. Robert Wright, Bishop Christopher Epting (staff for the Episcopal Church), Professor Mary Hines, Rev. Dr. Robert Imbelli, Professor Jon Nilson, Rev. Dr. Francis A. Sullivan, Rev. Dr. George Tavard, Rev. Msgr. Robert Trisco, Dr. John Borelli (staff for the USCCB) and Rev. Dirk Reinken and Mr. Benjamin Brown taking minutes. Rev. Dr. Arthur Kennedy (Director of the USCCB Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs) was also present at some of the sessions. This was the 53rd meeting of ARC-USA since its foundation in 1965.

Pope cuts back schedule as Christmas approaches

VATICAN— Pope John Paul II is cutting back his schedule, especially his travel, during December, in an apparent effort to save his strength for the public ceremonies of the Christmas season.

The Vatican has announced that the Pontiff has invited the street-sweepers of Rome to visit his Christmas crèche, rather than traveling outside the Vatican walls to visit their crèche. That invitation preserves an annual meeting with the street-sweepers, but it breaks a tradition that dates

back to the days of Pope Paul VI.

Every year, the street-sweepers of Rome prepare an elaborate Christmas crèche, which is, by reputation, the finest in the city. The crèche is constructed of materials brought from the Holy Land each year; this year's model will be built partially of wood provided by the Franciscan monastery in Bethlehem. Pope Paul began the tradition of visiting that crèche, and John Paul II has made the visit each year of his pontificate.

The street-sweepers' crèche

is displayed at a municipal public-works building, not far from the Vatican. But this year Pope John Paul is being particularly careful to limit his travel, in recognition of his physical frailty.

The Pope has invited the street-sweepers to visit his crèche: the display in the Clementine room of the apostolic palace. There are, in fact, many different Christmas displays around the Vatican, including the large crèche in the middle of St. Peter's Square. But the Clementine room is the easiest of the sites for the Pope to reach from his own apartment.

The Prince of Peace: The Catholic Church and the Threat of War in Iraq

Editor's Note: This is the first part of a perspective by Bishop Edward K. Braxton on "A Statement on Iraq," a document approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at the group's November meeting in Washington, DC. To read the statement and other documents approved by the Bishops, as well as news from the USCCB, go to the group's website - usccb.org.

During these days before Christmas, these days of Advent, we hear a great deal of so-called Christmas music on the radio and in the shopping malls. Of course most of it is about the vague reality of the "holidays" and not about the Holy Days celebrating the great and tremendous mystery of the "Word made Flesh," the Incarnation. G.F. Handel's classic oratorio "Messiah" is one of the great exceptions. While listening to this splendid music you will hear the chorus singing these words of the prophet, Isaiah. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulders. And his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Since Jesus Christ, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate, is the Prince of Peace, we Catholics and all Christians are called to be peacemakers in our own hearts, our families, our communities and our world. Yet, when the Holy Father and the American Bishops speak about the importance of seeking a peaceful solution to the growing conflict between U.S. government and the government of Iraq, many Catholic people and Catholic commentators in the media dismiss our concerns and challenges as "unrealistic, out of touch with the real world." Now, with Christmas just days

away, a great number of international experts predict that our country will be at war with Iraq in the early months of the new year. As you formulate a response to this crisis in your own heart and soul, I ask you to be attentive to my voice and the voices of my brothers in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

It is obvious to everyone



Bishop Edward K. Braxton

that our nation, Iraq and the world face grave choices about war and peace, and pursuing justice and security. These are not only military and political choices, but also moral ones because they involve matters of life and death. Traditional Catholic teaching offers ethical principles and moral criteria that should guide these critical choices.

Three months ago, Bishop Wilton Gregory, President of our Conference, wrote President George Bush to welcome efforts to focus the world's attention on Iraq's refusal to comply with several United Nations resolutions over the past eleven years, and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. This letter raised serious questions about the moral legitimacy of any preemptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq. Taking into account developments since then, especially the recent unanimous action of the U.N. Security Council, we still have grave concerns about the justification for war.

We Bishops have no illusions about the behavior or intentions of the Iraqi government. The Iraqi leader-

ship must cease its internal repression, end its threats to its neighbors, stop any support for terrorism, abandon its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction, and destroy all such existing weapons. We welcome the fact that the United States has worked to gain new action by the U.N. Security Council to ensure that Iraq meets its obligation to disarm. We join others in urging Iraq to comply fully with this latest Security Council resolution. We fervently pray that all involved will act to ensure that the current U.N. search for weapons in Iraq, will not simply be a prelude to war but a way to avoid it.

While I cannot predict what will happen in the coming weeks, my fellow Bishops and I wish to reiterate questions that may still have to be addressed. While I have no definitive conclusions, I do have serious concerns and questions that may help you to reach sound moral judgments. I acknowledge that Catholics and other people of good will may differ on how to apply traditional "just war" norms in particular cases, especially when events are moving rapidly and the facts are not altogether clear. Based on the facts that are known to us, the Bishops of this country continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq. This is because there is no clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature. With the Vatican, the bishops from the Middle East and those from around the world, we fear that resorting to war, under present circumstances and in light of current public information, would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching that allow the use of military force as a last resort.

(To be continued)

Oppression

fight sin, we strive for virtue, we seek to build unity, justice and peace.

Hence, all oppression must cease.

To welcome the good news that "A Savior is born for us," is to welcome the very power that does save us from sin and oppression, and to allow it to save us. To welcome the Savior is also to accept the obligation to participate with Him in saving others. The love Christ shows us in His birth places a burden on us: as He intervenes to save us, we are to intervene to save one another. He came to stand between us and our oppressors, and it brought Him to the cross. Celebrating Christmas indicates our willingness to stand between our neighbors and their oppressors. When we welcome our Savior, we welcome their Savior.

Nothing is more oppressive than abortion. No form of slavery has ever been worse in all human history. No assertion is more degrading than to say one is a non-person, a non-entity, whose life is not recognized and

whose death does not count. So bold is this evil, in fact, that it not only destroys the unborn, but seeks to punish those who try to save them.

So be it. We will accept the task; we will share the burden. "In His name, all oppression shall cease." We will participate in liberating our unborn brothers and sisters. We are the people who have heard the good news of the angels: "A Savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord!" We will not be merely hearers of the Word. We will not celebrate a superficial Christmas that seeks the joys of the season but doesn't strive for the victories of the season. We will not be people who proclaim that a Savior has come, but who do nothing to save anybody. Rather, we

will commit ourselves to fight and end all oppression, as we welcome the coming of the One who is Life.

Contact Priests for Life at PO Box 141172, Staten Island, NY 10314; Tel: 888-PFL-3448, 718-980-4400; Fax: 718-980-6515; email: mail@priestsforlife.org; web: www.priestsforlife.org

Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone to head Archdiocese of Genoa

VATICAN CITY - Pope John Paul II appointed Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as archbishop of Genoa. Archbishop Bertone is replacing Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, who was appointed archbishop of another major Italian diocese, Milan, last July.

The new archbishop of Genoa, 68, was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's right hand at Doctrines of the

Faith since June 13, 1995. John Paul II gave him the responsibility of publishing the third part of the Fatima "secret".

Born in Romano Canavese, in the province of Turin, on Dec. 1, 1934, Tarcisio Bertone soon discovered his Salesian vocation, making his first religious profession on Dec. 3, 1950. He was ordained a priest July 1, 1960.

After receiving a doctorate in canon law from the

Salesian University, he was given the chair of special moral theology there in 1967. In 1976 he headed the school of canon law, where he taught ecclesiastical public law until 1991.

He collaborated in the last phase of the revision of the Code of Canon Law, which was promulgated in 1983, and directed the working group that translated it into Italian.