

A time for the 'alienated' to reestablish c

By ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM D. BORDERS

At Christmas time we tend to forget the difficulties that our city and our world are facing. We gather together with our families, and at least for a day believe that what Jesus did thousands of years ago has truly brought peace to our world.

But reality shatters what we wish our Christmas could be. Russian armies are gathering at the Polish borders, NATO ministers make menacing statements about Russian troop movements. The hostages are still captives in Iran. We have no answer about the senseless killings of four American missionaries in El Salvador.

Closer to home, our city and our state governments are telling us that they will have to cut back on human services to people in need because there is not enough money in the state and city budgets to maintain them.

Because inflation rates are still rising, some Christmas gifts remain unpurchased. Credit at present prime rates makes it nearly impossible for people to realize a life long ambition of purchasing a home for their families.

As I reflected on these conditions in our lives, my personal prayer over the book of Isaiah has caused me to see again that our world is much like the world to which Isaiah spoke. At that time he said that people were in revolt against God. He also said that unless the will of God became a part of the lives of the Jewish nation they would not have peace in their time.

Isaiah was telling the people of his time something that has been growing in my thoughts for many months. The great prophet was telling the people of his time that they had lost a sense of the transcendent. And perhaps the reason for a lack of peace in our time is a similar lack, a lack of an understanding of who God is, a lack of the sense of the transcendent.

In the closing lines of the book of Genesis, the sacred author tells us that God grieved. He grieved because people did not understand Who He was and how everything they received had come from Him. The author of Genesis also tells us the story of Cain and Abel, reminding us that when people forget God and break their faith with Him, they soon break faith with others.

In a sense, God is telling us in the book of Genesis that the sin which alienates us from our God will inevitably alienate us from one another.

Is our society an alienated society? Are there not thousands of people in the cities and towns of Maryland who are alienated from themselves, unable to be in touch with their feelings? Are there not thousands of people who feel lonely and who live right next door to you and me? Are we not witnesses to people's hunger, their lack of heat, and the despair of their criminal acts?

Yes, ours is an alienated society!

Some would say that I am pessimistic in these words I have written. Perhaps I am. But I am reminded too of the words of Martin Luther King who wrote in his book, *Strength of Love*, "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles, and misguided (people)."

In our daily life we experience the skill, efficiency and dedication of the people of Maryland. The highway network curving into the center of Baltimore is just one example of dedication to growth. The growth in the counties of places like White Marsh, the increasing yields of Maryland farms, and the growing numbers of students who are graduated from our colleges each year point to the desire of our people for improvement and their ability to get things done. Most Maryland homes

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are warm and comfortable, and leisure time is increasing for all of us because we have learned to harness nature through science.

But what is the cost of this scientific achievement? What spiritual realities have been sacrificed to the gods of sophistication, technological superiority, and communications excellence?

I believe that as we enter into the spirit of Christmas 1980 we must admit that we have sacrificed many spiritual realities to the needs of our modern society.

But the same God who grieved in Genesis never forgets our need.

What is our need? Our need is to know God despite what appears to be his alienation from us. Because of sin God may seem remote from us. But God chooses to help us see Who He is. He clothed His Son in flesh because he loves us.

The mystery of God's love, then, is that He would send His Son to us so that He could forgive us our sinfulness. Jesus came into our world so that the very things which alienate us from our God and from one another could be healed. The cradle, in whose shadow there is always the cross, contained the person that would eventually be the bridge from our lives of sin to a life of love with God.

Jesus is the bridge, the mediator between God and ourselves. That struggling babe of Bethlehem takes on our sins, frees us from them, and gives us the ability to live our lives with God.

The meaning of Christmas is contained totally in this mystery of God's love. But if we have lost a sense of God, it will be difficult for us to realize the beauty of that love, and in that way we will remain alienated.

Christmas, then, gives us another chance to reflect on the importance of God in our lives. It is a reminder that the God who grieved in Genesis, loved us even more deeply than He grieved for us. If we accept His love, then we have stepped away from the alienation that is all around us.

But it is only in faith that we can accept His love; only in faith that we can overcome alienation.

So, Christmas, is a time of faith and a time for renewal of faith. It is a time for renewal of faith in Jesus Christ whom the scriptures tell us is the Prince of Peace.

Even though we renew our faith in Jesus, the troops massed on the Polish border will still be there, and we will wonder still about the hostages in Iran. But we will be able to look at those situations with the hope engendered by faith. We will know that we are no longer alienated from our God, or alienated from one another.

We will believe and experience that despite our human failings, there is peace in our world, the peace of people who live with the knowledge of God within them. Inner peace is part of the peace that Isaiah spoke of; the peace that comes from knowing and accepting God's will.

All of us have been called into existence by God, if we accept His love, then we will eventually be united with Christ. When we are united with Christ we are united with each other and peace and joy gives life meaning.

Our task now is to remember that we are called to live with faith, then to cling to the mystery of God's love made real through the presence of Jesus Christ.

In the spirit of faith and hope that Jesus' presence brings, I pray for God's blessing on all of you who are my brothers and sisters in His name. May your Christmas days be filled with the love and peace that the Infant Jesus came to bring.

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