World Commentary

The Climacteric*

When the history of the 1960's comes to be written, 1963 may be seen as a major turning-point, the year in which it became clear for all to see that the constructive efforts of men of goodwill were triumphing over the separative and destructive influences in the world.

Even though we are so close in time to the achievements of this remarkable year, we cannot fail to be impressed by the record. Foremost in the minds of many is the breakthrough in the religious field resulting from the Vatican Council, and the undoubted success of the liberal forces within the Roman Catholic Church in the election of Pope Paul to succeed Pope John. The signing of the partial nuclear test ban treaty is probably of equal significance, despite the fact that many advise caution and minimise the idea of a breakthrough, emphasising that it is still a long way to real disarmament.

The list of other achievements is long and the range of human activity in which they have been accomplished is correspondingly varied. Relations between the white and coloured races can never be the same again after recent movements in the United States, culminating in the hugely successful demonstration by both Negroes and whites in Washington last August. Similar progress towards freedom and reconciliation can be seen in various parts of Africa and Asia. Who could have imagined a year ago that in the middle of 1963 Jomo Kenyatta would be addressing white settlers in Kenya and be loudly applauded for what he had to say?

Many of the successes of the year have been achieved by the United Nations. The Development Decade and the Freedom From Hunger Campaign began to get into their stride. The conference on science and technology in Geneva (UNSCAT) could mark the start of a new era in their worldwide application to the problems of economic and social development. The gradual but steady improvement in the Congo situation, and the quiet dropping by the Russians of their effort to bring the cold war into the U.N. secretariat with their 'troika' proposals, are two other examples of the relaxation of tension and the growth of goodwill. A recent article in the American weekly, Saturday Review, made the perceptive comment that, whereas just over a year ago the U.N. was being criticised for its weakness, there are now those who charge the U.N. with having gained too much influence and power. These critics recognise an undoubted tendency (which many of them do not like) for the U.N. to become the only effective arbiter in the worst world
cres, and so start to exercise in em-

bryonic but practical form a function

of world government.

Such set-backs, failures and unre-
solved problems as the failure of the

Common Market negotiations for Bri-
tain’s entry and the threat of the

Chinese on the northern frontier of

India gain a different historical per-

spective in the light of this year of

breakthrough for men of goodwill.

**Improved Climate of Thought**

The really remarkable thing about

1963, however, is not merely that all

over the world and in nearly every

field has humanity taken major strides

in the direction of mutual under-

standing. It is that the whole climate

doctrine of thought and expectation about the

future is changing. In the long, hard

and often wearying years since 1945,

every step towards peace and goodwill

has had to be fought for against pre-

judice, suspicion, ideological blind-

ness, and— that most formidable of

all enemies—narrow-minded idealism.

It has seemed as if the forces of reaction

and separatism, fortified by unchanging

dogmas, could never be dislodged from

their strongholds of political, economic

and religious control.

The psychology of many of those

working for human welfare has there-

fore been unconsciously negative.

They have never really expected, at the

very roots of their thinking, that major

successes were within their grasp. The

forces against them seemed too power-

ful. These workers have had to persist

year after year with the expectation

that their efforts would achieve at

best a limited success. Very few people

can give of their best in these circum-

stances. Psychologically speaking, the

possibility of success is a necessary con-

dition for even moderate effort over a

long period. The expectation of

failure or a sense of frustration has con-

ditioned the minds of men of goodwill

far too long.

**The Future**

In 1963 however, such a significant

measure of success has been achieved

on so broad a front that it now be-

comes possible to revolutionise the most

deeply held attitudes of the majority

of men and women of goodwill. This

is the most important achievement

of all. A positive and optimistic psy-

chology can now emerge, confident of

the future and of the success of the

forces of light. If humanity is to expe-

rience the full fruit of success, three

things are required.

First, we must recognise the success

for what it is, and actively expect

future progress. The balance between

the positive, optimistic, forward-look-

ing forces in the world and the negative,

obstructive influences will not alter to

the fullest extent without a clear recog-

nition by the men and women of good-

will of the present achievement.

Second—and paradoxically—we

must be able to meet failure calmly

and not be cast down by the next

major crisis or crises. It is a common-

place of human progress that success

brings us face to face with new and

unexpected problems, just as problems
that are not solved continually recur. If we really believe that 1963 has been a breakthrough for men of goodwill, that fact will not be altered by subsequent failures and difficulties. A new, confident attitude will mean little if it is disturbed by the next crisis that comes along.

Third, humanity must learn to welcome the changes which progress brings. The Unknown—and that includes the results of change and the shape of the future—is feared by many. The negative and unconsciously pessimistic attitude of past decades has fed this fear and hindered progress. Fear of change has been a major ally of those who would maintain the status quo. Men of goodwill need to emphasise that the future will be secure because the tide has turned in favour of the forces of light, and that those who consciously or unconsciously resist man's progress are in retreat.

There is a final factor of profound significance for the future. Until very recently many of the forces leading humanity forwards appeared to be in conflict with one another. This was perhaps inevitable in a world seeking direction in the midst of chaos, but it is nonetheless regrettable that only too often men of goodwill found themselves on opposite sides. Today, however, the outlines of a new type of world community are emerging and the real relationship between the many different groups, schools of thought and ideologies is becoming obvious to many. Leaders in all spheres of activity can now acknowledge one another and see that although they may not necessarily act together and think alike at the outer practical level—this is not always possible or even useful, anyway—the various activities on which they are engaged are linked in an inner synthesis.

Humanity is in fact finding direction, a new sense of purpose and a better understanding of life that can reconcile the transcendental with the world of everyday and see the real unity in our diversity. We are learning that many of those who are the pioneers of the human family are characterised primarily by the desire to serve their fellow men and that this motive acts as a building force and gives an inner unity. It finds increasing expression in the attitude which Pope John demonstrated in his life and communicated to the world—that we should stop harping on our differences and simply love each other a little more.

*From the Oxford English Dictionary: "climacteric (adj.) constituting a turning-point, critical; (noun) critical point in physical development, end of any seven-year period in life, especially 63rd year."