

A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCY

Anxiety is the malady of the twentieth century, just as *ennui* or *weltschmerz* was said to be the *mal du siecle* of the nineteenth—at least among European intellectuals. But there is no doubt of the universality of our own century's sickness.

At the turn of this century, it seemed as though civilization had at last struck its stride. Progress was in the air in all fields of human endeavor and all that remained was to round out things that had almost reached perfection.

Then unexpected things started to happen all at once. The props were knocked out from under us in the arts and sciences, in philosophy, psychology and religion, in sociology, economics and politics. Scientists annihilated the stable, material universe by showing us that matter was non-existent; artists plunged into a maelstrom of unsuspected depths in the human soul, as did psychologists. Economists shattered the old school which taught that economic laws worked automatically for the common good, and "balance of power" politics exploded.

In the old days, what was a little war or depression? An "innocuous desuetude" which would soon be forgotten. But the wounds of 1914 and 1929 are still bleeding, and Communism has not stayed in one country. The situation in Korea does not promise us that the more comfortable world of 1900 will return.

The first half of this century has kept the world in a constant state of anxiety. But how constant can anxiety get? Eventually, it turns to apathy or relief, depending on what is in the offing.

Everybody knows that the global churning cannot be calmed until that *something* underneath it all, whose features cannot yet be seen, has worked itself out—but whether it is the collapse of civilization or the millennium, communism or freedom, a night of despotism or a spiritual rebirth, no one is sure. Hence the anxiety.

He would be a rash prophet indeed who dared to predict the next half-century for us. But is there not room for optimism? What is at work but the forces within human beings? And if what is within is not good, what does anything matter? And when can the storm be stilled but when the forces (good, I say) in *every* human being issue forth? And what is that but *association in equality*?

When that is achieved, people can then at last look at one another, as they do in the frescoes of Giotto, with understanding and with a smile.