

The Church In Our Day

(Today's installment of the American Bishops' Collective Pastoral, "The Church in Our Day," deals with the distinctive "voice of the laity" in the continuing life of the Church.)

How Does The Voice of the Laity Fit Into the Church's Authority?

The layman has his right to speak and to be heard in virtue of his status in the Church. Given the nature of the Church, his title to be heard on matters of faith and morals depends not upon his ability to teach with apostolic authority but upon his ability to witness the will of Christ, the judgment of the Gospel or the genuine good of the community. The voice of the Spirit is the more clearly heard when those in authority exercise the charism of their office in appropriate consultation with the laity. Scripture and Tradition assure us, however, that the layman never speaks to and for the community in the same way as must those who possess apostolic authority. No one would maintain, for example, that an individual layman or all the laity together should be heard by the Christian community in the same way that the Pope in his office of Chief Shepherd, or the College of Bishops are to be heard.

The voice of the laity must echo the authentic voice of Christ to the whole community which is heard in the community at large and therefore never in isolation from those who hold apostolic office. "Anyone who listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16) was not spoken to any one of the faithful but to the Church as Christ intended it. Hence, the layman who loses the sense of community loses his ability to echo Christ. Likewise, those in apostolic office who violate the limits of their authority imperil the sense of community and diminish their effectiveness in echoing Christ authentically.

Is The Voice of An Individual Inseparable From the Spirit of the Church?

The man held responsible by Christ because he would not hear the Church (cf. Matt. 18:15-17) was not accused of neglecting selected voices, or even the voice of the majority, but that of the Church as Christ constituted her. In no case does the Church listen to the voice of any individual as such for the statement of the faith of the community. An individual who does not reflect the spirit of the Church or respect its structure, speaks in a manner that the community cannot interpret. This is true of Pope, bishop, priest or layman, in each case with careful regard to the formalities of their respective roles. When an individual is heard, he is heard as an individual in the community, and thus not as an individual as such. He is an individual who has taken his place and found himself in the context of a wider reality, namely, the community of Christ.

Does the Laity Have a Role to Play in the Development But Not Definition of the Faith?

Even when the Church speaks officially, she relies on the continuing work of the faithful to clarify further what has been taught and to apply concretely the program specified in ecclesiastical pronouncements.

"While the definition of the Faith has been confided to the successor of the Apostles in union with the successor of St. Peter, or to the Pope speaking in their name, the de-

velopment of revelation has been confided to all who have been baptized in Jesus Christ" (Jean Guittou: "The Church and the Laity").

Is The Voice of the Laity to be Determined Statistically?

With the layman's increasing voice in the life of the developing Church comes a graver responsibility. The Church does not listen, as we have just said, to any individual as such. She listens in each voice for the echo of the ages, with their accumulated wisdom, and for the voice of eternity with its ultimate judgment. With a subtle discernment, she recognizes the voice of the person, be he priest or layman, whose accent is unmistakably Catholic and whose motive is the genuine good of the brethren, neither of these being divorced from the integrity of the faith. Better than Isaac, she knows how to distinguish the voice of Esau from that of Jacob when the inheritance of the Christian people, a matter of faith and morals, is at issue (Gen. 27:22).

What Are Some Historical Examples of the Role of Pope, Bishops and Faithful in the Church?

Thus there is never sound reason to believe that the voice of the layman concerning the faith is heard in public opinion polls or any mere counting of hands. Rather, the faith of the Church is heard in the judgment of the deeply committed Catholic who witnesses to the community the experience of integral Christian living. It is not how many say something which is significant for the Church, but who it is who is speaking and what manner of faith is his. Numbers count only if those who comprise the total really know. Sometimes, as when the Church was threatened with Arianism, the laity were articulate on the side of those who know and who speak accurately the voice of Tradition. Sometimes, as when the Church verged on the brink of conciliarism, it is the voice of Peter who confirms his uncertain brothers in the episcopate. Sometimes, as in the Second Vatican Council, Pope and laity listen with special care to the voice of the bishops. This is not to say that the Church moves forward disregarding Pope, bishops, priests or laity. It is to say that God's Providence provides for special moments and occasions when each structure in the Church is called upon to aid the others without subverting that order for the Church which is Christ's disposition and the Spirit's gift to the community.

Did The Council Give A Special Consideration to the Laity?

It is imperative, however, to add that we welcome, not avoid the consultation of the laity in every manner consistent with the mission of the Church, the promptings of the Spirit, and the needs of the community of faith. Thus it is not rhetorical concession to the mood of the hour, but an exercise of the pastoral office we share with Pope St. Leo which impels us to say to the laity of our times what he said to those of his day: "Recognize, O Christian, your dignity!"

It was our intent in the council to salute that dignity in the chapter on the laity in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. It is our hope that these documents will be studied in depth and implemented in detail by all the laity who bring the gift of their graces to the structures, permanent and contingent, present and future, of the Church they love no less than do we.

Dubuque Diocese Announces School Consolidation Plan

Dubuque — The Roman Catholic archdiocese of Dubuque has announced a school reorganization plan that will reduce the number of schools from 141 to 100 through consolidation and some closings.

The plan, which will go into effect next fall in order to utilize funds and personnel more efficiently, envisions 80 elementary schools and 20 high schools in the archdiocese which covers a 30-county area in northeast Iowa.

"This plan will mean more busing," according to Father Russell Bleich, assistant superintendent of schools. "But it is less expensive to provide buses than to continue maintaining buildings."

The plan calls for the consolidation of 49 schools, and the closing of several others. The program will provide more efficient use of nun and lay teachers. It was adopted after four months of meetings extending from the local parish level to the Archdiocesan Educational Review Board.

Changes were prompted by a 10 per cent decline in the number of nuns teaching classes, as well as increasing costs in school operations. Archdiocesan officials said 875 nuns now teach full or part time in the 141 schools. Next year, they report, there will be about 800, plus 595 lay teachers.

There will be between two and five rural Catholic schools in each consolidation. Where previously there had been two 8-grade schools near each other, there will frequently now be one. In some cases, grades 1 through 4 will attend classes in one building and grades 5 through 8 in the other building.

The board said that larger schools provide richer opportunities for students because individual needs of children within the classes can be accommodated more readily.

Archbishop Byrne said the chief features of the reorganization plan, including consolidation, sharing of facilities, and a system of centralized financing, will permit hiring additional lay staffs and redistribution of teaching sisters.

As a result, 20 sisters have been designated to staff CCD centers. Additional sisters released from parochial school duties will be assigned to develop teacher training courses and CCD programs. Emphasis will also be given to assisting parents of pre-school children in the religious formation of their children, and to archdiocesan efforts at adult religious education, Archbishop Byrne stated.

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Scout Leaders Trappists Admit New Rules Opposed Report Dinner

The 21st annual Report Dinner sponsored by the Catholic Committee on Scouting of the Rochester Diocese will be Tuesday, April 23 at Sacred Heart parish in Auburn.

This will be the first time the dinner has been hosted outside the Rochester area, according to Robert J. Randall, dinner chairman.

A former Auburnian, now a lieutenant general in the U.S. Air Force, will be the main speaker. He is Lt. Gen. Harold C. Donnelly, director of the Defense Atomic Supply Agency in Washington, D.C.

Although born in Lynn, Mass., General Donnelly spent his boyhood in Auburn, has always claimed it as his home town. He graduated from St. Mary's School in Auburn, later attended St. Andrew's Seminary in Rochester for a time.

A West Point graduate in 1933, Gen. Donnelly has made the military service his career. He has maintained a strong interest in scouting. While assigned to Santa Fe, N.M., in New Mexico, he was vice president of the Kit Carson Council in Albuquerque.

All adult scouters of the Rochester diocese, as well as their spouses, are invited to the report dinner, according to Victor Gessner, diocesan activities chairman of Boy Scouts.

End War, German Church Asks Hannover, Germany — (RNS) — The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover adopted a resolution at its Synod here calling on both sides of the Vietnamese war to end "the bloodshed" in that Asiatic country. "Since the Vietnam conflict may be decisive for the future of the whole of mankind, Christianity's responsibility to promote peace is particularly challenged," the resolution said.

Hey, Mrs. Wilson

Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti Day... it wouldn't be Wednesday without it.

A PRODUCT

Trappists Admit New Rules Opposed

Vatican City (NC) — Trappist superiors here have admitted to opposing the new rules of the order, according to a report from the order's general superior, Abbot General M. Gillet, who wrote to Trappist superiors throughout the world admitting that changes in the rules had aroused opposition within the order and from Roman authorities. He asked Trappists to avoid giving controversial statements to the press.

Quotations in the March 20 issue of the National Catholic Reporter from Abbot Gillet's six-page letter to superiors were admitted to be "correct." However, the source observed that the letter as a whole was much milder than the newspaper's fragmentary quotations suggested. Abbot Gillet's letter does not discourage free and impartial discussion. That is going on in most of the houses of the order.

The general chapter of 1967 allowed changes in the rules on silence and diet, among others.

The abbot General appealed

Bishop Named in Venezuela

Vatican City (NC) — Pope Paul VI named Father Mariano Gutierrez Sarazin, O.F.M. Cap., apostolic vicar of Caroni, Venezuela. He becomes titular of Bamaccora.

He was ordained in 1937 and became a professor at the seminary of Pardo, Spain.

HONORS FOR POPE JOHN

Venice (RNS) — The Informative process, leading to the possible beatification of Pope John XXIII, will open here in March. This phase of the procedure has the purpose of investigating the sanctity of Pope John during his years in Venice.

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