

A Speaking - Role For the Church

David Lawrence, editor of U.S. News and World Report, wrote about The Missing Demonstration in his June 8th editorial. Commenting on campus furor and street rallies, Mr. Lawrence regretted our national indifference to "the greatest means we have to unite mankind—namely the spiritual power which generates the moral force of the nation." He wants more "prayer demonstration."

Questioning why we do not have more gatherings for mass prayer rather than mass rallies for protest, Mr. Lawrence wrote: "Prayer can remind us of the presence of God inside ourselves. Prayer is an influence that can turn our minds from evil thoughts — from selfishness to unselfishness . . . Is it not time to stress a dependence on spiritual influence as the best way to achieve both internal and external peace?"

Here are several more truly quotable sentences of opinion: "We need God's help. It is available to us if we will only make ourselves aware of His spiritual presence in our lives. This is but another way of saying that what we call conscience is a constant reminder of what we feel in our hearts . . . We need to awaken the American people to the fact that this is an occasion for prayer — a prayer that we may see the right course and carry out the mission which God wishes us to fulfill for human welfare." These are unusual words from a secular journalist.

Mr. Lawrence blames the U.S. churches for lack of leadership in subduing the passions which rage in our political and social life today. He charged: "We get few words of reverence for law and order from most of the church groups in America. Indeed, many of them have become active participants in the political controversies of the day."

Mr. Lawrence generalized unjustly when he stated that church groups by participating in political controversy contributed to unrest and even violence. He specified no names and didn't even say how many. But even the few church individuals who are militant have a place in our society. The democratic right to have and to express an opinion is not to be muzzled by membership in a church nor the wearing of a special religious garb. Granted that a few in the Church have been partisan activists and have deliberately sought publicity for their nonconformist views. This does not take away the right of any group within the Church to speak out if they do so with a true conscience that they are giving witness as Christ did for principles which they believe He would uphold.

Many Catholics feel embarrassed by the public conduct of Fathers Philip and Daniel Berrigan, for example, and strongly disagree with what they have done and said. But if our society would ponder the philosophy which has animated these men, more of us might admit that we are silent and passive because we have not made a deep Christian study of these moral issues. We have not thought and prayed, and been willing to suffer for a conviction.

Perhaps the strongest reason our church leaders have for not entering the controversies, even to call society to calmer conduct, is because the issues are unclear to them and the bitter polarizations seem so insoluble. Yet Mr. Lawrence may be right when as a layman he wonders where the hierarchy was when the crises called for leaders to "produce a mood among all people receptive to peaceful behavior and reasoned study of public issues." His opinion is that churchmen are particularly obligated to "bring together those who disagree with one another so that representative groups may debate questions in an orderly fashion.

A unique, peaceful and quietly spiritual demonstration which might have interested Mr. Lawrence was held in Rochester last weekend. A large group of local clerics headed a voluntary public fast. It was a prayerful event in that it asked participants, for a spiritual reason, to do without several meals as a sign of their concern for the continuation of tragedy in the Vietnam war. Fasting involves discomfort, but it is silent: it talks to the inner man rather than protesting the Administration. It spoke strongly to witnesses that here was an unselfishness which said to the fomenters of violence and promoters of revolution: "We may win the attention of our community more effectively by silent personal sacrifice than by speeches and confrontations."

—Fr. Richard Tormey

The Word for Sunday

Youth's Own Patroness

By Father Albert Shamon



In Sunday's biblical readings there are vigorous pictures about seas and ships and storms. Maria Goretti was a tiny ship sailing the sea of life. One day the storms of a man's passions engulfed here. I recall her story now, for many reasons: last month (May 6) Alessandro Serenelli, the man who killed her, died; on June 24, 1950, Maria was canonized a saint; Pius XII proposed her as Patroness of Youth; Pius X called her the St. Agnes of the Twentieth Century; her story shows what bad books can do to a man and what a chaste girl can do for him.

Maria Goretti was born at Corinaldo, Italy, on October 16, 1890. Her family were migrant laborers, living in direst poverty. Near starvation compelled the family to move to swamp-ridden Ferriere and move in with a Signor Serenelli, who had a son named Alessandro — a name the Goretti's would never forget.

Alessandro had been motherless since four. "Guideless upbringing without a mother," Alessandro once said, "was the prime cause of my ruin." The other was bad books. During the interminable nights, he buried himself in books—bad books glorifying crime and glamorizing lust. He read that man is an animal and that the supreme law of an animal is

appetite. His passions were set on fire. Pin-up girls plastered his tiny room.

Inevitably Maria drew his lustful interest. She was twelve. Her features were perfect and regular. Though not one to attract at first glance, she possessed a plain, quiet, beauty. Alessandro made advances. Maria recoiled in horror. A reign of terror began. Alessandro thought he could force the young girl by fear.

Then on July 5, 1902, Alessandro caught Maria alone in the kitchen. Lust had turned him into an animal. He sought Maria. She tried to flee. Trapped, she vigorously cried, "No, no, Alessandro. You do not know what you are doing. It is a sin. God does not wish this." Alessandro tried to floor her. She struggled wildly with a strength not her own. Furious, Alessandro spat out words from novels he had read, "Submit or die."

When he realized Maria feared sin more than death, he took the brush hook jammed in his belt and with its murderous blade slashed her breasts and body fourteen times.

Doctors in Nettuno tried to save her life. It was no use. After twenty pitiful hours of suffering, during which she forgave and prayed for Alessandro, she died.

Alessandro was condemned to 30 years imprisonment: three in solitary confinement and 27 at hard labor. His term of solitary ended October 18, 1905. Of the others in solitary he learned, three had killed themselves, and six had gone mad. For the next three years he was still sullen and unrepentant. But one night in December, 1908, Maria appeared to him in a dream so vivid he could not distinguish it from reality. She gave him fourteen lilies each of which turned into a flaming light in his hand. Then she promised, "Alessandro I have prayed for you; one day you will be with me in heaven." From then on Alessandro so changed that his fellow-prisoners said it was a miracle. In 1927 he was granted amnesty.

In 1935 he was reconciled to Assunta, Maria's mother. And she became as a mother to him. Both were present at Maria's canonization in 1950. At it, Pius XII went to Assunta and embraced her saying, "Blessed is the mother of such a daughter." Alessandro's last years were spent in a Capuchin convent. May 6 he died a holy man.

A novena to Maria Goretti can be begun on July 1 and end on her feast, July 9. Youth should make it for chastity; the injured, to be forgiving like Maria and Assunta; the sinner, to be changed like Alessandro. How wonderful is God in his saints!

On the Line

Newsman In Vietnam

By Bob Considine



The State Department, in a note expressing sympathy over the death of CBS correspondent George Sversten, counseled other newsmen in Indochina to take fewer risks.

They won't. Most of them feel they'd lose their jobs or, worse, lose face, if they played it safe.

Significantly, NBC's Welles Hagen, a superb newsmen, was not far behind Sversten, another outstanding correspondent, as the CBS man and his people plunged down a Cambodian road in search of a story that would probably have been allotted a few crowded minutes on Walter Cronkite's evening news. The NBC men had to think of Huntley and Brinkley or the Today show. The wonder is that the ABC team didn't fall into the same trap that ensnared or killed eight CBS and NBC men. ABC must have taken a wrong turn, or a shortcut.

There are wars within wars, and one of them is the war for scoops. The generally friendly antagonists are not confined to TV networks, where news people, cameramen, sound specialists and others daily risk their lives so that their webs stay alive in the ratings races.

AP battles UPI for the "play" back home in newspapers that will use one account of an event and toss the other into a wastebasket. Same with news magazines, the still cameramen and the radio people.

This is a special breed, these men, and sometimes women,

who go out in search of the guts of war, risking their own. They feel sorry for colleagues who remain behind at headquarters and accept the crumbs from a loaded mimeograph machine in the general's public relations office. Months and years of peril have little effect on them, except to make them ever less likely to accept advice.

Washington correspondent Warren Hoge of the New York Post notes that when President Nixon is under stress his thoughts turn to sports.

The President scheduled one of his most important speeches of late for a relatively unprime time hour so as not to interfere with a national basketball game.

He watched a football game on TV last fall while tens of thousands rimmed the White House to protest the war.

When he went boldly to the Lincoln Memorial last month in the dead of a worrisome night, to meet assembled anti-war students, he talked football and surfing.

Last July aboard the carrier Hornet, the President spoke to the crew of Apollo 11, fresh back from the moon and safely inside their streamlined "pest-house." The moment the amenities were done with and the feat had been hailed as the greatest event since the Creation, the President asked the men what they thought about the outcome of the All Star game.

One reporter who was present likened the scene to Marco Polo's returning to Venice after 17 historic years at the court of Kublai Khan, and being collared by a chap who wanted to tell him all about the bocci finals between Verona and Padua.

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