

The Parish Director of Religious Education

By Eugene A. Scapanski

There is a new sign on a door in many of our rectories and parish centers across the nation this Fall. The lettering reads "Director of Religious Education" (DRE). Just exactly what that title implies is probably a mystery to most parishioners, and perhaps to some pastors and DRE's themselves!

For many Catholics the teachings of Vatican II brought them face to face, perhaps for the first time, with the challenge of an adult Christianity. Little of their own formal religious education had prepared them for the new spirit and changes that were sweeping the Church. Adult courses on the documents of Vatican II, on modern theology and Sacred Scripture sprang up in every parish, and with them, a thirst for better quality religious education on all levels, beginning with preschool children and continuing right through the adult years.

Perhaps the most common attitude prior to the Council was that intensive religious "instruction" should take place in the early years of a child's life usually ending with the 8th, 12th, or in rather rare cases, the 16th year of one's parochial education.

CCD programs were run on a hit and miss basis for those children who did not attend Catholic schools.

Today, with the vast majority of our children unable to attend parochial schools, with our parishes increasing in size and complexity and with the inspiration and challenge of Vatican II still ringing in our adult ears, many parishes are beginning to establish "Offices of Religious Education" with trained personnel and quality educational materials to meet our growing needs. These new programs are shifting their emphasis from exclusively child-centered instruction to

more and more of an adult orientation.

Programs are designed to reach the whole family, and often the parents themselves are being trained to prepare their own children for the sacraments and to participate more intimately in their children's Christian development.

In order to meet the demand for quality educational programs of this kind, parishes are increasingly seeking out trained laymen and religious to act as parish directors. These DRE's usually come equipped with a master's degree in Theology or Religious Education and a familiarity with modern educational theory and methods.

Most DRE's work as consultants for the parishes they serve. They act as resources for program and organizational devel-

opment, they plan curricula, train and supervise teachers, evaluate procedures and are concerned, generally, with all the educational activities that go on within a parish. This role has brought about a new concept of a parish ministry, for it implies a close working relationship with the pastor, priests and religious.

In many areas a real team-ministry is developing under the guidance and direction of the pastor. While he is concerned with the over-all pastoral and liturgical life of the par-

ish, he is assisted in specific areas by a parish staff with specialized skills.

Perhaps one of the biggest, unsuspected dividends for the life of the Church is that so many of the new DRE's are laymen. In a Church where the concepts of lay priesthood and lay ministry have been de-emphasized as a result of the polemics growing out of the Protestant Reformation, it is a sign of new life to see the laity take on positions of responsibility and real ministry within the Catholic Church.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FR. RICHARD P. McBRIEN

Q. I am a brother in one of the largest and oldest religious orders in the Church. Last fall the Sacred Congregation for Religious decreed that lay brothers may not become superiors of communities that include priests. I think this policy is shortsighted and unfair. Is there any theological support for the decision taken by the Congregation?

A. There is no theological reason why a lay brother could not serve as the superior of a religious community which includes priests among its membership.

By now you must be aware of the resolution adopted by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men at their 13th annual meeting, held this June at the University of Dayton.

The delegates (about 200 religious superiors, representing more than 35,000 priests and brothers throughout the United States) stated that "we are both saddened and profoundly disturbed by the decree." Their resolution charged that the decree's provisions are "considered offensive and discriminatory by our American Religious."

Furthermore, the superiors urged a reshuffling of the membership of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and asked that American religious men be consulted beforehand on any future decrees. The Conference of Major Superiors of Men also requested a reconsideration of the original decree.

For those who still think that the Church is an absolute monarchy and that the Roman congregations are merely the alter egos of the Pope, this kind of organized dissent must be particularly baffling. But the CMSM understands that the Church is a collegial entity where dialogue, communication, and prior consultation are essential to its life and mission.

Q. The Catholic Church continues to suffer from the attrition of so many of its priests. Try as I might, I cannot get it out of my head that most of these priests who leave have simply lost the spirit of prayer and sacrifice and that their motive for abandoning their ministry is almost always selfish; namely, the desire to marry.

I know this sounds crude and cynical, but perhaps we're just losing the deadwood, those who were not really functioning anywhere near the limits of their priestly capacities. Do you think we've "bottomed-out" and now we're on the way back up?

A. Significantly, the Catholic bishops of the United States have rejected this analysis. In their statement on priestly celibacy, published last November, the bishops suggested that the present crisis does not have its origin simply in the desire of some priests to get married.

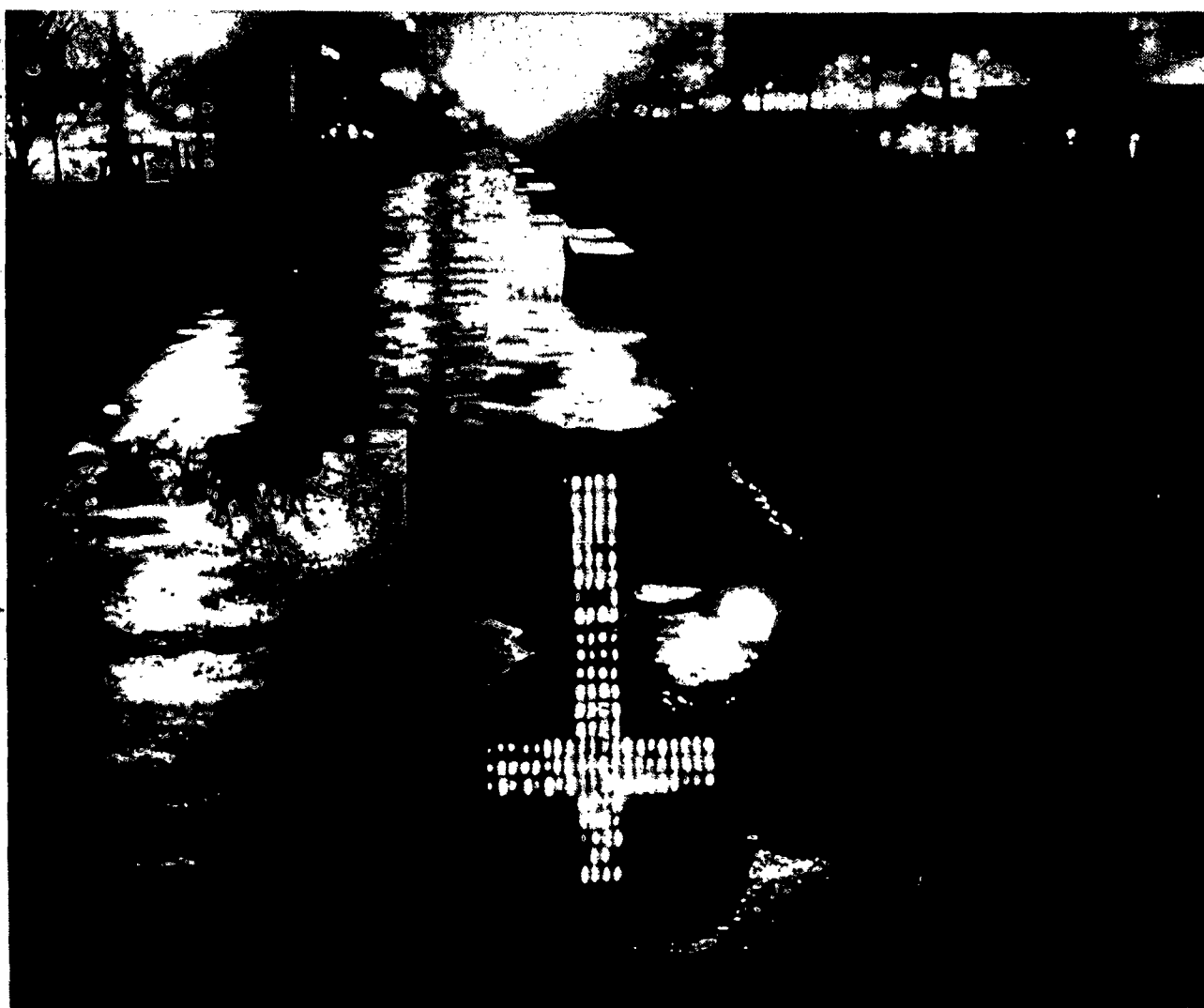
The key problem, they argued, is not celibacy but rather the quest of "a joyful and fruitful style of life and work."

Those who serve the Church as ordained priests are endowed with human dignity. They have basic rights and responsibilities, and these must find adequate realization in their work. "Customs which isolate the priest from the people he serves tend to retard his growth in pastoral identity. Likewise, policies which unduly delay his assumption of major pastoral responsibilities can be corrosive of the zeal of the priest eager to work in freedom and trust.

"These and other hindrances to fruitful work and a happy life play no small part, we feel, in the painful decisions of many priests to seek elsewhere than in the priestly ministry the fulfillment of their human and Christian potential. We pledge ourselves, therefore, to strive for those conditions which permit priests to live fully for the sake of God's People to bring them the Good News" (para. 17).

Unless one wants to argue that the bishops didn't really mean what they said, this document commits the American hierarchy to some significant reform of those ecclesiastical structures (e.g., the pastor-curate relationship, rectory life, traditional parochial expectations of priestly service, etc.) which directly affect and shape the lives of the Church's professional personnel.

If we assume that almost every priest who leaves the ministry has done so for unworthy motives, then we are guilty of rash judgment. And if we believe that the situation has "bottomed-out" (even though there has been no major concrete reform of clerical life), we are engaged in some kind of wishful thinking.



Cross Reflected in Water

This lighted cross as a symbol of the "way of Christ" remains a visible sign centuries after the Apostles began to spread the Word.

The Sign of Peace

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

A cartoon in the July-August issue of The Critic pictures two young people standing in the front pew passionately kissing one another. The bespeckled celebrant watches this display of affection with great patience, but finally feels forced to speak out. His admonishing words to the preoccupied lovers: "The kiss of peace was over five minutes ago!"

The magazine's humor may make some laugh. It touches a sensitive and sore spot. The sign of peace, for them, is either artificial, or unhygienic, or upsetting or all three.

Feedback from across the country indicates parish priests in the past few months received considerable flak when they introduced this gesture of reconciliation. Inauguration of the other changes—Order of Mass, Lectionary, baptism and marriage rites—went along remarkably well. Fairly thorough educational programs paved the way for smooth implementation with positive acceptance of the reforms relatively universal. But not so the sign of peace.

A few pastors even found opposition so vocal and intense that they either curtailed the controversial practice already in operation or postponed in-

troductory of it until a future date.

It seems to me the only way we can successfully cope with an emotional matter like this which divides people is to air all aspects of the issue. What official backing does the practice have, when did it originate, how has it developed? Are there significant benefits? What practical suggestions for the future have been made with regard to the sign of peace? I hope to answer these questions in this and the next two columns.

The highest liturgical authorities in the Church strongly encourage this gesture of love and harmony. Pope Paul VI in an Apostolic Constitution promulgating the Roman Missal stamped his approval on everything in that particular text. So did, naturally, the Congregation for Divine Worship which published it.

The General Instruction (no. 56) leaves concrete details to the hierarchy of each country. "The form of this rite is left to the conference of bishops to decide in accord with the customs of the people." At its November, 1969 meeting in Washington the National Conference of Bishops, in turn, permitted local traditions to govern the method followed in this sign of peace.

We think of the peace sign in worship as a new, a contemporary creation. In point of fact, however, it dates back to pre-Christian moments and enjoys an unbroken, even if varied history in the liturgy.

When Jesus accepted a dinner invitation from Simon his host neglected to offer him the kiss traditional in Jewish history as a sign of respect or friendship. Omission of this courteous preliminary to a ceremonial meal was an affront and did not go unnoticed.

Later on St. Paul mentions a "holy kiss" and sees this as a sign of love and union between Christians. "Greet each other with a holy kiss." (Romans 16:16; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:27).

Writings in earliest Christian times speak of a liturgical sign of peace. Believers used it not only when they gathered for the Eucharist, but whenever they assembled for prayer. Documents of succeeding centuries include similar references.

History, then, tells us the kiss or gesture of peace apparently has occurred in every rite of both Eastern and Western churches from Apostolic days until the present period.

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