

Our Parish COUNCIL

by Bernard Lyons

Is There Room For A Rebel In The Parish?

It is part of the mystery of the Church that it, too, is a political body.

Pope Paul's plea for new forms of democracy, in his apostolic letter to Cardinal Maurice Roy of Quebec, would also seem to apply to parish councils.

"The two aspirations, to equality and participation, seek to promote a democratic type of society. Various models are proposed, some are tried out, none of them gives complete satisfaction, and the search goes on between ideological and pragmatic tendencies.

"The Christian has the duty to take part in this search and in the organization and life of political society," Pope Paul writes.

A concrete situation might suggest some of the dimensions of the difficulty of constructing new forms. A man wrote to me recently:

"I haven't been on a parish council for over five years; I haven't even attended a council meeting for two years. It is my observation that parishes with councils are more closed than even those with 'repressive' pastors; that is to say, councils DO NOT perform the function of communication; if they don't like your idea (by vote) you will NEVER get a fair hearing."

I wrote and asked the correspondent for more details of what had happened. After an answer and reading the literature he sent, I made a long-distance phone call and had nearly an hour's talk.

Dan — let's call him — is 38,

father of four, and an airline pilot.

There was no single incident that caused him to "give up" on councils.

He feels it would do "little good (at this time) to talk about the pastors who have walked out of meetings when the going got rough, or the time that a conservative parish board would not let a rebel speak."

Dan has since formed a laymen's group that has no dues, regular meetings, etc., but mails some 360 newsletters irregularly.

Although Dan maintains liaison with the National Association of Laity (NAL) in New York, he is not affiliated with it.

He says that parish councils are "shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic" because "the present mentality (lay and clerical) is the idea that the Pope is the locus of the Holy Spirit rather than the focus. Until parish councils can question and discuss theology they will probably spend their time deciding what time to have Mass, how to raise money for a new parking lot, etc., etc.," says Dan.

Dan would like to see the Church officially eliminate all parish boundaries; stop assessing parishes for Catholic schools, at any level; elect bishops to five-year terms; and do a feasibility study of the idea to convert little used structures into community centers.

He says his intent is "to provide a channel of communication among Catholics (in his diocese) in regard to new ideas on theology, morality and matters of conscience."

Conscience Is Worthy Guide In Draft Issue, Priest Says

Detroit — (RNS) — Charging that present U.S. draft laws provided options that are "unjust," the head of the Catholic archdiocesan World Justice and Peace Commission here affirmed that Catholics who conscientiously conclude that participation in a particular war is immoral must claim exemption from the military.

Father Thomas F. Hinsberg said the current draft legislation, which does not allow for "selective" conscientious objection, "is a denial of freedom of conscience," leading to prison, exile, or violation of conscience.

The priest conceded that his statement "surprised many" because even most Catholics are unaware of "the fact that selective conscientious objection is

legitimate for Catholics . . ."

Allowing that the subject is complicated, he said "distinctions must be made between pacifism and selective conscientious objection." He described a pacifist as "one who is convinced that Gospel imperatives of love and brotherhood exclude the use of organized violence," while the selective objector is one who decides that "participation in a particular war — like Vietnam — would be immoral."

He said pacifism was the position of the early Christian Church, when for the first three centuries the Church refused to allow its members to serve in the military. Since then, with some exceptions, he said, "the opinion that military service was allowable and even laudable has prevailed . . ."

Father Hinsberg asserted that Catholic teaching regarding war and conscience should be better known. "The bishops at Vatican Council II and the American bishops in their 1968 pastoral letter . . . have supported conscientious objection as a legitimate position for a Catholic."

The priest said "selective" objectors may decline to serve in the military on the basis of the "just war theory," which states that wars must be fought for a just cause, by legitimate authority, and with the hope of attaining a greater good. When these conditions are violated, then the war is immoral, he said.

No 'Utopias' Layman Tells Synod

Vatican City — (RNS) — The second lay person in two days to address the Synod of Bishops on the theme of "Justice in the World" urged delegates to guard against "Utopias" and "myths" that can distort the concept of proper world development.

Candido Mendez de Almeida, an educator and social scientist from Brazil, is one of three Catholic laymen invited by the Pope to participate in Synodal discussions on problems of world justice.

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