

Proper Spirit Key to Pastoral Council Success

(Continued from Page 1A)

pointed. The one who wishes to be first among you should be the last and the servant of all. Then He strengthened his statement by bringing a little child into the group and said that if anyone wishes to be first, let him become a child because the reign of God is for children. Let us keep this in mind always. The sharpness of this answer has not always been appreciated. Effectively what Christ was saying was that there is no first in the region of God — if you want to be first, then become every man's lackey. Return to your childhood and then you will be fit for the first place. Jesus left no room for ambition and He left no room for the exercise of power. Lackeys and children are not the bearers of power.

The second saying is very interesting and applies to the same point. St. Matthew and St. Mark recall the petition of the mother of the sons of Zebedee for a first place in the kingdom for her sons. Matthew was so embarrassed because one of his fellow apostles had proposed this question that in telling the story, he places the entire blame on the mother. Mark, telling it like it is (as they say today), blamed the apostles for asking the question. Here Christ compares the government of the secular state to the condition of the Church. He speaks of the secular government in harsh terms. Great men in leadership of the nation lord it over their subjects and are guilty of tyranny. St. Luke adds, with a touch of sarcasm, that they received the title of benefactor. Christ said it should never be so with His disciples — the first among whom should become the lackey of others, as He Himself had come to be.

The antithesis between the exercise of power in secular states and in the church could scarcely be drawn more clearly. Jesus does not contrast the improper exercise of power with proper exercise. If Jesus had wished to distinguish between the proper and improper exercise of power, He had a vocabulary with which to do this and, therefore, it was unnecessary for Him to make a contrast between domination and tyranny, with being a lackey and slave. Such passages as I have just quoted, could seem to destroy all authority within the Church and leave not even a democratic society but rather a group of rugged individuals each self-propelled in his own direction. Such a picture is not the picture of the apostolic church nor can it be deduced from any saying of Christ. We encounter here a situation not unusual in the New Testament, a new reality, which it is difficult to portray in the language of custom.

'There is no room for Power struggles within the Christian community'

The Church is unlike any other society and when we attempt to make the Church intelligible, we fall easily into language which makes it like other societies. The point of all the passages quoted is simply this: There is no room for power struggles within the Christian community; in fact, we have no power at all in the ordinary sense. Those who occupy the top positions have a more complete dedication of service, or should have. Service, like charity, is a word which has lost much of its gospel meaning. Jesus and His listeners caught the full force of the metaphors of child and lackey which He used. The force is not so readily caught in the modern world where the title of a public servant is given to public officials who are aware of power to dominate others and are usually quite jealous of it.

Did Jesus leave with His Church the resources to create a new kind of leadership? Has the Church created this new concept of leadership? One can scarcely doubt that Jesus

A New Role For Leaders



left to His Church the resources to accomplish its mission. But if one looks at the New Testament for something like a manual for executives, one will not find it unless he looks at the pastoral epistles. Certainly these epistles deal expressly with the responsibilities of leadership in the Church. All the passages presuppose that a Christian's leadership like the rest of his life will be motivated by the principle which motivates all Christians and that is love. Leadership will be an act of love as much as any other act in the life of a Christian and if you want to know what the love of the leadership is all about, read St. Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth, Chapter XIII, which I think is the most beautiful passage in all the Sacred Scriptures.

It delineates the attributes of love. Successful leadership is not measured by the usual standards of wisdom and prudence and efficiency and production. It should be measured only by those standards by which the Christian life is judged, and by the fullness with which the life of Christ flourishes in the leadership. This does not mean that we bypass talent or consider it not important. But so it is, may I say, unless it is a spirit of charity which governs all our activities.

Leadership of the Church is like the Christian life in another respect. The Christian life itself is not the work of man but it is the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church. Successful leadership also is the work of the spirit and not the work of man. The spirit in the Church does not displace the human powers of intelligence and will, but these powers are helpless if the Church is left solely with its personal and organizational resources, however abundant they may be. The spirit does not supply intelligence or judgment or courage which may be lacking. The spirit does supply the fullness of faith, the fullness of hope and the fullness of charity which give form to leadership.

Too frequently, the leaders of the Church have relied on the spirit for what the spirit does not give, and counted on themselves for what the spirit does give. The leadership of the Church is corrupted at any age when it is conceived in terms of power and not in terms of love. It is corrupted when the leader refuses to think of himself as a lackey who did not come to be served but rather to be a slave and to give his life for the salvation of men. Power corrupts love; bureaucratic power perhaps corrupts love more than any other form of power.

The Church has no guarantee against failure in this hour of renewal, just as it has never had in any age a guarantee against corruption in her leadership. She has always had more than sufficient means to prevent it. The most important of these means is the awareness that the Church has of her identity and of her mission. She is the Body of Christ. Christ is the corporate personality of this body. In the language of St. Paul, she is the body of which Christ is the head. In his body, no one is more a member than anyone else. There are different charismata, gifts which are given not for the benefit of the one who receives them but for the benefit of those for whom he ministers. It is always the same spirit, the same divine love that moves in all the members of the Church. The body is recognized as the Church of Christ only by her unity and never by her divisions. The unity of the Church is the love which unites the members with each other and with Christ. It is not a unity of authority. Christ never au-

thorized anyone to substitute controls for love. This is the spirit of the Church which your organization must reflect in all of its conduct.

Pastoral Councils were recommended by the second Vatican Council not as an end but as a means of revitalizing the mystical body of Christ. They are tools not toys; some people have been toying with advisory groups for many years but they have not stood well under scrutiny. As a group, they were very often distinguished by their unimaginative homogeneity for which they were chosen by their so-called leadership to be vigorous applauders of the status quo. If there is not tension among us, if we all agree, then I think our work is hopeless. Pastoral Councils are designed for a purpose which is spelled out: to investigate and weigh matters which bear on pastoral activity and to formulate practical conclusions regarding them. (DECREE on PASTORAL OFFICE OF BISHOPS.)

'Leadership...is the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church'

The DECREE on the LAITY also speaks of these councils in terms of assisting the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of making the gospel known and men holy, or in the charitable, social, or other spheres of the life of the Church. It seems to come through very loud and clear that councils are not to be seen as the latest of parish societies, new structures to replace old structures, nor are they take-charge groups who are going to tell everyone in the parish, including the pastor, how every detail of parish life is to be managed.

They are counselors, they are facilitators. They are directed to give spiritual direction through counsel and in union with the ministerial clergy.

The laity has a very distinct role and many diverse talents badly needed for effective action in the apostolate of the Church today. Their insights respectfully given and respectfully received will aid in giving Christ a greater visibility in parishes and in the diocese. These insights must, however, be given with the realization that Christ is made present to His people. This realization can be actuated by the recognition by the individual Christian that where he is, there is Christ. It takes a lot of self-knowledge to grasp this fact and it takes real fortitude to get rid of the un-Christlike accretions that will be revealed by education and self-analysis. No one is going to be a suitable council member, then, who is not closely in touch with reality — which is Christ.

When we look at the way Christ worked, we can see that our work must come from within. Christ did not give directions from outside; He came in; He became part of something and from within, He transformed the situation. God did not simply tell man what to do; He became man — then as man, He became part of a particular culture, spoke a special language. He became part of all that surrounded Him. To us who have been entrusted with the continuance of His work, ours is His Mission of rebuilding the earth.