

# Every Beginning A Sign of Hope

The following is the text of Bishop John E. McCafferty's address at the recent training session for regional coordinators of the Year of Renewal.



Every beginning, we keep saying, is a sign of hope. So we are repeatedly told in the Church these days. The concept of a beginning has always had another connotation for me, going back several years when, with what were to be forever dashed hopes of high adventure and extensive travel, I learned in German the simple adage: "Every beginning is hard."

The Germans were realists and those of us who have thus far survived the 20th Century aggrainamento in the Church can issue gilt-edged guarantees that new things don't come easily into being. Still, difficulty does not exclude hope and in the past decade, since the first utterances from Vatican II, we have witnessed many changes — changes which have not come easily, but which are now yielding signs of hope for a better day.

Tonight it is our hope that your hopes for the future of the Church of Rochester will be articulated during the next 2½ days, and that a unity in expressing and moving towards the realizations of these hopes may be evidenced. In one sense, we have a distinct advantage over other groups called to establish goals insofar as we have our primary goal already set with full agreement — and that is the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

A great deal has been said of the Kingdom in the study paper, "The Mission of the Church," which has just been released to the public. What is said there and said beautifully calls for unremitting response from the Church, and it is our calling at present to determine how best to evoke that response. That is our immediate goal. In practice it will call for the development of intermediary goals, the refinement of processes to achieve these goals, and the development of structures to sustain them.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council is in this concept our target. Vatican II itself did not propose these councils or any other instruments as ends in themselves. The Pastoral Council is conceived, and should always be regarded, as a tool for proclaiming and extending the dominion of God. In our times, it would seem that such councils are viable tools and for many reasons, most of which are obvious. We are children of our own time, and while our times are blessed with the rapid sort of development that induces future shock, this trauma is softened by the availability of many educated, talented, generous and fraternal people of the Church, in the Church, and for the Church, who, no doubt in part due to the information explosion as it is popularly called, have come to a balanced perception of man's need for man, as well as the loneliness and ineffectiveness of leadership separated from the support of an informed and responsive following.

The Church throughout history has exhibited a genius for adaptation. Although at times the adaptation was weakened by identification with goals which were inappropriate or marked by intriguingly distracting characteristics, in Western civilization, she went effectively underground during early persecution before hard-won acceptance; she developed offices, institutes, and structures which were intelligible to, and compatible with, the society in which she was situated.

This is neither the time or place for a thorough review of Church history, but when Christianity emerged vigorously from the catacombs, the structure, titles, and even the vesture of the pagan past were adopted, and the joy or solemnity of the old festivals, and the pageantry of immemorial ceremony, passed like maternal blood into the "new" religion. Still the People of God were comparatively few in numbers and clustered in relatively isolated communities where hierarchical structure after the Apostolic model of service was easily blended into a fraternal context. During the barbarian invasions and the Dark Ages, monasticism grew in tight little authoritative conclaves to protect the faith, to guard divine truth and transmit it through tediously copied manuscripts and the use of such limited opportunities as arose to teach the basics of rhetoric, the Scriptures and patristics in the monastic schools. In the Middle Ages the Church again adapted to the Feudal Church.

Sometimes the lord of the manor was a Bishop or Abbot. Though monks labored with their hands and many monasteries and churches shared tithes, additional support was necessary for great ecclesial establishments and this came mostly from kings and nobles in gifts of land or shares in feudal revenues. Archbishops, bishops and abbots received investiture from the King, pledged their fealty to him like other feudatories, carried such titles as prince or duke or count, minted coins, presided over courts, and took on the feudal tasks of military service and agricultural management. Bishops accoutred with armor and lance were frequently seen in Europe until, as Will Durant summed it up, "Feudalism feudalized the Church." Tensions certainly developed in this era — centered on investiture and conflict of papacy vs. empire finally to be compromised by Concordat in 1122.

In the subsequent era of absolute monarchy and reformation, the Church, easily adopted the monarchical concept to her hierarchical nature. She developed through mimicry and then purified through self-examination, a system of administrative absolutism which was found a satisfactory vehicle for the spread of the Gospel even into our own times, and was not altogether ineffective some half century after the absolute monarch took his final curtain call on the stage of history.

Situated in the world as she is, the Church is naturally affected by her terrestrial environment — not that at any period of her history has her conduct been alto-

gether consistent with the political and social climate. Long after the Reformation, with the age of democracy, the Protestant ethic was generally accepted as the uniquely Christian response to capitalism. And from this ethic there arose in place of the divine right of kings the divine right of empire; the manifest destiny sort of thing — with vast implications for colonialism and laissez-faire economics which, apotheosized, have led in the extreme to the social evils of insidious poverty, the dimensions and proximity of which we seem just now to comprehend.

Restlessness has always been a characteristic of the living Church and it is good that this should be — restlessness was noted by St. Augustine as a mark of the individual Christian whose hearts are restless until they come to rest in Christ. Now the Church again grows restless with the times. Though her mission remains today unchanged, she has betrayed for sometime an uncertainty and then a dissent from the assumptions and presumptions of the "good old days" when quite honestly the American was inculpably unaware of the extremes of depersonalization which even in our own land were being affected by the prevailing philosophy.

"He who does not work should not eat."

"To the victor belongs the spoils."

With such comfortable and reasonable assumptions, we were at home and the Church — or at least the parish — grew strong in ghettos of blind Christianity, parish spirit was identified with parish plant and programs, and worship was a curious mixture of reverence and mystique — neither of which should be absent from worship, but neither or both of which should be identified with the body of truths revealed by Christ.

And as understanding breaks through the collective Christian conscience, it seems clearly now time for reappraisal and readjustment. Perhaps change as a process is a continuing thing — I believe it is. But what we call change and the change which frightens and challenges us most is periodic restatement of ecclesiastical posture in response to happening in the world about us, and the restructuring which is an imperative consequent upon these events. Our time is still known as the Age of Democracy, and this leaning toward a more representative posture in no way is incompatible with the hierarchical Church.

Certainly we are conscious of the personal involvement stimulated by the knowledge explosion, and more informed input is daily made available for the upbuilding of our society. Why should the Church turn her back on this evident opportunity for her own upbuilding — upbuilding the body of Christ.

In a very real sense, modern know-how has shrunken the world so that it is truly possible for the first time in nearly two millenia for a now mature Church — a large body of Christians scattered all over the earth — to fraternize constructively with the ecclesial leadership for the perfection of service. It is not unlikely that we shall see in the seventies the formation of the communities as the individual — not as the bee-in-the-beehive of Mao's China — but through the development of the culture in which the individual's identity with the community becomes, as it were, personified and expressed through consensus.

The future of the individual lies not with the great man surrounded by his admirers. That can lead to Charles Manson and his groupies. Rather there seems to be growing the evidences in the reality of the One World — a concept once a political catch phrase only thirty years ago — that there may be merit in the reflection that the Second Coming may well not be a return to the great man surrounded by His disciples, but a transfiguration in which many men become what that Man was.

And so we can perceive in the Church community the anticipated values of the Pastoral Council. Truly not an end in itself, but reading the signs of the times, it opens the Christian community for a receptivity to and use of the individual's participatory contribution. No man is an island and in the present day no sane bishop is by choice a loner. He recognizes that while a leader, chosen God knows why as leader (the mystery of election has never been confided to men) is still on the same pilgrimage as his people, and he must rely on the talents and experience of many to come more surely, directly and peacefully to the destination.

If then the Pastoral Council is a tool, it should be evident that regional councils and parish councils are seen as tools as well. And if the Bishop is a pilgrim along an erratic exodus, through arid places, then his coordinators are fellow travelers equipped with their own unique charisms. In a sense, I suppose, they can be called Tour Masters of the journey. If the Bishop shares his authority, and the closer one gets to share his work the more readily perceptible is the service orientation of his office and limitations of his time and freedom, then the more evident becomes the value of sharing all the way down the line to meet the current needs of the people who are seeking and searching for the truth and peace of Christ.

I think it is clearly enough understood by those present here that the current regionalization and the appointment of regional coordinators has been devised as a well-considered instrument for effective renewal tailored to the unique needs of this 12-county — 7,107-square-mile diocese, vastly diversified in its topography, industrial development and population distribution.

The regional coordinator is emerging as a stimulator of authentic renewal and the enthusiasm for the regional concept has been relayed throughout the Diocese from one region to another and from each to the control center — recently, uniquely and happily known alone, as far as I know, in Rochester as the Pastoral Office. In the comparatively short period of time since the coordinators were appointed, we have taken heart that a new Spirit is truly being poured out in the diocese. Signs of tolerance, patience, perseverance and openness are becoming apparent which seemed impossible to achieve just a year or two ago.

When we consider the changes which have occurred in the diocese over the past seven years since the Council was concluded by the Holy Father, we have seen a slow liturgical renewal which is finding a responsive cord in the hearts of many, many people. Issues which — to use this one area of reform — seemed insurmountable and fearful are now not only accepted but strongly desired by a widening circle of our fellow Christians. Mass facing the people, the vernacular liturgy, folk music — all of which came into being with symptoms of deep-seated culture shock are now commonplace. The most unexpected people will tell us that, after assisting at a Latin Mass, they prefer the present liturgy.

Now we are witnessing legitimate penance services, and enthusiasm for the new rites of Baptism and Marriage. A new rite for Confirmation will be introduced in the fall. Para-liturgical events are encouraged but these are not de rigueur, and charity which must always be associated with genuine Christian renewal must in this area restrain us from imposing our personal preference on people otherwise inclined.

There are ever growing groups of dedicated people, and highly motivated by the the Spirit, which meet to work and pray for our diocese — for the Kingdom of God — as affiliates of the Legion of Mary, the Blue Army, the Cursillo, the Marriage Encounter, the Teen Seminars, the Better World Movement and many other groups. Cannot such spiritual power move mountains? The Spirit indeed breathes where He will and a spot check of the diocese reveals that He is active here indeed.

Emphatically we shall not now dwell on the other evidences of renewal which we see in our diocese, the ecumenical thrust of GEM, the accomplishments of the Office of Human Development, the Department of Education and all its divisions, and so on and on. We have an active Priests' Council and Sisters' Council, and we see evidences of parish councils in an estimated 90 per cent of our parishes.

The ministries of worship, ecumenism, human development and all the rest are yours to stimulate; the diocesan departments which bear these names are in your service and you are in the service of the clergy and their parishioners. It seems that this was not perhaps is not fully or clearly understood, but as the Bishop's area representative, the diocesan departments serve you, the regional coordinators, because it cannot be expected that you be or can readily become fully conversant with the techniques of each specialized ministry — you are encouraged to establish teams to work with you in your area for pastoral renewal through councils which address themselves to the ministries represented by the departments. That a start has been made toward team formation and team work is clear from the record already standing.

There is a danger that we may mistake the tools for renewal for renewal itself. For God's sake let us avoid this. It is an error which has dogged our past. Diocesan leadership with which you are affiliated calls upon you all to develop skills in the use of the tools of renewal through services made available through the diocesan offices. It asks your patience and your assistance in the evaluation of our present situation to initiate a real and authentic RENEWAL.

And what is RENEWAL? It is generous and responsive obedience to Christ who speaks to the world today not in erratic and contradictory terms but through those whom He has sent.

To Peter he gave power of binding and loosing.

To Apostles He said: "He who hears you hears me."

It is not our point to get into the whole current uproar over the authentic voice of the Spirit speaking as He will. Just as one cannot claim validity for His effusions by self-identification with the Second Person of the Trinity yelling "Lord, Lord" but must rather do the Father's will; neither can validity for any action be claimed by identification with the Third Person, calling "The Spirit, The Spirit" as justification for a chosen course of action. The test of the word and the work must be found in the discernment of its relationship to the Will of the Father, revealed by the Son, and conveyed by those whose credentials indicate they have been sent as teachers to God's people.

Renewal does not mean rejection of everything that has gone before. It is a sensitive and sensible evaluation at the beginning of that which is good and true. In renewing or reordering or extending the most humble human structure we apprise what of value can be and should be salvaged from what now exists and incorporate it in our work of renovation. And the Church rests indeed on a firm foundation, established by and on Christ Himself.

True unquestionably in our work of renewing the

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