

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Confirmation — A Personal Appraisal**Confirmation — A Personal Appraisal**

During the Fall and Spring of each year your bishops are busy practically every evening traveling to a Church in some part of the diocese to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to boys and girls whom we prefer to classify as 'young adults.' Three years ago, I made a decision, by no means irrevocable, to confirm those of the Junior High School level (preferably 8th year students). I reasoned then that such was the age when young people were beginning to emerge from the narrow world of childhood where "I" seemed to be the sole pronoun. The world of dreams and fantasy was beginning to give way to the world of reality, and maturity was beginning to show itself in a concern for others. I reasoned, too, that this real world was filled with the power of evil attractive and tempting in its vain promises. I wanted our young people to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain them at such a critical time of life.

I suppose we will never know the perfect age for Confirmation. Surely, theology provides no definitive answer. I could appeal to some of its writers and choose to administer the Sacrament immediately after

Baptism. For justification of this decision I could invoke the practice of the Eastern Church which relies on the theology of the special character imprinted on the soul as a title to added glory in Heaven. Then, again, I could justify its postponement until the last year of high school or later with the emphasis on Confirmation as a sacrament of maturity to be received only by those capable of making a personal and mature commitment to the Christian vocation. In fact, I have permitted such postponement in some cases where pastors and teachers have requested it, and have accepted the responsibility for their decision. I will be most open to their judgment and insights emerging from this experiment.

What are my personal reflections after three years of implementing our Diocesan Guidelines and after witnessing the Confirmation of thousands of our young people? I must say that there is nothing so startlingly apparent in the present procedure as to tempt me to change the decision of three years ago. Nor, at the same time, is there anything so forcefully obvious in the results as to incline me to be inflexible about it.

I do feel comfortable, however, with some healthy signs I see. I have been impressed with the extensive preparation by way of instruction, and the experiences provided for apostolic action, the involvement of parents in the preparation, and the personal letters written to me by the young people requesting the Sacrament.

I read all of their letters carefully. In fact, they usually provide an abundance of material for my homily. Here are some selections (I leave it to you to imagine my response):

"My mother was eight years old when she was Confirmed. She didn't know what she was doing."

"Godparents spoke for me at Baptism. They told me that I just cried. Now, I am happy to speak for myself."

"I babysat for two months and did not charge. The months were November and December." (Ed. note: Toughest months for babysitting.)

"I am not doing this just to please my parents. It is my own choice."

"I want to be one of Hogan's Heroes." (Ed. note: Right on, son! They are a rare breed.)

I am impressed, too, with the required parental participation in the sacramental preparation. This is excellent adult education and a haunting challenge and reminder that Confirmation does not produce maturity in Christian commitment automatically by relying solely on the Holy Spirit, but requires the added confirmation which comes only from the inspiration of those who are supposedly mature. Young people cannot develop in a spiritual vacuum.

vatican news**Change Not Made In Papal Election, Pope Paul Warns**

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul has cautioned bishops who do not hold the rank of cardinal against prematurely counting themselves as eligible to participate in the election of his successor.

But the 75-year-old pontiff made clear in audience with members of the Permanent Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops that he would like to broaden the eligibility for papal balloting.

He said his mention on March 5 of the possibility of opening secret papal election conclaves to bishops holding membership in the secretariat was not an announcement that his decision had been made.

"This study has not yet ended," Paul VI. told the secretariat members at a special audience for the 15-member group.

During the March 5 consistory at which 30 new cardinals were formally installed as Princes of the Church, the Pope announced that he was considering the possibility of admitting some selected bishops, as well as patriarchs of the Oriental Church, into the conclave that will elect his successor.

At that time, the Pope announced that he had decided to set a limit of 120 on the number of cardinals who will be permitted to cast ballots for his successor and expressed the hope that the Popes of the future would hold to that limit.

However, the pontiff told the secretariat's prelates that the matter of changing the ancient rules of papal election conclaves is "so delicate" that it requires long study.

Actually, the reference was to the controversial nature of any streamlining of the papal conclaves. Some months ago when it

was reported that the Pope had just about decided to admit some bishops to the next conclave, there was considerable opposition voiced against any change in the tradition.

The papal choice of the Secretariat of the Synod as the most likely body from which to select papal electors under a conclave expansion program was an obvious one.

Twelve of the members of the agency are elected by popular vote of the Synod, making these prelates truly representative of the world's bishops. The other three members are appointed by the Pope. All serve for three-year terms.

One official in the Vatican Secretariat of State said the Pope had not made up his mind what to do about the conclave reforms until two days before the March 5 consistory at which he announced the voter limit and the possibility that bishops and the patriarchs might be permitted to cast ballots.

The Holy Father's speech containing the reference to the voter limit and to the bishops and the patriarchs was not sent to the Secretariat of State for translation into the languages in which it was distributed on Monday, until the Saturday before," the official told RNS, adding:

"This means that the Holy Father had not made up his mind about exactly what he was going to announce until some time on Saturday — less than 40 hours before the announcement was made.

"I think his mention that he is considering the possibility of admitting some bishops — those on the Synod council — and the patriarchs of the Oriental Church — were trial balloons."

Pontiff Greets West German President

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul and West German President Gustav Heinemann agreed here on the value of "practical ecumenism."

The subject was brought up by the West German official during a 45-minute audience with the pontiff at the Vatican.

Mr. Heinemann, an active Lutheran layman and holder of a degree in Protestant theology, also discussed peace and justice with the Pope.

The pontiff praised the economic and technical progress of the West German people and expressed deep appreciation for the warm relationship that he said exists between the Vatican and West Germany.

Pope Paul said the friendly relations between the two sovereignties are based on "a reciprocal esteem and harmonic collaboration."

"At this time," the Pope said, "we also want to remember the universities and superior schools which brought your people together at a sad time in the history of civilization and culture, and which brought a decisive contribution to Europe and even the world."

The leader of the Catholic Church stressed that technical progress must be accompanied by "progress of the spirit."

"The histories of all the centuries teach us, in fact, that the true goodness of a people and its legitimate aspirations in political, economic and cultural fields must be necessarily based on moral fundamentals," he said.

CARDINAL DIES

Vatican City [RNS] — Cardinal Giuseppe Ferretto, who resigned Feb. 28 as head of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, which rules on dispensations and indulgences, died at his residence here on March 17. He was 74 years old and had for some time been suffering from a heart condition.

Applause, Tears of Joy Greet Restored Pieta

Vatican City [RNS] — Michelangelo's restored Pieta is on public display again in St. Peter's Basilica, with the ancient marble statue protected by a shatterproof glass shield.

Pope Paul personally led Church dignitaries who, on March 26, viewed the 15th-Century masterpiece, as it was unveiled here. The unveiling followed a 10-month period of restoration after damage caused by a hammer-wielding man who fancied himself as being on a mission of destruction at the bidding of Jesus Christ.

Many Europeans and pilgrims and tourists from the United States were among the great throng who watched the unveiling of the restored Pieta.

The pontiff arrived at the "Pieta Chapel" just inside the basilica doors less than two minutes after a heavy drape had been dropped swiftly and without warning to bare the statue and its new protective glass wall.

Exclamations and gasps of pleasant shock and delight rose from the crowd as the near life-sized figures of the sitting Virgin cradling the broken body of her Son came into full view.

Many were seeing the most famous of the artist's several Pietas for the first time. Others in the crowd had viewed the white, satin-smooth marble grouping often.

But the veteran as well as the novice viewer was taken aback by the stunning combination of surprise and artistic magnificence.

After several seconds the crowd composed itself and a round of applause slowly began to rise from its midst and make its noisy way to the far corners of the huge basilica.

The public — for whom Michelangelo had created a masterpiece more than 470 years

ago was thanking him anew in a spontaneous display of emotion. Many of them were people who had stood against the wooden barriers for more than an hour before the unveiling in order to have a good vantage point.

Pope Paul and his entourage went behind the glare-resistant glass wall where he knelt on a bench and prayed silently before the altar above which the Pieta has rested for most of the years since its completion in 1499.

It was taken from the basilica only once in modern times when it was sent to New York to be displayed at the Vatican Pavilion of the World's Fair. It was one of the major attractions of the international exposition.

As the Pope and his official group prayed, many in the crowd crossed themselves and joined in offering a silent religious entreaty. The Sistine Chapel choir sang in the background.

Pope Urges Funds For New Churches

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul VI has made an appeal for funds to be used in a church building program for suburban Rome.

The pontiff told thousands of Romans and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square for his customary Sunday-noon address and blessing that today's city planners and developers often overlook new church construction.

The Pope noted that "thanks to praiseworthy civil organizations" in many places, new housing, new schools, new workshops, new hospitals, "even some new sports fields and some new police stations" had been constructed. "But," he complained, "still no new churches, no new religious centers of moral and religious assistance, no new parishes."