

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Vocation Crisis — A Grace

I suppose most of us are tempted to pray each day: "Lord, deliver me from all crises. Let me continue to live in the tranquility of peaceful day-to-day existence freed from all challenging events and separated from people who disturb me. Preserve my 'status quo' for ages upon ages."



Such prayer should be alien to the life of a pilgrim on his journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. For that is what we Christians are meant to be — people on a journey filled with risks but sustained by faith and hope in the victory of Jesus Christ over every seemingly hopeless situation.

One such situation which looms dark and ominous is the present vocation crisis. I feel we have bemoaned the fact of the shortage of religious personnel long enough. As people of faith and hope in the Lord's Providence for His Church, let us accept the crisis for what He has intended it to be — grace of reflection and response.

I feel privileged to challenge all of our diocese to such reflection and response. The question for prayerful reflection is this: "What can I do personally to improve the situation?" The sincerity of our prayers will be assured by some offering of ourselves worthy of the name sacrifice.

The II Vatican Council made two statements about the involvement of the whole Christian community in sponsoring religious vocations.

"The task of fostering vocations devolves on the whole Christian community which should do so in the first place by living in a full Christian way." Decree on Priestly Formation Chapter 2 - Par. 2

"Since, however, a common concern unites the Captain of the ship with its passengers, the whole Christian people

should be taught that it is their duty to cooperate in one way or another, by constant prayer and other means at their disposal, so that the Church may always have the necessary number of priests to carry out her divine mission." Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests Chapter 2 - Par. 2

While these passages refer only to the priesthood, their message is valid and applicable to all vocations to religious life. They tell us that the Christian community will always have and will only have the leadership it deserves. Vocations are not born in a vacuum but in the responsive hearts of young men and women who are reared in a climate of faith and whose generosity to the divine call is supported by the prayers and example of a faith community.

Upon reading these passages, I think of the overwhelming frustration that has dulled the initial enthusiasm of many dedicated priests and religious because of the lack of human support and encouragement for their efforts. We bishops, priests and religious men and women long for your daily prayerful support and for some heartening evidence that our message is bearing some fruit. We are human enough to appreciate an occasional word of gratitude. We are well aware of our inadequacies without constant public announcement of them. We beg you rather to raise your voices in constant prayer for us. If priests need priests (and surely we do) and religious need religious (and surely they do) we all need you desperately.

One final passage has much to say about the vocation crisis:

"Outstanding contributions are made to this work by families which are alive with the spirit of faith, love, and reverence and which serve as a kind of introductory seminary." Decree on Priestly Formation Chapter 2 - Par. 1

And this means that a vocation crisis points to the woeful shortage of Christian homes — the basic seminary for vocations. We talk today so much about a housing shortage. And, indeed, I would not want to

minimize its reality. But more critical is the home crisis — the desperate lack of environment — for the growth of religious vocations or for any sense of vocation and lifelong commitment. All of us who said 'yes' to God's call have only repeated what we first heard from good parents. I owe my own vocation first to God and then to a good father and mother who encouraged me to a generous 'yes.' After years of personal experience in the spiritual formation of candidates for the priesthood, I have found no exception who has bypassed this route of response to His invitation.

What is the strength of this parental influence?

1) Every child is a prolongation of both parents. Psychologists may argue in text and speech about the relative influence of heredity and environment. But we are faced with the reality that we inherit our environment. We are blessed with it or burdened with it throughout all the formative years of our life.

2) Our spiritual formation and training begin from the moment we are born. Before we understand, we are impressed. The cooing of a child is a response to the sensed love of parents for each other and for God's gift to them.

3) Religious education begins long before we enter the formal training of a school. Its curriculum includes — a sense of the trusting, confident and generous love of God — a practice of bending one's will to make the observance of God's will more acceptable, and all of these lessons presented through the greatest of teaching methods — personal example.

Let us be united in prayers and personal sacrifices in a diocesan campaign for vocations. We have bemoaned the crisis for years, we have superanalyzed its causes. Now let us work together for its solution guaranteed by the Lord of the Harvest and confirmed by His Church assembled at Vatican II.

vatican news

'Heart Filled with Loving Grief'

Pontiff Begs for End to Divisions in Church

Castel Gandolfo [RNS] — Expressing concern and "grief" over "divisions and dissent" in the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Paul VI invited the faithful to strive to overcome the Church's "inner torment" in the perspective of the "reconciliation and renewal" programmed for the 1975 Holy Year.

"The reconstruction of real spiritual unity within the Church is one of the gravest and most urgent problems of the Church," he declared.

In a lengthy address during his weekly public audience at the papal Summer residence here, the

Study Religions Truth, Pope Paul Stresses

Castel Gandolfo [RNS] — Pope Paul said here that it is the "duty" of every Christian family, Catholic school and parish "to know and encourage the study of religious truths," especially among the young.

The Pope stressed religious education during his usual Sunday message at his Summer residence here, declaring that such education "concerns the vital need of every human being

75-year-old pontiff dwelt particularly on two points: the phenomenon of "contestation" or protest within the Church, and the alleged distinctions between the "institutional" Church and the "purely charismatic."

He expressed the hope that the "charism of love" would intervene to offset the "contagion of disputatious and corrosive criticism" within the Church, and denied any "substantial distinction" between the institutional and "presumed purely charismatic" Church.

Pope Paul insisted that there is "only one" true Church of Christ,

Noting the great impetus given religious education by Vatican II, the pontiff said it pleased him to see young people who sacrifice their time to work in Christian doctrine classes, and the "great reflowering" of catechetical literature in many Christian nations.

The Pope said he was especially grateful for the General Catechetical Directory, developed and published by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy.

the one "founded on Peter and the Apostles as custodians and ministers of the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

The pontiff began his address by referring, generally, to the "great difficulties" that he was meeting in his efforts to achieve "unity and harmony" in the Church. He said he wanted to infuse a spirit of "seriousness and efficiency" into the Holy Year of reconciliation and moral renewal, but he said he was ever discovering "new problems and new obstacles."

The Church, he said, is suffering from an "inner torment of dissent and arbitrary acts." The pontiff made no specific reference to individuals or groups, but his words were taken by Vatican observers as expressing his concern over the challenging attitude toward the hierarchy and the Vatican by some Catholic theologians and breakaway groups.

"Our heart is filled with loving grief," he said, and asked: "How shall we surmount the problem of division and disunity which unhappily is to be found now in not a few parts of the Church?" He criticized those Catholics who claim to promote "communion" within the Church, while, at the same time, endeavoring to discredit "the juridical, in-

stitutional aspects of the Church."

Such persons, or groupings of such persons, he said, want to "legalize their official belonging to the Church" by blurring distinctions and "by abolishing all concepts of schism or excommunication."

Explaining this point, Pope Paul said the "division" in the Church today . . . is in the minds and behavior of many people who still proclaim — and often with the obstinate conviction of superiority — that they are Catholics, but in their own way, with freedom of thought and with proud claims of untouchable authenticity."

Pope Paul was strongly critical of protest, which, he said "has become fashionable today, with irresponsible facility." Insisting that he was not against "positive contestation," — so long as "it remains positive," — the Pope deplored "negative" contestation, which, as "a form of self-injury," is "too often without wisdom and without love."

He described this attitude of protest as "a habit of closing one's eyes to one's own defects, and opening them, instead, on those of others." It was a habit, he went on, that leads one to "rush to judgment" on the faults of the Church, but leads one to be indulgent "to the point of

sympathy and connivance" with the faults of the enemies of the Church, "those who deny the name of God, those who subvert social order. . . ."

The Pope then expressed the hope that love will intervene "to cure the Church of the contagion of disputatious and corrosive criticism which has penetrated here and there even into the very tissues of the Mystical Body of Christ." "The charism of love must be put back in its due place," he affirmed, "the first place."

Paraphrasing St. Paul, the pontiff described the love he was referring to: "Love is always patient and kind, and is never jealous. Love is never boastful or conceited. It is never rude or selfish. It does not take offense; it is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in their advance in holiness. Love is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes."

Pope Paul ended his address with a fervent appeal for unity: "We must restore that sense of the Church which reflects the divine intentions" and which "confers on the Church that inner unity, that vitality, that joy of being and doing which will give witness in our time to the presence and salvation of Jesus Christ."