

**PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# The Vocation Crisis

**PART II**

During the years since Vatican II numerous conferences have been assembled to analyze the vocation crisis. Concerned bishops and heads of religious communities and vocation directors have anxiously sought solutions to the problem. I have read a massive amount of literature from the reports of these meetings. In reflecting on what I have read, I can safely conclude that the crisis exists practically everywhere in the Church, that the causes are many and complex, and the solutions are far from simple.

What I liked especially about our recent Clergy Conference was that it focused on us priests as contributors to the crisis and, at the same time, as the hope for its solution. We had gathered as people concerned with the fact that so few young men are attracted to the priesthood and want to spend their lives doing what we are doing. We were blessed in having as our speaker a man of the talent and dedication of a Dr. Arkin — and, even more, a man who had the courage to say to us "Blame nobody but yourselves." It is a human temptation to analyze problems by pointing the accusing finger at others and by seeking solutions that do not involve us. But, here we were being told that we are the chief promoters and salesmen for the priestly vocation and if the situation is critical today, it is simply because we have done a poor job of salesmanship.

In one of the fine and grace-filled moments of the Conference, Dr. Arkin recalled the vocation crisis of the prophet Jeremiah who was called by God in 650 B.C. to be His spokesman and to challenge His people to be uprooted from their aberrant conduct and to reform their lives — the same unpopular mission that every priest is called to. After years of failure to reform God's people from the idolatry of the gods who promoted and enshrined their own self-interests, the prophet, engulfed in a sea of self-pity and overwhelmed by the ingratitude of those he had been called to serve, utters his litany of complaint to God about the misery of his vocation. He asks God's vengeance on all the ungrateful who did not appreciate his best efforts and who sought to persecute him. Chapter 15 of Jeremiah is the story of a prophet who had not understood at that moment of his personal history the cost of discipleship. And when he reminds the Author of his vocation that he is bearing insult in His name, he is himself reminded in clearest terms — "I never promised you a rose garden. Shut your complaining mouth and get back to your work. I am with you always." This is a free translation of this inspired text: (Jeremiah 15:20-21):

And I will make you toward this people a solid wall of brass.

Though they fight against you, they shall not prevail,

For I am with you, to deliver and rescue you, says the Lord.

I will free you from the hand of the wicked.

And rescue you from the grasp of the violent.

And history records that Jeremiah lived out his vocation, despite a miserable record of job satisfaction and zero moments of success, in the tranquil assurance of a man of faith that the Lord was with him until death, and that in the frustrating meanwhile he was a man privileged to be singled out by the mystery of divine election to be God's spokesman proclaiming an unpopular message.

And by presenting the vocation crisis of Jeremiah and the divine solution, Dr. Arkin was telling us very directly to quit wallowing in self-pity and complaints about the frustrations of our priesthood and the lack of job satisfaction. Face your problems as men of faith who know that your strength is in His abiding presence. "If you are concerned about the vocation crisis, begin to reflect the joy of your vocation. Be proud of your priesthood and enthusiastic about your work."

A strong message, indeed. And we seemed to accept it in a humble spirit. I think most of us left the conference grateful for its inspiration and resolved to encourage by word and deed potential candidates for the priesthood.

Surely we weren't blaming others for the crisis. And most assuredly we weren't accusing God. When a conference provokes a 'mea culpa' it has to be a great success.

P.S. The above confession of guilt should in no way be interpreted as a declaration of independence from the highly treasured prayerful support of the whole Christian community.

**Bishop Hogan Involved**

## Bishops Demand Action to Uplift Appalachia Area

Wheeling, W. Va. [RNS] — In a stinging indictment of the exploitation of the people and resources of Appalachia, 25 Catholic bishops called for a return of power — through citizen and community control — to the people of the area, and commissioned a "comprehensive plan of action" to spur such a program.

In an unprecedented pastoral letter, the bishops addressed themselves to the critical socio-economic and spiritual issues of the 13-state region and urged Catholics and all people of good will to "help recover and defend the struggling dream of Appalachia itself."

[Among signatories to the pastoral is Bishop Joseph L. Hogan. Part of the diocese is considered in the Appalachia area.]

The 38-page pastoral, "This Land is Home to Me," is aimed at challenging the "powerless" of the Middle Atlantic mountain region — from Southern New York to Northern Georgia and Alabama — and represents the first concerted effort by Catholic bishops whose dioceses encompass a portion of the Appalachian region.

The result of a dialogue begun in May 1973 between the bishops and the people of the region, the pastoral involved a "year of listening" to these struggling to maintain a way of life against "brutal and repressive institutional violence."

The pastoral letter was announced Feb. 1 at the semiannual meeting of the Catholic Committee on Appalachia (CCA) at Wheeling College here. Bishop Michael Begley of Charlotte, N.C., CCA chairman, said he and the other Catholic prelates are not only concerned with the needs of the people but about

"action which will right the wrongs that bring suffering to people."

Bishop Begley disclosed that the letter stemmed from a lengthy dialogue with the people of Appalachia, from those in the "hollers" of the mountains to the miners, the farmers and city dwellers of the 13 states.

In addition to focusing on the problems of Appalachia, as a "symbol" of suffering in this country as well as the rest of the world, the bishops' pastoral "invites" the CCA "to draft for us and with us . . . a comprehensive plan of action" for Appalachia.

"This plan would constitute our first tool which hopefully, each year, could be brought up to date, in the light of fresh experience," the letter noted. The pastoral recommended several points to be included in the action plan.

Initially, it urged the establishment of "centers of reflection and prayer" throughout Appalachia which would "integrate the analytical social science skills and the profound spirituality necessary for persevering creativity in the struggle for justice."

The pastoral indicated that such centers, following guidelines from the recent Rome Synod's document, "Justice in the World," could also link "fragmented struggles from different parts of the region, and even outside the region, thus supporting healthy localism with the richness of a wider national and international network."

It also urged that cooperation be sought from "other major institutions" of the area which are open to the voice of the poor. The letter went on to suggest that "centers of popular culture" be set up in every parish "as a sign of the Church's concern, linked to

the broader action centers, places where the poor feel welcome, spaces for people to come and share at all levels . . ."

The pastoral stressed the need for action plans to key on economic questions as "first and most basic" for the people of the Appalachia region. "We call attention to the presence of powerful multinational corporations now within our region," it said. "The fate and role of these institutions is a major question, not only for Appalachia but for the whole world . . ."

"As a counter-force to the (politically) unaccountable power of these multinational corporations," the pastoral declared, "there must arise a corresponding multinational labor movement, rooted in a vision of justice, rising above corruption and narrowness, with a universal concern for all workers . . . consumers . . . people."

Finally, as regards the action plan, the pastoral listed a number of issues which it called upon the CCA to investigate. These included the role of the coal industry, energy consumption patterns, strip and deep mining, land acquisition, exploitation of cheap labor, job safety and many others.

In explaining how the plan would be implemented, the bishop said "we expect each diocese to adapt these concepts to their own existing structures. In addition, any plan, to be truly effective must be ecumenical in nature. That is why I hope that implementation might be achieved through a vehicle like CORA."

CORA, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, is an ecumenical organization representing 17 different Christian denominations in the 13-state area.

The pastoral, divided into three sections, initially provides an historical perspective of Appalachia, and is noticeably critical when describing certain problem areas, such as the coal industry.

The pastoral pointed out that "reform movements are under way" in unions, community organizing, among consumers and in religious circles. It emphasized that the various groups seeking reform of socio-economic and political structures in Appalachia must promote "citizen involvement" in all facets of life.

"Hopefully," the letter stated, "this letter . . . will start a process, wherein the Catholic community can join together with all people of good will through the region to reflect on and act for a more just society."

Besides Bishops Hogan and Begley, those signing the pastoral are Archbishop Joseph Bernardin

of Cincinnati; Archbishop William Borders of Baltimore; Archbishop Thomas Donnellan of Atlanta; Archbishop Thomas McDonough of Louisville; Bishop Richard Ackerman of Covington, Ky.; Bishop Edwin Broderick of Albany, N.Y.; Bishop Joseph Brunini of Natchez-Jackson, Miss.; Bishop William Connare of Greensburg, Pa.; Bishop David Cunningham of Syracuse, N.Y.; Bishop Joseph Daley of Harrisburg, Pa.; Bishop Joseph Durick of Nashville; Bishop Edward Head of Buffalo, N.Y.; Bishop Edward Herrmann of Columbus, Ohio; Bishop Joseph Hodges of Wheeling, W. Va.; Bishop James Hogan of Altoona-Johnstown, Pa.; Bishop Vincent Leonard of Pittsburgh; Bishop John May of Mobile, Ala.; Bishop J. Carroll McCormick of Scranton, Pa.; Bishop John King Mussio of Youngstown, Ohio; Bishop Walter Sullivan of Richmond, Va.; Bishop Ernest Unterkoefler of Charleston, S.C.; Bishop Joseph Vath of Birmingham, Ala.; and Bishop Alfred Watson of Erie, Pa.

## Bolivia Strike Ends After Bishop Intercedes

La Paz, Bolivia [RNS] — Roman Catholic Bishop Rene Fernandez Apaza of Oruro, Bolivia, has been credited with playing a key role in successfully mediating a 13-day strike of some 7,000 tin miners in the Siglo XX — Catavi area, about 100 miles from La Paz.

The strike had been precipitated by the closing down of four radio stations, including one Roman Catholic broadcasting facility, in the mining area, and the arrest of five Catholic priests.

The military government of President Hugo Banzer Suarez had cracked down on the radio stations on the grounds that they were broadcasting "subversive

programs" and "encouraging a campaign" against the Banzer regime.

The Catholic Pius XII radio station is owned and operated by the Canadian Oblate Missionary order. The Bolivian Catholic bishops have protested the closure of all four stations, and the arrest of the priests.

**COMMITTEE**

Hornell — St. Ann's Religious Education Board recently announced the formation of a new Adult Education Committee: Carol Shilkett, chairman, Mary Kelleher, Angel Lang, Jim Mooney, Jean Wolfruber.