

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Paralysis of Resentment

A few weeks ago a brother priest introduced me to a most recent meditation from the heart and pen of the gifted spiritual



writer, Father Henri Nouwen. While written primarily for seminarians, and prompted by a painful personal experience with a group of ten candidates soon to be ordained priests, the message is valuable for all of us. I share it with you now in this Lenten season which calls us to self-evaluation and personal renewal.

Father Nouwen had been invited to conduct a retreat for men who by every expectation should have been highly motivated and filled with excitement about their ordination to priestly service. Instead, he found tired men, paralyzed in mind and heart, victims of the passion of resentment, filled with negative criticism of their seminary days, devoid of hope for the days ahead, and far from any real understanding of the eucharistic life of daily gratitude which alone could free them from their selfishness and enable them to live their vocation enthusiastically as men for others.

I find this condition all too prevalent in the Church today. So many of us who are called in varying degrees by our Christian vocation to be people who can share our love and concern for the hopes and anxieties of

others, have drained our energies in self-pity, self-defense, and in bitter resentment.

Resentment rarely expresses itself in spastic and violent rage. It is more a smoldering passion that deteriorates our character, that prevents us from seeking forgiveness and from creating space for God's liberating grace. When we keep clinging to our complaints as our own morbid way of self-affirmation, we leave no room for God to set us free to be creative people.

I am sure we have all experienced the death that resentment brings to people who in any society are the most vocal in their negative criticism and offer the least to create a better day. Their litany of complaints is endless. Pardon the expression, it is 'bitch, bitch, bitch,' 'gripe, gripe, gripe.' Families experience this destructive power and the Church does, too. Resentful people drain the vitality of any group. Vocal in their affirmation of all that is wrong, they are strangely silent about ways to improve the situation.

I hope this Lent will bring all of us to a greater measure of gratitude — to the humble recognition that our life is not an inalienable property to be defended but a gift to be shared. For what have we that has not been given to us? Really — what have we that we have not received? Which means that the only thing we can give is thanks. It is indeed significant that the central act of Christian life is the Eucharist — thanksgiving

in which we are reminded that life is not to be possessed but shared and finally given away.

It is through a Eucharistic life that resentment can be overcome and a new way of living becomes possible. Resentment makes us cling to our negative feelings and prevents us from being creative. Gratitude opens us to new possibilities, new hopes and expectations. Resentment exhausts us by complicated jealousies and by the draining desires for revenge. Gratitude gives us new vitality — allows us to desire God as the Lord of our personal history who forms and shapes us day by day and makes us more receptive to Him and to His people. The resentful heart leaves no room for the Spirit, because it is filled with worries, jealousies, revengeful thoughts and suspicions.

The grateful heart sees the Eucharist not as an isolated event in every day or week, but as an expression of life, as a gift of God in Jesus Christ inviting us to unending gratitude. It is only when we enter this eucharistic life that we can begin to let our resentments go and stretch out our arms to Him who sets us free — free to be obedient to His Spirit in us ever calling us to be more than we are now — and free to serve others, not as a burden but as a manifestation of our own gratitude.

May this Lent bring us to a deeper awareness of our common mission to be Eucharistic people — devoid of resentment and filled with gratitude.

U.S. Bishops Committee Offers Statement On the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

By U.S. Catholic Conference

Washington — The U.S. Bishops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices, in a statement on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, declared, "We encourage those who already belong and we support the positive and desirable directions of the charismatic renewal."

Observing that the charismatic renewal cannot be productive "in isolation," the statement calls for continuing contact between leaders and members of the movement with bishops and pastors, and the full integration of charismatic groups into the structures of parish life.

It recommends sustaining a climate of mutual understanding, trust and communication through the appointment of diocesan liaison persons who can keep current with developments in the movement, offer sound guidance, and keep the bishops informed.

Priests are strongly encouraged to take an interest in the charismatic movement. "Because of his unique role and the charism of sacred ordination, the priest can most effectively relate the work of the renewal to the total life of the Church and in this way fulfill his own special function of coordinator of the gifts of the Spirit," the document says.

Expressing the hope that the "truly positive values of the charismatic renewal will prevail," the Pastoral Research Practices Committee also drew attention in the statement to "dangers and undesirable features" which appear in some charismatic groups, as well as to other aspects of the movement that require "caution."

The Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices prepared the Statement on Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the request of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). Archbishop John R.

Quinn of Oklahoma City, then chairman of the committee, presented the statement to the meeting of the NCCB last November, at which time approval for its distribution was given. In the interim, suggested changes in the document have been completed and an introduction and appendix added. The latter comprises the text of a recent address on the subject by Pope Paul.

"One of the great manifestations of the Spirit in our times has been the Second Vatican Council," the statement says. "Many believe also that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is another such manifestation of the Spirit."

Where the movement is making solid progress, it offers positive and authenticating signs, the statement says, citing such manifestations as "a strongly grounded spirit of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord," a renewed interest in private and group prayer, a new sense of spiritual values, a heightened consciousness of the Holy Spirit, "the praise of God and a deepening personal commitment to Christ."

"Many, too, have grown in devotion to the Eucharist and partake more fruitfully in the sacramental life of the Church," the statement continues. "Reverence for the Mother of the Lord takes on fresh meaning and many feel a deeper sense of and attachment to the Church. Things of this kind certainly merit encouragement and do reflect the biblical and church teaching," the Pastoral Research and Practices Committee said.

At the same time, the committee pointed to "some dangers which continue to exist here and there" and which cannot be ignored "if the movement is to develop in a positive and fruitful way. Elitism and that kind of biblical fundamentalism which offend against the authenticating norms of Sacred Scripture and the

teaching of the Church are two of these dangers."

The former "creates a closed circle and gives rise to divisions rather than unity," the Bishops said, while biblical fundamentalism "does not do justice to the mission of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to 'all Jesus has taught.'"

While it cannot be denied that other aspects of the charismatic renewal — healing, prophecy, praying in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues — could be genuine manifestations of the Spirit, these phenomena "must be carefully scrutinized and their importance, even if genuine, should not be exaggerated."

The charismatic renewal "has to have a strong bond with the total life of the Church," the statement asserted. "This means that it is necessary to maintain involvement in the local parish community as a whole and to seek out and work under the guidance of the parish priests who as sharers in the pastoral ministry of the bishop have responsibility for coordinating the overall well-being of the parish."

"Priests and bishops, of course, have the correlative responsibility to develop means for relating the charismatic renewal to the whole Church," the committee said.

The statement suggested that a key element in the future success of the charismatic movement is the formation of leaders who are well grounded in the teaching of the Church and in understanding of Scripture, "leaders who are open to one another and mature enough to share responsibility. In many places the benefits derived from such leadership are already markedly visible."

"An especially sensitive pastoral question concerns

charismatic groups which involve both Catholics and Christians of other traditions," the NCCB committee said. "Catholics who participate in such groups should be mature in their faith and committed to the principles of Catholic belief. They should be well informed of and careful to

French Nun Beatified In Holy Year Rite

Vatican City [RNS] — The first beatification of the Holy Year was solemnly proclaimed by Pope Paul on Feb. 9 when he raised to the honors of the altar the foundress of the French congregation of the Religious of the Assumption, Mother Marie-Eugenie de Jesus, Milleret de Brou.

The congregation founded by Blessed Marie-Eugenie in 1839 specializes in education and social work. Today there are 1,800 members of the Paris-based congregation, which has spread to 30 countries around the world, including Spain, Belgium, Denmark, England, the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Japan, Lebanon, as well as countries in Central and South America and in Africa.

Representatives of the congregation and pilgrim groups from nearly all these countries attended the beatification ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica, which was conducted by Cardinal Francois Marty, Archbishop of Paris.

Following proclamation of the beatification decree, Pope Paul, speaking in French, praised the sanctity and work of Blessed Marie-Eugenie, who died at Paris in 1897 at the age of 80.

Born in Metz, northeastern France, in 1817, Anne-Marie Milleret de Brou began in her teens to work among the poor of Paris. She was just 22 when she founded the Religious of the

Assumption, dedicated primarily to the education of girls.

"To the members of the movement, to pastors and to all the faithful of Christ, we commend the words of Scripture we take as our own guiding light: 'Do not stifle the Spirit' . . ."

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Referring to this goal of the congregation, the Pope said it was a noble effort to develop in girls and young women "simplicity, humility, righteousness, courage, a spirit of sacrifice, honor, goodness, and zeal."

"Strong characters developed" in this way, the pontiff added, "will not be swept aside by the changing moods of the times or by the whim of romanticism or by passion."

Then, addressing his remarks to the young people present, the Pope urged them to "heed the voice of the Lord calling new laborers to work in His vineyard" by consecrating themselves to "the immense task of evangelization in the modern world."

Later, speaking to the thousands gathered in St. Peter's Square for his weekly Sunday-noon homily and blessing, Pope Paul renewed his expressions of esteem of the newly-proclaimed Blessed.

"Once again," he said, "the Church is called upon to honor a great woman of singular religious virtues."

He praised Blessed Marie-Eugenie as not merely "an educationist of real talent," but also, and especially, "as a woman who dedicated her full and holy life to a double program: to adore and to educate."