

# Catholic Schools: A Challenging Ministry

At an informal gathering last month there were several young priests who had been at Becket Hall in the days when I was rector and



Father Louis Hohman was the spiritual director. The young priests were teasing Father Hohman about their experiences with him, recounting tales, things he had told them, advice he had offered them.

While the conversation was playful in tone, it was evident that Father Hohman had won their respect and admiration in those years of growth and value-shaping, and that their lives had indeed been affected by their contact with him. Teachers can have impact!

Catholic Schools Week this year is celebrated Feb. 8-14. It is an occasion to reflect on the important role that our Catholic schools and their teachers have in enriching the faith experience of their students. All teachers stand in a privileged position. They participate in discovering the beautiful and the possible in each youngster and in encouraging the expression and growth of that youngster. That is a very real and demanding challenge. And how much more significant is the privilege and the challenge of helping our youngsters know and love the Lord Jesus. This is what our Catholic schools are all about.

The American people have chosen to leave God out of public education. We have not only chosen to include Him, but we have chosen to make Him our essential message, our reason for

grappling with the serious and sometimes overwhelming challenge of financing Catholic schools.

The apostolate of Catholic schools is worth the sacrifices all of you are making. The schools provide regular opportunities to help our youngsters search out the meaning of the gospel message in the context of their lives and the contemporary society in which they live out their Christian commitment. They sincerely strive to be living communities of those who proclaim Jesus on their lips, in their hearts and in their lives. The Catholic schools possess a special opportunity to promote the dignity of the person and the building of community. And we all know that these two values are critically needed in our American society.

A special measure of gratitude is due to the dedicated parents, teachers, priests, Religious men and women who have expressed their own Christian vocation through the ministry of our Catholic schools. I offer my own thanksgiving for the blessing they have been to our diocese and for the call to reflection and growth that our schools now offer us.

To you who are parents, may I say that our schools are meant to help you teach your children about Jesus. They are not meant to take on your responsibilities. If you want your children to be just live justly. If you want them to worship God, do so yourselves. If you want them to care for others, point out the ways. Talk to your children about Jesus. Nourish your own faith. Provide a home which demonstrates an honest attempt at Christian living. No Catholic school can make up for your own lives.

You who are teachers, realize that the most

compelling subject is you! Knowledge is not enough. Technique is not enough. Mere experience is not enough. The mystery which is at the heart of the teaching process is "tuning in" to the needs and gifts of the person. The teachers who meant the most to me in my own school life were not necessarily those who knew the most, but those who gave out of the fullness and richness of their own being. Their own Christian humanness called out to me to be my best self. These teachers are rare and they are worth more than we can ever pay them. But I dare to ask each of you to examine your own heart on how you have been grace and blessing to your students or how you have been pain and fear to them. An honest evaluation of your life and teaching relationship can be better teaching, preparation than any brush up college course.

To you parish communities, school boards and education committees — I challenge you to educate your young people by being more of a genuine community. St. Augustine describes community as a group of people who decide to be joined together in the peaceful sharing of the things they love. Your listening respectfully to one another and loving and serving each other will speak more loudly to your children than words. Don't avoid the hard questions about the future of your parish's educational life. But do deal with the questions seriously, lovingly, responsibly.

And, to all of you engaged in the Church's teaching mission — we must promise a great deal. And we must deliver our best. To a great degree the future support and commitment to Catholic schools depend upon these schools being substantially different from other schools — and different in their most important feature — their witness to the belief in the Gospel and its power to transform human life!

## Joy and the Cross in the Civilization of Love

Following is the text of the address Pope Paul VI delivered to a general audience of Jan. 14.

We have celebrated the Holy Year. We hope and trust that the celebration of this event has really interested the spirits of each of us and that it will continue to exercise its beneficial influence upon us. The Holy Year has spoken to us of renewal and reconciliation. God grant that these two words will remain engraved in our memory, and that they will give a constant direction, a continual impetus to our spiritual life. And if this is so, if it continues to be so, we will see other words, other fruitful formulas germinating from them, which we will be anxious to cultivate and on which we will base the style and programme of our Christian renewal. To look for and choose some simple and comprehensive formulas is in the genius of our times.

We have already briefly launched one such formula when we proposed to seek in the "civilization of love" the religious, moral and civil fruit of the Holy Year. If people like it, this formula can remain. We think it is a valid one for sincere developments both individual and, particularly, social, in living and active memory.

In the following address, delivered during the Angelus Prayer in St. Peter's Square on Jan. 11, Pope Paul refers to abortion and euthanasia.

Today, we are informed, Catholic Rome, praying Rome, is called to St. Mary Major's at 5 p.m. for a "Vigil of prayer and witness" in order to reflect on human life, considered in its highest and truest dignity, as the "glory of God", to use an expression of St. Irenaeus (from the end of the second century).

It is clear that this religious manifestation, promoted in Rome and in the local churches, and with similar manifestations in the world, is motivated by fear that defense of life, both because of the legalization of abortion, particularly, and because of the feared legalization

of the year of grace which has just ended, but which is not outdated and empty for the spiritual history of our time. We must, however, remember the danger of the ambiguity of love, as St. Augustine teaches us, since love may coincide with selfishness, that is, self-love, and become the foundation of an earthly "city", opposed to love of God, the only foundation of the heavenly "city" which, according to our thought, is the only one that can achieve the civilization of love.

But there are other excellent and fruitful formulas in which we can condense, just like seeds destined to have marvelous developments, the genetic force of a Christianity that is always new and alive. St. Paul can suggest to us a great many of these original and comprehensive formulas (cf. Rom 1, 17; Eph 4, 15; Col 3, 11; etc.). Every religious family, moreover, has its own motto, which reveals to us its interior character and its own dynamism.

At this important moment of our spiritual maturation, we ought to return to the original formula of the actual Gospel proclamation, a formula which we have always on our lips and in our heart whenever we recite that great and basic prayer: "Our Father", and take as our own the subject of the early preaching of Jesus Christ Himself: "Thy Kingdom come". This expression would deserve long reflection: what are we actually asking God the Father for, when we beg that his Kingdom may come? This is a biblical and spiritual subject that is always worthy of

study. We will just recall that this expression, a characteristic one in the Lord's early preaching, seems to usher in the coming of the Messiah. Exegetes point out that this kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven) is mentioned over 50 times in the Gospel of Matthew. The precursor, John the Baptist, proclaims it first (Mt 3, 2), and then it becomes the subject of the early evangelization of Jesus, who "began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Mt 4, 17). What did the Lord mean by this formula, not unknown to the People of God?

He meant a great many things, which are not always easy to make out clearly. But let it suffice at present to indicate the Messianic news brought by Christ, the new religious destiny of mankind, a new plan of relations between God and human history. It is a plan of love, mercy and salvation, which on God's initiative penetrates into the natural, degenerated world to raise it and confer on it new life, a supernatural adoption, coming from communion with Christ, if we only accept it and live it.

We must acquire this doctrine of the Kingdom of God and give it our full personal acceptance, ready to experience the joy that is characteristic of it to suffer the cross which faithfulness to the Kingdom of God has also in store for us, to derive from it the practical, moral and social wisdom of which it is the source, and to make it the subject of our dialogue with the secular world surrounding us.

## Religion Is... Defending Life

of euthanasia, will fall short of the absolute standard which is necessary. "For some time now, it has been written, human society has been using its resources to convince itself that it is permissible to kill and to give itself laws that deaden conscience and set it at rest. It seems that human progress demands permission to kill."

It is a sad, a distressing matter. But now we wish to look at this religious episode from its positive, consoling and promising sides. That is, first, that man's life itself becomes not only an object of protection, but also of a respect, an admiration, an inviolability, which places it, at the summit of fundamental values and supreme duties. This is civilization; this is religion.

The second positive aspect is the origin of

this particular initiative, this "vigil of prayer and witness". It comes from the laity, from young people. It is Catholic Action, in its renewal, after the Council, after the Holy Year, which promotes this community act of conscience and religious spirit; and that is, nothing less than for man's life, in its complete significance. Here we have a sensitivity and a vitality which holds out good hopes for the future.

And there is a third aspect characterized by beauty and trust: the Vigil is convened in the Sanctuary of Mary, the Virgin-Mother of God, the first in love for Christ, for the Life of the Saviour, and for ours. Prayer becomes poetry, it becomes song, it becomes joy and confidence, and will not fail to obtain some good divine answer.