

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Reflections on the Detroit Conference

PART I

I write this column four days after leaving Detroit and the "Call to Action" conference. It is hard for me to sort out all that happened in Cobo Hall where the meeting was held. It was exciting, very tiring, encouraging, a vivid experience of a national Catholic faith community very definitely at work.

I know there has been nothing like it in the history of the Catholic Church in this country and I suspect that there has never been anything like it anywhere in the Church. I am not implying that there were not rough spots. Improvements are definitely called for (especially because of the rush involved in each step and the failure to present and discuss the overall scope of each of the documents). I say that it was invigorating to be with a group from Rochester that consisted of priests, Sisters, lay people — married and single, a theology professor and an urban politician. Our group represented many different approaches to church and yet all were pleased and deeply moved at what happened. Detroit for me showed the love of Christ as an active force for unity and understanding. It was a sign of great hope for me to see the diversity of people there; to hear the nuances and tones — the lyric of English (and Spanish) — influenced by many different languages; and know at the liturgy how deeply we are one. It was a special moment of grace to witness Bishops, community workers, military personnel, businessmen, priests, marriage encounter people, Sisters, and others in attendance, all expressing their deep love of church and their concern for people. I had the feeling that Detroit represented the beginning of a powerful movement in the American church that will cause us all some pain but it will be the pain of birth and rebirth as the people of God — the Catholic Church.

Let me be more specific on who were there. I have not seen the official tabulations but I think I can share some idea of the diversity. There are 167 dioceses in this country. They have names with great character that evoke the history and personality of this Country —

Cheyenne, Orange (California), Boston, Oklahoma City, Galveston-Houston, Tallahassee-Pensacola, Bismarck, Belleville, Sioux City, Covington. One hundred fifty-two of them sent delegates to Detroit. I would estimate the average age of the delegates at between 40 and 45. I have read that 39 per cent of the delegates were women. I would say that about 20 per cent were priests. About 120 bishops were at the conference at one time or another. There were more than 100 national Catholic organizations represented by one delegate each. In all, there were 1,360 delegates. Each delegate from a diocese was personally signed on as a delegate by the bishop of that diocese. I list all this just to let you know that this was not a rump group trying to grab the national spotlight. The "Call to Action" conference was sponsored by the U.S. Catholic Bishops and the people there represented the institutional church. I want to add one word here on bishops. There is a lot of criticism of bishops for lack of leadership in the American church. I think that this conference represented the type of leadership that I would hope all American bishops aspire to. A bishop is a servant of the church community who fosters the gifts of the entire church. They are to be praised for the Bicentennial celebration that they designed.

There is no question that the group was more concerned for justice than your average Parish Council or Pastoral Council. That was, after all, the theme of the conference — LIBERTY and JUSTICE for ALL. The problem that has existed in the past ten years has been a perceived split between the average Catholic and the wing of the church that works for justice. I saw definite signs at Detroit that this split was healing. There was little bitterness, and where there was some sharp division at the beginning of the conference, by the end of the conference most of the proposals were accepted with overwhelming consensus. No one tried to take over the conference and use it for self-centered assertions. The conference was profoundly pastoral. I have not been able to go back over the documents yet, but from the first proposals to the final revisions there is a constant move toward grounding the work for justice in faith, following Christ, recalling the need for prayer and the guidance of the Spirit in every effort. The papers explicitly state that we do not have to leave our religion behind when we work for justice and the development of a more humane society. The papers speak of petitioning the Holy Father for the ordination of married people

and women, but they also point out that the priesthood is a failure unless it provides a deeply rooted spiritual leadership to the community. It called for a halt to the sale of arms and for the necessary conversion of our economy, but it also called for the church to find better ways to serve the widowed and our urban and rural communities.

Now the focus will shift to two areas — the May meeting of the bishops in Washington and the local diocese. I regard the substance of what was accomplished in Detroit as a very creative, powerful, somewhat awkward, and a bit raw and uneven voice of the Catholic people of this country. We need to listen, reflect, critique, and be called to conversion by this voice. We need thinkers and theologians to point out inconsistencies in the papers. We need pastors and parish staffs to add even more warmth and practical love to the positions adopted. We need bishops to pray and listen, study and consult their people and then speak with courage in May. It will not, however, be a question of whether or not the bishops accept or reject the positions that have been called for. The focus will be on the local church — all of you with me. Can we begin to adopt the stances that were advocated at Detroit when we agree they are wise and pastorally sound? Are we ready to face new wine when we feel like old wineskins at times? Renewal, as I have said before, is just beginning. It is not a romp but a painful pruning of our hearts and our ministry as church in order that Christ and His purposes may have room to grow. I shall write next week about the document on the Church and then return to the subject of our response as a diocese.

Let me close with an incident that happened at the very end of the conference. One of the Rochester delegation was returning to the hall after lining up suitcases. He walked back in with a woman who was wearing a pin with a cross stating, "Give me a piece of the rock of Peter." When asked how she liked the conference, she replied, "Of course I do not agree with any of it." "You mean there is nothing you can agree with in all these documents?" "Well," she replied, "I will say this, these are loving people but they know nothing about doctrine." She went a little far in her statement on doctrine, but she was right on this: **The love of Christ was evident and deeply felt at the conference in Detroit and everyone, on all sides, saw it and was confirmed in faith and hope.**

The Life of a Saint -- A Vision of Heaven

Following are excerpts from the homily preached by Pope Paul on the occasion of the canonization of St. John Ogilvie, martyr.

When observed with loving understanding, the life of a saint is sufficient to reveal to us many things about the kingdom of God. On a lovely Roman hill there is a villa that pilgrims are familiar with. If one looks into the keyhole of its closed door, one has the surprise of seeing on the background of the sky the perfect and majestic dome of Saint Peter's Basilica. It is like the vision of another world. Similar to this is the experience in the life of every person — like every saint — who manifests Christ, who belongs to him and who reveals him in a way that is always personal and original. Thus the brief biography of the saint whom we celebrate today points out to us many, many things of immense interest. The historic setting, first of all, characterized by the great crises of various expressions of the Protestant Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist and Presbyterian Reformation, checked by the immense yet not vain effort of the Council of Trent and by the intense renewal of Catholic life, often for

mented by wars, religious struggles and decadent morals. Christendom breaks up and henceforth contains permanent and irremediable confessional divisions, to which modern ecumenism would wish to give a definitive remedy. The character of our saint cannot be understood outside this violent spiritual storm.

But we would not pause here, thinking that a search for the focal point of the new saint's life would be sufficient for us. This point is above all subjective, it is evident; it is the focal point of every martyr, that which forms the profound reason for his holiness and hence for his glory. Thus there is in human life a value that is superior to life itself; there is a duty that exceeds all others; there is a certitude that, when confronted with any other, can never be denied. There is something necessary, for the sake of which every other thing can be set aside and, if need be, sacrificed. This value, this duty, this certitude, this necessary thing is faith; it is the truth of faith. This absoluteness conceded to faith is the central nucleus of the psychology of the martyr, that is, of the testimony to Christ. It is also true for John Ogilvie.

So great is the horror which they provoke in our minds and sensitiveness, that we are often led to give greater consideration to the martyrs' sufferings, those atrocious and cruel sufferings to which they were subjected, than to their

motivation. But their sufferings are not the supreme and specific title of their greatness and of their authority in our regard. Saint Augustine recalls this to us when he says that it is not the pain but their cause that makes the martyrs true.

And what was the cause of John Ogilvie's martyrdom? It is easy to discover: it is faith, as we were saying. But faith is a whole world: what point of faith, what truth of faith constituted the centre of the combat of his martyrdom? It was the voice authorized by Christ to proclaim it: "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8) — witnesses, heralds, martyrs. Jesus said: "Go and make disciples" (Mt 28:19); "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16). The Church is the teacher; faith is taught by an authority that precedes the book itself that documents it. We would speak today of an authentic ecclesiology, which from the time of the reformation has become the epicentre of the controversies which disturb the religious unity established by Christ.

Once we have discovered this central and painful point of the witness of John Ogilvie we shall go no further in our discourse; it is enough for us to note that the holiness of our hero is characterized by his witness of devotion to the magisterium of the Church and to faith in the Mass — that act of worship which celebrates the Word of God and makes it truly present.