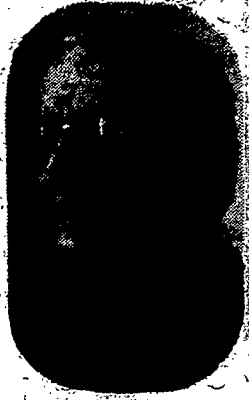


PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Church As Educator

The primary mission of the Church is one of proclamation of the Word of God to the whole world. There is a strong biblical tradition which portrays the Church in the imagery of a herald:



He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison;

to proclaim a year of favor from Yahweh. (Is. 60:1) The herald is the official courtly messenger sent with dispatch to publicly proclaim the King's message.

In the New Testament, Jesus is identified as both the message and messenger. Jesus, as the Father's Son, not only proclaims the Good News of salvation, but is the bearer of salvation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the culmination of God's wonderful deeds and mighty acts. In His goodness and wisdom, God the Father chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us through His Son, Jesus, the hidden purpose of His will and His plan of salvation for all persons.

God has given His Son to all of us to be teacher and savior of all persons. God "wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself or man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed Himself as a ransom for all. He is the evidence of this, sent at the appointed time." (1 tm. 2:4 ff)

The Word of God creates community. Once the Word is proclaimed, it summons persons to believe and challenges them to renewed growth in faith. Thus, the Church, as the community of believers, is gathered together in faith around Jesus, and receives its identity as a community by the life and sustenance it draws from the Word of God. Consequently, the Church is the visible and tangible sign of the Kingdom yet to come.

There are several practical implications for education that can be derived from these foundational theological concepts. The Church is not identical with the Kingdom, but serves the

Kingdom by faithfully and persistently proclaiming the Gospel. The Church is the voice or herald of the Kingdom, bearing witness to God's love and justice in good times and bad times.

Faithfulness to this witness entails a great deal of courage. Fidelity to the Gospel must avoid the danger of doing injustice to the Word by disguising its mystery, by presenting novel interpretations of its meaning, by evading the scandal that results from the paradox of the Cross and by overcoming a reluctance to preach lest persons reject the message of salvation or demonstrate a cynical reaction to the Word. Fidelity to genuine proclamation insures the Christian message of its authentic and distinctive character, overriding the temptation to turn the Gospel into some commonplace and religious generalities.

The responsibility, then, enjoined upon the Church is to proclaim the Word of God with integrity and persistence. The Church cannot hold itself responsible for those who fail to hear its summons or to accept its challenge. However, for those persons who take the Word of God to their hearts, the Church's role moves beyond evangelization, eliciting a significantly deeper commitment from the members of the Church community. The Church as educator must strive to facilitate the growth of faith to its fullest maturity, living, conscious and active. This task is accomplished primarily through instruction which is characterized by reflection, relevance, fidelity and creativity.

In order to acutely sharpen one's awareness to the need for heightened Christian consciousness, each member of the Church should ask him or herself this question: What does it mean to be a Christian today? It is irresponsible that anyone should be satisfied with his or her response if it reflects no deeper insight or conviction than held in his or her youth. To critically evaluate one's life and behavior in accord with Gospel norms is to admit that the Word of God is living, dynamic and present in each moment's situation. Learning, then, is indeed a life long process! Thus, fidelity to the Word (for the Church as educator) demands the continuous rediscovery of the newness of the Gospel message for each new event and each new human situation. Authentic but creative interpretations of the Gospel, directed toward present human realities, prevent the Word of God from becoming hackneyed and fixed in

meaningless stereotyped formulas. What Jesus taught is not a matter of rigid formulas or a philosophical system, but a way of life.

Through a Vatican II understanding, the Church is seen as the people of God, called to become a community of love and brotherhood, a community of witness challenged to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus and to serve the human community in the building of the Kingdom. Thus, the whole community of the Church is educator; it is a teaching community proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus in both word and deed, as well as sacramental celebration.

Viewed from this perspective, the local parish community is perceived as the extension of Jesus' saving presence. How often do parishioners look beyond their parish staff and existing institutional structures to call forth the gifts and resources from within its own membership? The community as educator must assume responsibility for itself. The first task of the parish community is to help the community become conscious of itself. This is achieved by inviting the members of the parish community to critically evaluate its present conditions of education against its own ideals.

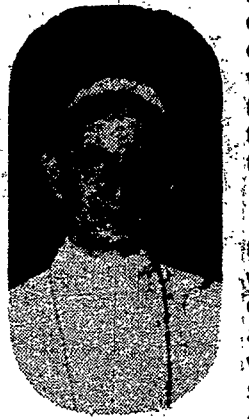
This raising of consciousness presupposes a willingness to dialogue with its own membership the ability to listen to the many voices within its own ranks and the courage to embrace new ideas and sometimes differing opinions. Nevertheless, when this kind of corporate energy is directed toward the positive efforts of reducing the tension between what is educationally ideal and what is educationally real in the parish, gradually and painfully the community has educated itself to its own needs and Gospel presence.

When plans are developed and implemented by the community for itself and when the motivation and commitment comes from within the community rather than from a designated expert, this kind of responsible and thoughtful participation fosters genuine community. Through this process of self-education, the parish membership understands better its present realities, its hopes, its own vision and its tasks. The community helps its willing members to undertake these tasks. When this happens, then the members of the parish community have learned together the meaning and quality of life through the shared presence of Jesus Christ.

Church a Standard for the World

Following are excerpts from Pope Paul's year-end address to the College of Cardinals.

If we consider the panorama offered by the world at the end of this year, and the forecasts for the one that is about to begin, we cannot hide our concern at certain disquieting situations which exist here and there and which might endanger the tranquility of some territories, if not general tranquility.



We wish, in any case to trust in the goodwill and wisdom of those who preside over the destinies of peoples, and in particular those upon whom the major responsibilities weigh in avoiding conflicts and safeguarding peace. We confirm, for our part, our commitment in the service of such a noble and necessary aim. And we confirm our determination to continue to offer all the collaboration in our power to those who sincerely share thoughts of peace with us and wish for an active, beneficial solidarity among peoples.

With a deep feeling of relief and satisfaction — although overshadowed by fears not yet sufficiently assuaged — we have seen draw to

an end the fighting that has caused bloodshed in Lebanon for such a long time. Our thought goes to all the victims of this fighting and to all those who still feel its painful consequences, in the flesh and in the spirit. The efforts of goodwill on the part of all those in positions of responsibility must now be aimed at solving the problems that gave rise to the conflict and at the work of reconstruction.

The Lebanese crisis has emphasized even more the urgency of solving the long standing problem of the Middle East in order that the situation of dangerous tension which remains in the region may at last be overcome, in a spirit of justice and equity. In this perspective, we cannot but repeat the wish and recall once more the necessity that — out of respect for what is right, and for the very solidity of peace — an adequate solution should be found for the problem of the Christian Holy Places, as well as Jewish and Moslem ones, and in the first place for the problem of Jerusalem.

We do not wish to pass over in silence the question of Rhodesia. Recent events, which have brought to the forefront the figure of a prelate — Bishop Donald-Raymond Lamont of Umtali — committed to the point of sacrifice to vindicating the rights of the native population, urge us to do so. But we are moved above all by the hope that the conference convened to solve the Rhodesian problem may lead, with the necessary promptness, to positive results, so as to ensure real conditions of justice, peaceful coexistence

and good collaboration among all populations of the country. This is the affection we fervently formulate, out of the affection we bear for Africa.

This very rapid glance at the world surrounding us would be too incomplete if we said nothing about Italy, so close to us, and for so many reasons. We are not going to refer here to the problems of national life, although we follow them with particular interest and not without trepidation. We wish on the contrary to allude to the work, to which the Holy See on its side consented willingly, for a revision of the Lateran Concordat which will make this historic act of reconciliation an instrument better suited to guarantee, under the present circumstances, the correct and friendly relationship between the State and the Church.

But our glance extends to the whole Church at this particular moment. She is the sign of hope and a sure point of reference, today especially, when there are multiplying disquieting and frightening signs of a society which seems to be using the stupendous and fragile gift of freedom to become the slave of perverting ideologies, to which it succumbs without a struggle. Yet in the face of all these recurrent threats, of thought or of action, which seem to wish to disintegrate orderly public life and the forms of its peaceful society which promote the good of all, the Church does not cease to be the standard raised up for nations of the world.