

Just Trying to Save the City Neighborhoods

By JOHN DASH

Msgr. Geno Baroni started out to save the world, he says. Then he decided to save the country. Now, as the first priest ever to hold a cabinet-level post in the U.S. national

government, he's settled for saving the urban neighborhood.

Msgr. Baroni, in Rochester last week to speak to the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation for their annual Housing Day

and to tour a tenant-managed housing project, Ashanti, one of five such projects in the nation, spoke to the press a day after he had been sworn in as Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

His duties include keeping an eye on consumer affairs, non-governmental organizations working in urban development and the strength of the neighborhoods.

The vitality of the neighborhood, and especially of the ethnic neighborhood, has been of major concern to him for the past several years.

He has worked to preserve the ethnic identity of such urban groupings and sees that they are the key to the preservation of the cities.

America, he says, once priding itself as the "melting pot" of cultures, still promotes the idea that people from different ethnic backgrounds have to "melt or get off the pot."

Such an attitude, he notes, has been at the roots of the urban decay affecting U.S. cities.

Preserving the cultural heritage of the varieties of peoples who inhabit cities is the key to revitalizing them. The words plurality and diversity are frequent nouns in his lexicon.

There is a triangle of

'Make Noise,' BSHF Urged

By JOHN DASH

In the halls of Congress, "The silence on low-income housing is thunderous because nobody cares about it," except those who object to it.

That was the principal message that Cushing Dolbear brought to Rochester last week when she addressed the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation on its annual Housing Day observance at St. John Fisher College.

Ms. Dolbear is widely known in Washington for shattering that thundering silence and she encouraged Rochesterians to join her in that work. "We've never said to Congress 'We think decent housing is a right,'" she said. "You and I may

believe it, but we've not said it."

If one divides the population of the U.S. into five groups; according to income, she said, 90 percent of the top group, households whose income is more than \$50,000 a year, in one way or another are subsidized by the government.

Less than seven percent of those households whose income is \$4,000 a year or less get governmental help.

"Government is doing nothing for the bottom group," she said. "There are 15 million families who need housing help. Yet, this year, federal outlays for housing amount to less than 2 per cent of the federal budget."

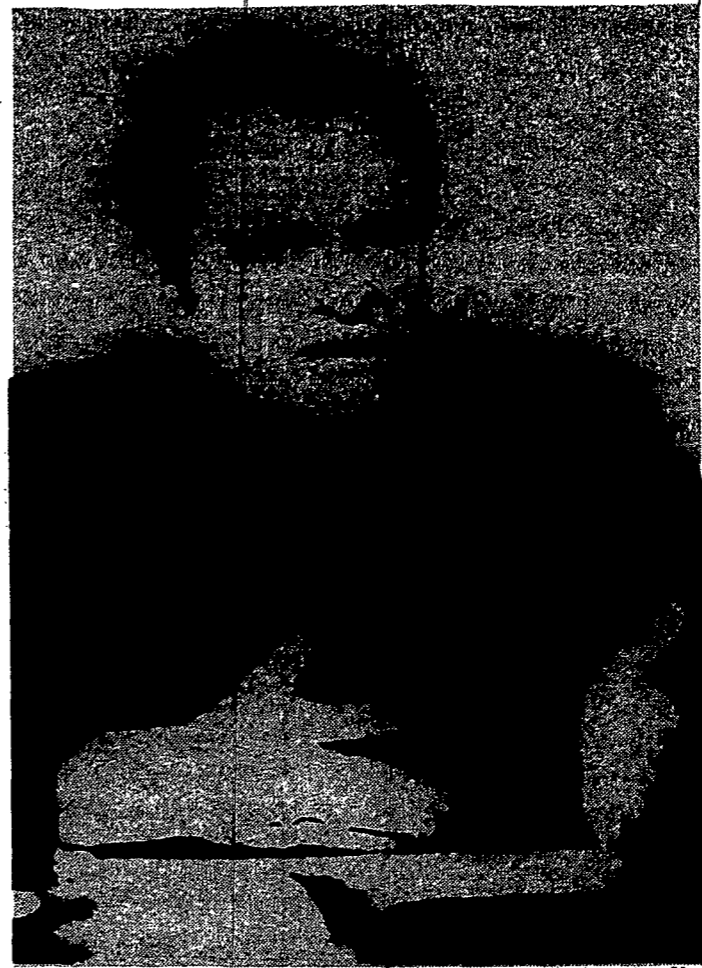
tongue." For clinging to God's word, they too, like Paul, have suffered — "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb."

This heavenly scene is a verification of Christ's words that "I give (to my sheep who hear my voice) eternal life." The Jews in the gospel were looking for clarification on who Jesus was. He did not refuse to answer this question ("I and the Father are one"), but He made it clear that clarification alone would be futile. What was needed was not clear declaration, but faith on the listener's part. To hear God's word, one must listen!

In communication, it is said that the receiver controls input. That was why the same message, Paul's, was received by Gentiles with joy and by Jews with rage. What causes one to turn off God's word? Why did God's people reject Paul's word?

The word of God is often opaque. For instance the words "The Father and I are one" are freighted with mystery. We might liken God's words to a jack-in-the-box. The jack-in-the-box is on a spring which pushes jack against the lid. Should one lift the lid, jack would pop out. God's words are the jack-in-the-box. Because these words are often hidden, the intellect, like a spring, pushes hard against accepting them. The intellect chafes at mysteries. For the nature of the intellect is to seek to "read into" things. So the will, helped by God's grace, like the lid, compels the intellect to assent to the truths of faith. However, should the will get weakened, then it would not be able to hold the intellect down — the lid flies open and the word of God pops away and is rejected.

What weakens the will is sin. Thus the threat to faith, to God's word, is not its opaqueness. The threat to faith is sin. God's word is rejected for moral, not



MSGR. BARONI

forces that have to be brought into balance if the cities are to survive, he says.

Government, money institutions and the neighborhoods have to work together to "right the wrongs" perpetrated in the urban setting.

"There are not a lot of simple answers" to the problem of bringing these

forces together, he says. One group acting alone cannot do it.

He cites programs established by Federal agencies, especially in the area of housing, which have come to disastrous conclusions because the needs of individual neighborhoods have not sufficiently been recognized and the organization surrounding

the programs was incomplete.

"It's an apples and oranges thing," he says. "What works for cities in the Northeast, just won't work in Texas."

Msgr. Baroni also sees the Church as a major force for the revitalization of the cities.

While not denying the value of such services, he wants the Church to act as something more than "an ambulance service" in the urban neighborhood.

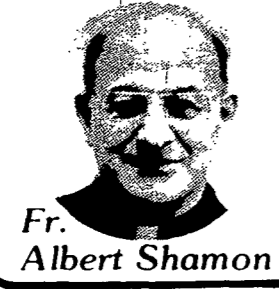
"The Church ought to promote diversity in neighborhoods... to help motivate their people," he says. The Church should be a factor in the convergence of the three institutions mentioned earlier. "Some of the best programs for cities have come from the churches," he says.

The Church also ought to make clear the disproportionate sums of money spent by the Federal government on such items as the B-1 bomber as against urban housing, he says.

(Msgr. Baroni has long been a critic of Defense Department action and spending.)

Under his administration, he hopes his office will encourage federal programs which "respond to the diversity of the needs," in urban centers and will project only that involvement "that will help people grow," he says.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 10:27-30. (R1) Acts 13:14, 43-52. (R2) Rev. 7:9, 14-17.

In last Sunday's gospel, Peter was commissioned to feed the lambs and the sheep of the Lord. But who are the sheep of His flock? They are those who respond to the word of the Lord with praise (R1); who cling to it despite persecution (R2); "My sheep hear my voice" (R3).

On his first missionary journey, Paul discovered that those (the Jews), who should have responded to God's word, did not; whereas those (the Gentiles), who were not expected to respond, did.

Paul interpreted his preaching to the Gentiles as a fulfillment of the promise made to the Isaian Servant to be "a light to the nations, a means of salvation to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6). And he saw his sufferings not unlike those of the Servant, for they were occasioned by his mission.

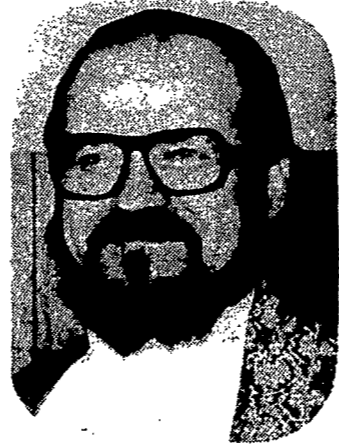
The Jews believed that all nations would reach salvation through them — but according to their terms, not God's. That fact accounts for their rage against Paul and Barnabas: they saw their synagogue opened to Gentiles and Paul offering salvation to them on equal terms with themselves.

St. John in the second reading describes a vision of heaven in which God's people consist of both Jews and Gentiles: "countless crowds from every nation and race, people and

intellectual reasons. Jealousy stirred up the Pisidian Jews against Paul. He treated Gentiles as their equals. Therefore they countered with a whispering campaign and violent persecution.

It has always been thus. Those who do not hear the voice of the Shepherd are those who do not follow the Shepherd. "My sheep" — those who try to live good, moral lives — it is these who hear His voice.

Father Sebastian Falcone, professor of Sacred Scripture at St. Bernard's Seminary, will conduct a Scriptural Weekend at the Cenacle Retreat House on East Avenue, May 12-15. The weekend is open to both men and women and will begin at 6 p.m. on Friday evening and will close at 5 p.m. on Sunday evening. Information on this program and other Cenacle programs is available by calling 271-8755.



MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER Marriage Encounter of Rochester has scheduled information meetings for Sunday evening, May 1, at various places in the diocese. Details may be obtained from the following area representatives: Civiletti, Rochester, 225-3725; Becker, Henrietta, 334-5838; Wieloch, Penfield, 381-3793; Mooney, Palmyra, 597-6449; Wildrick, Nunda, 468-2268; Gauthier, Auburn, 253-4206. A direct reservation for an ME weekend may be made through 716-865-9160.

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