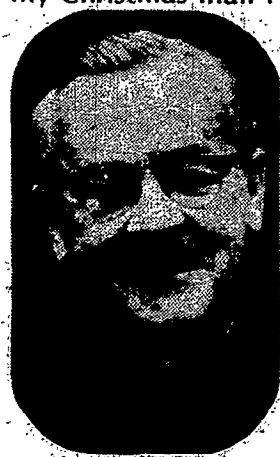


PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Approaching the Unchurched

Just a few months ago I issued some basic directions that I wanted the Church of Rochester to pursue in the coming year. The Focus for 1978 included a challenge to begin to reach out to the Unchurched. In my Christmas mail I received some suggestions from the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers of Sarasota, Florida. I had not asked them for any advice but it was most welcome.



In this column I would like to share with you their recommendations for evangelizing those who for a variety of reasons have become alienated from the institutional Church. It is estimated that more than 80 million Americans never go to church and never have anything to do with organized religion even though most of them say that they believe in God.

The suggestions emphasize a personal approach rather than a structured apostolate. I have left it to parish leadership and to the departments of the Pastoral Office to use their own creativity in devising effective approaches to my challenge. The responsibility for doing something, however, rests with all of us who have been blessed with the precious gift of faith. Hopefully, these suggestions may help.

"First, newcomers to every parish area should be visited, either by a priest or by a team of lay persons. In the case of new parishioners who have taken the

trouble to register, a visit by a priest to bless the home of the new arrivals would seem essential. In the case of newcomers who have not registered and who may or may not be Catholics, there are at least two problems: how are they located and how are they best approached? Newcomers may be located through "block captain" reports or through searching new telephone listings for new families. Lists of such newcomers could then be prepared for systematic visitation by lay parishioners who would welcome them to the neighborhood and to the parish and who would leave with the newcomers a note of welcome from the pastor with an invitation to participate in divine worship or in parish activities. Catholics will be impressed by such outgoing friendliness; non-Catholics will at least be impressed by the resourcefulness and zeal of their new Catholic neighbors — and they may be motivated to visit the local parish community, especially on the occasion of Open House celebrations.

"Second, every home in every parish should be visited at least once every three years by teams of lay people who invite all within the parish boundaries to an Open House at the local parish church. Since so many Americans move every year, such repeated effort is essential to reach every family systematically. Such visits should be both brief and courteous — with an invitation offered to attend a parish Open House and with an offer to accompany those who express an interest in attending. Also, a small gift — such as a prayer card could be left at each home in the name of the parish. In this way, no one can say that he or she never entered Christ's

Church because the opportunity was never presented; on the other hand, no one can say that he or she was coerced or pressured in any way. A friendly invitation is far from objectionable coercion. Those who accept the invitation will be grateful; those who decline the invitation because of membership in another church or because of alienation from religion will at least have experienced the courteous zeal and sincere concern of others eager to share that which is most precious to them: their faith.

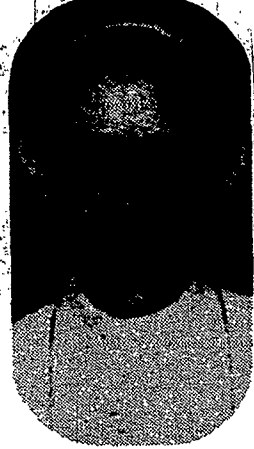
"While extensive home visitation is not the entire answer to the evangelization of an increasingly secular society it is at least a beginning. It is a personal touch in an impersonal world; it requires effort and personal responsibility in a world where too many too often take no responsibility and make no effort; it requires personal preparation, deeper appreciation of Christ and His Church and a measure of personal courage, in a world often characterized by the slipshod and the superficial.

"Our Lord commanded His Apostles to go and teach; He did not invite them to sit and wait. The unchurched will remain deaf to Christ's call unless it is brought to them. If it is not brought to them, they will be impoverished by being deprived of the fullness of truth and the instruments of grace available through Christ's Church, while those who fail to bring them the "good news" of the Gospel will be subject to severe judgment for not sharing that which is most precious to all God's children — faith in Christ and hope for heaven."

Pope Paul's Message for the Day of Peace, Jan. 1

No to Violence, Yes to Peace

To the world and to humanity we once more dare to address the meek and solemn word, Peace. This word oppresses us and exalts us. It is not ours; it comes down from the invisible kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. We perceive its prophetic transcendence, which is not extinguished by our humble repetition of it: "Peace on earth to those on whom God's favor rests" (Lk 2, 14). Yes, we repeat: Peace must be! Peace is possible!



This is the proclamation; this is the new, the ever new and great announcement; this is the Gospel, which also at the dawn of the new cycle of time, the year of grace 1978, we must proclaim for all people: Peace is the gift offered to all people, which they can and must accept, and place at the summit of their lives, of their programs, of their hopes and of their happiness.

Peace, let us repeat at once, is not a purely ideal dream, nor is it an attractive but fruitless and unattainable utopia. It is, and must be, a reality — a dynamic reality and one to be generated at every stage of civilization, like the bread on which we live, the fruit of the earth and of divine Providence but also the product of human work. In the same way, peace is not a state of public indifference in which those who enjoy it are dispensed from every care and defended from all disturbance and can permit themselves a stable and tranquil bliss savouring more of inertia and hedonism than of vigilant and diligent vigour. Peace is an equilibrium that is based on motion and continually gives forth energy of spirit and action; it is intelligent and living courage.

We therefore beseech, also on the threshold of this new year 1978, all men and women of good will: the leaders of the collective conduct of the life of society, politicians, thinkers, publishers, artists, those who mould public opinion, the teachers in the schools, the teachers of art, of prayer, the great planners and operators of the world arms market — we beseech all of them to begin once more to reflect with generous honesty on peace in the world, today!

It seems to us that two main phenomena claim the attention of all of us in the evaluation of Peace itself.

The first phenomenon is magnificently positive, and is constituted by the developing progress of peace. It is an idea that is gaining prestige in the conscience of humanity; it advances and precedes and accompanies the idea of progress, which is the idea of the unity of the human race. The history of our time — let it be said for its glory — is studded with the flowers of a splendid documentation in favor of peace, one that has been carefully thought out,

desired, organized, celebrated and defended: Helsinki teaches this. And these hopes are confirmed by the next Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations devoted to the problem of disarmament, and also by the numerous efforts of both great and humble workers for peace.

No one today dares to defend as principles of well-being and of glory deliberate programs of murderous strife between men, that is, programs of war. Even where the community expressions of legitimate national interest, supported by motives that seem to coincide with the prevailing reasons of law, do not succeed in affirming themselves through war as a means of solution, one still has confidence that there can be avoided the desperate recourse to the use of arms, which today as never before is insanely murderous and destructive. But now the conscience of the world is horrified by the hypothesis that our Peace is nothing but a truce, and that an uncontrollable conflagration can be suddenly unleashed.

We would like to be able to dispel this threatening and terrible nightmare by proclaiming at the top of our voice the absurdity of modern war and the absolute necessity of peace — peace not founded on the power of arms that today are endowed with an infernal destructive capacity (let us recall the tragedy of Japan), nor founded on the structural violence of some political regimes, but founded on the patient, rational and loyal method of justice and freedom, such as the great international institutions of today are promoting and defending. We trust that the magisterial teachings of our great predecessors Pius XII and John XXIII will continue to inspire on this fundamental theme the wisdom of modern teachers and contemporary politicians.

But now we wish to make reference to a second phenomenon, this one negative and concomitant with the first: this is the phenomenon of passionate or premeditated violence. This phenomenon is spreading in modern civilized life; it takes advantage of the ease that the activity of a citizen enjoys to lay snares for and to strike, usually with calculated surprise, a fellow-citizen who is a legal obstacle to some personal interest. This violence, which we can still call private, even if astutely organized in clandestine and factious groups, is taking on alarming proportions, to the extent that it is becoming habitual. By reason of the antijudicial terms in which it is expressed it could be called criminal, but the manifestations which for some time and in some circumstances it has been employing require a proper analysis, and this is extremely involved and difficult. This violence derives from a decay of the moral conscience which is not trained and not helped, and which is usually permeated with a social pessimism that has extinguished in the spirit the taste for and the commitment to honesty professed for its own sake, as well as what is most beautiful and most happy in the human heart: love — true, noble and faithful love. Often the

psychology of violence takes its origin from the depraved root of deliberate revenge, and hence of an unsatisfied justice steeped in bitter and selfish thoughts, potentially undirected and unrestrained towards any aim. What is possible takes the place of what is honest; the only restraint is the fear of incurring some public or private sanction. Hence the habitual attitude of this violence is one of hidden action and of cowardly and treacherous acts that repay the violence with successful impunity.

Violence is not courage. It is the explosion of a blind energy that degrades the person who gives in to it, lowering him from the rational level to the level of passion. And even when violence preserves a certain mastery of itself; it looks for ignoble ways of expressing itself: insidious attacks, surprise, physical supremacy over a weaker and perhaps defenceless adversary. It takes advantage of his surprise and terror and of its own madness; and if this is the relationship between the two contenders, which is the more despicable?

As regards an aspect of violence that has been made into a system "for settling accounts", does not this violence have recourse to contemptible forms of hatred, rancor and enmity which imperil society and shame the community in which they decompose the very sentiments of humanity that form the primary and essential fabric of any society — family, tribe, community or whatever it may be?

Violence is antisocial by reason of the very methods that allow it to be organized into group complicity, in which a conspiracy of silence forms the binding cement and the protective shield. A dishonoring sense of honor gives it a palliative of conscience. And this is one of the distortions, widespread today, of the true social sense, a distortion which clothes with secrecy and with the threat of pitiless revenge certain associated forms of collective selfishness. Violence distrusts normal legal processes and is always clever at evading the observance of those processes by devising, almost by force of circumstances, criminal undertakings that sometimes degenerate into acts of pitiless terrorism, the final result of a wrong choice of road and the cause of deplorable forms of repression. Violence leads to revolution, and revolution to the loss of freedom. The social axis around which violence conducts its own fateful development is wrong. Once having exploded as a reaction of force at times not lacking in a logical impulse, violence concludes its cycle against itself and against the motives that provoked its intervention. Perhaps it is appropriate to recall Christ's lapidary phrase: "for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt 26, 52) Let us remember therefore: violence is not courage. Violence does not ennoble the man who has recourse to it.

NEXT WEEK: Part Two, A message for the children.