

Nostalgia Intense . . . But Present Is Preferable

By JEAN CARDINALI

This is being written in response to the Declaration of some members of the Catholic Community in Chicago. It is not meant to be either an intellectual or objective critique. Indeed, for this writer, a middle-aged woman who became involved in the old "Catholic Action" (as defined by Pius XI) at the age of twelve then moved on to become an official part of what, subsequently, became known as the "Lay Apostolate," such a high level of criticism would be impossible. The emotions aroused by the Declaration, both when I first read it some months back and, again, in the April 12 issue of the Courier preclude that.

The Declaration produced in me an enormous empathy for the nostalgia which, I suspect, the writers are experiencing. I, too, have felt this way — often very intensely. At the same time, I found myself annoyed with them for indulging in this seemingly pointless luxury. Let me try to explain for it would be difficult for those who didn't live through that period of American church history in a particular location (New York as well as Chicago!) to grasp what it is the writers are attempting to say.

Beginning with the Belgian Cardijn's creation of the JOCist movement (YCW) and its spinoffs up until Vatican II it is true the clerical relationships in regard to the role of the laity were very different from the present. Before I continue, however, there are a few things the Chicago Declaration left unsaid. One rather important omission is that only a small minority of both clergy and laity were involved. I think it accurate to say the Church, in general, considered both at best, deranged, and, at worst, downright dangerous!

There is no question that this minority of priests were actively engaged in forming the laity for our role in the "marketplace" — Pius XI's concept of the "apostolate of like to like." One must, however, ask if these priests of the Pre-Vatican II Institutional Church who were all concerned about issues of Social Justice and Social Charity had any other options unless they were part of the Catholic Academic Community.

Further, it seems important to point out that we were trained to think of ourselves as Elite — different, hence set apart not only from those in the milieu we were expected to Christianize but from our fellow Christians who did not share in the "compelling vision" which the authors of the Declaration seem to believe originated in Chicago!

They express concern with what might be categorized as our present "in-house" preoccupations (my term, not theirs) but they seem to forget we had them, too. They were different but no less present. We all read the Social Encyclicals, De Lubac, Congar and Plus and agonized over the discrepancy between their promise and the actual state of the Church at that time. Since ours was a Liturgical Piety most of us were deeply interested in Liturgical Reform, many of us even faithfully attending national Liturgical Conferences.

I agree that the contemporary American church has lost much that was good from that era. However, I believe the Declaration dismisses or omits many present-day developments which also have much to be said for them. Two of the many possible examples I would single out — and they are intertwined — are the potentially creative role of the parish and the lack of elitism.

While we all realize many parishes have not responded to the challenge those parishes with a dynamic and prayerful leadership are certainly involved in the non-Elitist formation of a laity deeply aware of their Christian vocation and struggling to exercise it in some credible way. Certainly, I share with the writers of the Declaration, a certain impatience with the concerns with which they are struggling. There seems to be little concern with the issues of Social Justice and Social Charity with an attendant preoccupation with in-house activities and/or personal spiritual growth.

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Am I, sometimes, nostalgic for that era of which the Chicago Declaration speaks? Yes! I miss working with a close community of lay people whose formation, interests and milieu are similar to my own. I miss interaction with clergy who are not so busy about their own thing that they have little time for us unless we have a crisis in our lives. Furthermore, while I believe it is good and valid, I think we have paid a price for our involvement as lecturers, Eucharistic ministers, planners of liturgy or whatever work has been "traditionally assigned to priests and sisters." No matter how capable we may be, when we are acting in those traditional areas ultimate decisions always rest else where. And the nature of these decisions, probably, demands that it be so. (In fairness, there are exceptions, albeit it rare, to these statements.)

Would I wish to return to that earlier period if the price were to renounce the realities of our present stage of development? Emphatically, NO! I am grateful that in this post-Vatican II church there is room for the many charisms which exist among us even when they cut across traditionally assigned roles. I am grateful that the laity may now Proclaim the Word; be extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and even preach. And it particularly pleases me, that our sisters in religious communities may now use their talents in increasingly varied forms of ministry.

Finally, I am basically optimistic even though it seems apparent that any of us (regardless of role) who are actively involved in the Institutional Church must expect to experience enormous pain. To paraphrase a contemporary cliché the Spirit "isn't finished with us yet." I honestly believe the day will come when all of the best of the decades just prior to and immediately following Vatican II will merge with the best of all of the other centuries this Church of ours has survived. At that time all of the members of the Mystical Body will have come into a healthy and balanced maturity. I like to think it will be then that the People of God will be ready to go home.

Christians Must Wear Two Hats

By SR. M. GRATIA
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In Response to "Has the Church Forgotten the Christian Worker?"

Christians are called to be members NOT ONLY of the world, of society, and therefore to minister in those places of our daily work, BUT ALSO we are all called to be full members of the Church community and therefore to be ministers of Word, Sacrament, and Justice to one another and to the world. We wear two hats, stand in two places; bear two responsibilities, as citizens of the earthly society, and citizens of the society of God's ordering, God's dominion, God's purpose for humankind.

Before Vatican II, the role of the laity was clear; they were ministered unto; the clergy were the active ministers, taking all the roles (as was clearly symbolized in the old liturgy), made all the decisions, had all the responsibility for the CHURCH AS INSTITUTION — for creating, maintaining, and carrying out the ordered life of the Church community. Laity who were highly motivated and highly trained (such as members of official orders, or members of various Catholic Action movements) were ALLOWED the PRIVILEGE OF SHARING IN THE APOSTOLATE (OR MISSION) OF THE HIERARCHY — this is the official definition of Catholic Action. The laity had no mission of their own AS PART OF THE CHURCH'S INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE. This is the major element of change in our understanding of Church — our ecclesiology — that ALL ARE CALLED TO THE PERFECTION OF HOLINESS, that all are to share in responsibility for being the Church and for its mission on its many levels: where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, or many gathered in the parish, or the diocese, or the nation, or the world. The mission of the whole Church is to become a true sharing community which proclaims the Gospel message and actively initiates action for justice. Our liturgy is the celebration and inspiration of this mission. ALL THE BAPTIZED HAVE A VOCATION FROM GOD. We must stand as outsiders when necessary, "in the world but not of it," not coopted by its false values, but taking the prophetic role when the teaching voice is not listened to. It is not enough for the priest to preach and the laity to go forth to their jobs. In isolation, who can speak against the mighty coalitions which are strangling two-thirds of the world's people? We baptized are society, yes; we all are also Church.

Why do the laity (and the priests, and the bishops, and the members of official orders) feel powerless and deserted? Part of the answer is that we are heavily burdened with the stress and confusion of change at this time. We still have a highly BUREAUCRATIC structure of Church, with authority at the top, with decisions mandated and handed down, with slot-filling and job-filling more important than the persons who fill them, with very clear symbols such as special vestments, and with most of our church law seen as regulating our behavior and our activities. We are attempting to move toward a different model of Church: a PARTICIPATIVE model, with authority at the center, calling forth and confirming decisions with persons (and their individual gifts) in a creative balance with the community (and its spirit and gifts), with a spirit of mutuality, and with law seen as forming our RELATIONSHIPS even more importantly than our behaviors. Meanwhile, as we try to shift gears, we find ourselves in an intermediate model, the THERAPEUTIC: in which authority is no longer clear, decisions are vague, persons are mostly in need of "doing their own thing," symbols are no longer understood, and law is rejected — almost a "no law" attitude which is as authoritarian as an "all law" attitude. This is a very human stage to be in, but it is a very bad stage to settle down in. The laity are more than deserted; they are called to take on responsibilities to be an adult church while still left with a child's understanding, skill, and experience. We are all new at being an adult church. Some of us want to remain children with parents to tell us what to do and how to do it. Others of us are in an adolescent rebellion stage! Some — fortunately for the future of the institution — are mature enough to take on responsibility without glory, and gird for the long haul. The most demanding task ahead of us is to understand what it means to become a faith community which shares and supports its members so that they do not have to sell out their Christian values and their souls in order to survive in the midst of that worldliness which masks evil as good, wealth as security, power as virtue, death as life.