

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Spiritual Dimensions of Ministry

The last few days of October provided me with the opportunity to lecture twice on our ministry as Christian people and to listen to and react to a lecture on the same subject by a distinguished Presbyterian Minister, Dr. Ernest Campbell of New York City. I will not use this column to report on my reaction to his vision of ministry except to say that many of us on the panel at the United Methodist Church in Geneseo, representing various denominations, disagreed with what we saw as his fear that the laity were being allowed to invade the sanctuary, a domain where only the ordained had the competence and authority to minister. He seemed to feel that those not ordained (the laity) should confine their ministry to the marketplace.



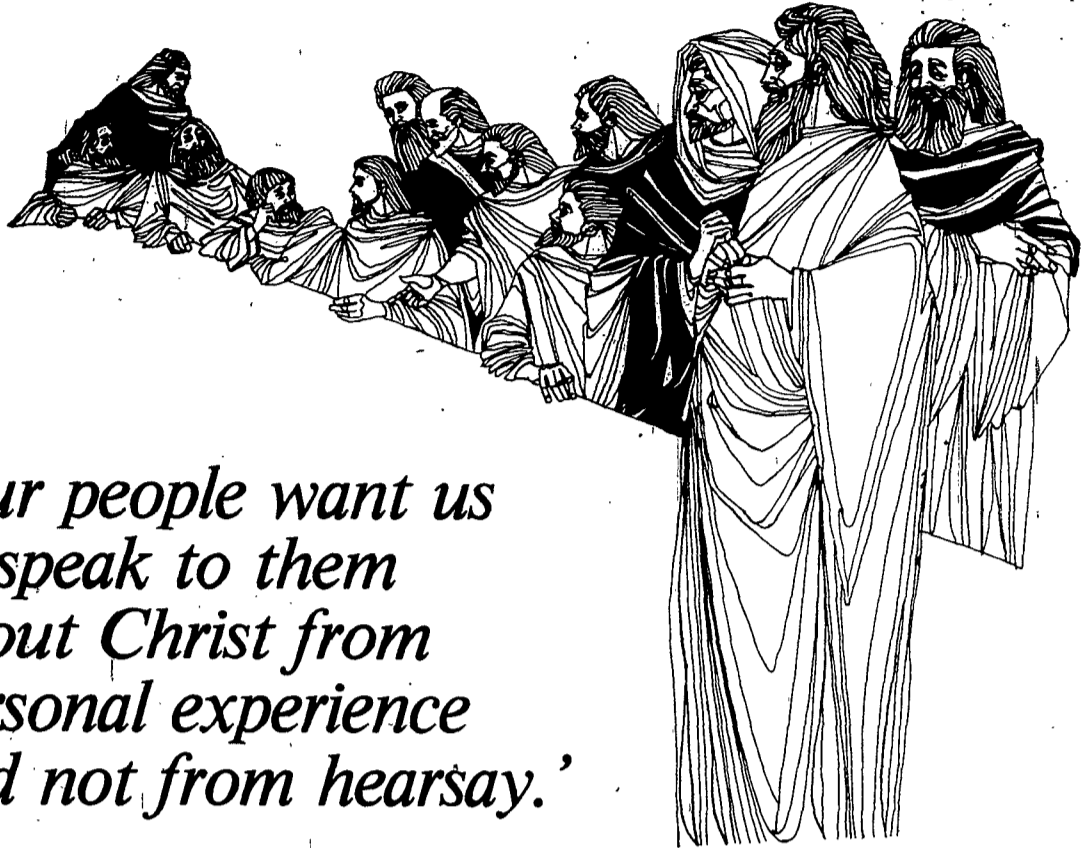
The day before Dr. Campbell's lecture and two days after it I was lecturing on ministry to priests, religious men and women and laity from the diocese who, ordained or not, have been called to some form of ministry by reason of their Baptism and who need, in my vision, encouragement and inspiration to use their talents generously in the service of His Kingdom be it IN THE SANCTUARY or IN THE MARKETPLACE.

I share with all of you now my message on the spiritual dimension of ministry presented to 23 (priests, Sisters, laity) in the Chapel of the Continuing Education building at St. Bernard's Seminary on October 26 and again on October 29 at the second annual meeting of all of our Consultative Bodies at the Otto Shults Center at Nazareth College.

Unless we have a vision of what we are doing, we become quickly demoralized and frustrated. Jesus wants to share His vision with us. He wants us to see ourselves, our Church and our world as He sees them. That is why prayer is so basic to all ministry. For it is there that we encounter Jesus and it is there that He gives us His vision and lets us dream His dreams about the Kingdom of God. When we share His vision, it becomes for us a presence — a power — and a promise.

The light of Jesus' vision can carry us forward a long way as through it we are made aware of His knowledge of us, His unconditional love of us and His assurance that He is with us always. "I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind; young men shall see visions and old men shall dream dreams and on my servants and my handmaids I will pour a portion of My Spirit."

This vision each of us possesses in a unique way — but left to ourselves it is incomplete. It is an experience to be shared with others. The primary witnesses of the Gospel are those who live and make visible the vision of Christ that is within themselves. But we need silence in which to dream and we need prayer to receive His vision. It is from our families, from our experience of Church and Sacraments, and from our reflection on the Scriptures that we get our first awareness of this vision within us. And it is the



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Eucharist that fully reveals and nourishes this vision of Christ.

St. Paul has given us an image of ministry that can prove helpful to us. He suggests that we begin to minister when we begin to develop a healthy image of ourselves and the healthiest image, according to Paul, is that of the earthen vessel — fragile — totally held together by the Lord. He reminds the people of Corinth that they are not the source of what they minister: "Name something you have that you have not received." (1 Cor. 4:7)

He again reminds us that effective ministry is not to be judged by human standards of efficiency. God has chosen those whom the world considers absurd, to shame the wise; He has singled out the weak to shame the strong. "Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:26) My own experience has shown that I have been ministered to by very humble and simple people. I have concluded, too, after years of a variety of apostolic work, that it is not credentials, degrees and structures that of themselves accomplish great things in His Kingdom. It is those who live in the light of Christ and who reflect the joy of the Kingdom and His love who help people find direction, value, purpose and priorities in their lives. Our people want us to speak to them about Christ from personal experience and not from hearsay.

St. Paul lived his image of ministry by working and praying strenuously and leaving it to God to give the increase. He spent much time warning his people not to match their gifts and their work with the gifts and ministries given to others and assured them that the one gift that mattered was charity. Our own meditation on Chapter XIII of his first letter to the Corinthians could profit all of us greatly.

For years to come we will all be hearing much about Evangelization — which is nothing more than announcing by words and example the joy and the power of the Gospel and the presence of Christ among us. This is the heart of all ministry and is the Charter upon which the Church was founded as a mission Church.

The fact of the large numbers of the unchurched among us should haunt us with the failure of our ministry. We are not looking so much for new programs and structures to make our ministry effective — but people who are committed to their vocation to ministry and in their own quiet way share the good news with others. Sometimes it takes only a smile or some simple personal reflection of our joy. Why did the brief ministry of Pope John Paul I have such an impact on the world? Simply because his 34 days as Pope were a vivid sacrament of the fundamental reality of Christian joy and of the Christian's call to manifest it. We cannot minister unless and until we have experienced that Alleluia is the song of all who are in possession of the Gospel — the Good News.

And now there is John Paul II gifted beyond the talents given to most humans especially in his ability as a multi-linguist. One could say that he has the gift of tongues. His greatest gift of utterance, however, is his ability to speak the ONE universal language understood wherever we go in the world — the language of love, compassion and concern. There is no ministry and no Evangelization without this gift.

For St. Paul reminds us that without this gift we are like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal — making lots of noise — but producing only sound and fury signifying nothing. The unproductive servant is a zero sacrament and the Lord has already rendered His evaluation of such stewardship.

More Opinions

From 4

Let's Break Traditions

Editor:

Now that the tradition has been broken that a man of Italian extraction must be elected pope, perhaps some other longtime traditions can also be now reviewed. For instance, why do so many Catholic voters automatically vote one

particular party ticket each and every November? Because they always have. Because their fathers did. Habit and tradition.

One of the great phenomena of modern American politics is how someone with the record of Hugh Carey automatically and systematically gets the "Catholic vote." This is a situation comparable to American blacks voting for the Ku Klux Klan or American Jews voting for Rudolf Hess. Carey, the political opportunist that he is, has courted the flaming liberal vote at the

expense of the Catholic voter. In his tenure as governor, his policies concerning abortion — disallowing parental consent requirements for teenage abortions (parental consent is required for an appendectomy but not an abortion) and his policy of forcing Catholic taxpayers to pay for abortions via Medicaid funds, have constituted an outrageous violation of Catholics' religious freedom.

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World Woes Need Christ

Editor:

Recently I was very impressed with a talk given by Father Vincent Micelli, SJ, concerning the "Church and the Family."

Several interesting points were made in the lecture. The viability of any society is totally dependent on the condition of its units, the family. With divorce or separation in one out of every two marriages in the U.S., it is no wonder our society faces many problems such as

cohabitation, homosexuality and abortion.

We can do nothing without Christ's help or we will be doomed to our human weaknesses from Adam's fall. Christ has given us salvation from our sins and models to follow in the Trinity and the Holy Family. The Church He established helps guide the family and society to harmony with peace, justice and love.

We should not be afraid of ridicule in trying to keep Church approved devotions as the rosary, benediction and novenas. Our modern day liberation

theology seems to prefer utopian values of the Marxist communists. Even though authority is being challenged to give more individual freedom, the responsibility that goes with freedom is being discarded by today's society.

The Christian family is being attacked by many evil forces and can only be preserved by reliance on Christ's help and our collective action. Evil will triumph where good men and women do nothing.

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