

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Celebration of a Chapter

(This column is written by one who is grateful beyond words to our Religious Communities who have served and continue to serve the Church of Rochester so faithfully.)

The Religious Communities of men and women throughout the world have consecrated their lives to be a visible sacrament of the holiness of God and of the presence of His kingdom in our midst. I write today about the religious in our diocese in GRATITUDE for the blessings they have brought to the Church of Rochester since the beginning of its history in 1868 until now, and in PETITION for your prayers to support them in their continuous pilgrimage of faith.



According to our Diocesan Directory we now have eleven communities of men and eleven of women serving in the diocese. In numbers that means approximately 1300 trained and dedicated personnel who serve our needs at this moment of our history. What they have meant to us in blessings received only God knows. It is safe to speak of their apostolic work as an awesome contribution which should never escape our attention.

This article has been prompted by a recent notice from the three largest communities of women (Sisters of St. Joseph 668; Sisters of Mercy 316; School Sisters of Notre Dame 67) serving our diocese that they are in the process of planning for a Chapter of Affairs for their membership. Every religious congregation is very sensitive to the ongoing need for renewal within the framework of their vows and within the context of their ministerial commitment. So what has been announced to me by these three communities happens in all religious communities on a regular basis. The Sisters of St. Joseph begin their General Chapter this Friday; the Sisters of Mercy begin theirs with a Congregational Retreat on March 2-4 of 1979; and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, whose Motherhouse is in Wilton,

Connecticut, have an ongoing Chapter which began in 1969 and meets four times each year.

The names for renewal may differ with each community and the cycles may vary but it all can be summed up in these words: our religious men and women are dedicated to the ONGOING RENEWAL OF THEIR COMMUNITIES and THEY NEED OUR PRAYERFUL SUPPORT. What happens in their days of reflection may be done privately, but the results of their renewal AFFECT THE LIFE OF THE ENTIRE CHURCH.

Chapters are the CONCERN OF ALL OF US. A little bit of my own reflection should have led me to this conclusion. But it took a serious reading of the reflections of another to bring me to a greater awareness of it. I refer to the reflections of Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious which I am happy to share with you.

The Cardinal admits that he was prompted to write the article because of his own concern that the efforts for renewal among religious congregations had been kept for too long a time too much of a secret: "It is an ecclesial event, even if the congregation is a small one and not extended all over the world. Consequently it concerns all people. It is a salvific event even if most people do not actually know what a Chapter is."

I will summarize for you some of the highlights of the Cardinal's reflections with a series of direct quotes from the document which first appeared in the September 16, 1976 English edition of L'Osservatore Romano:

"Every Chapter should be a new and deeper manifestation of God to people in the Church, that is, A REAL EVENT, A PAGE OF HOPE."

"A Chapter is always a 'paschal celebration.' It must be set in an essential Easter context, with everything Easter contains in relation to the cross and hope, to death and resurrection."

"A Chapter is not a mere study meeting, a superficial gathering or a short-lived revision of life. It is a PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION which aims at living two things deeply: a sincere attitude of conversion and a deep and painful search for the Lord's ways."

"A Chapter must leave a sensation of freshness in the Church, a good dose of paschal optimism."

"A Chapter is a moment when the Lord is particularly present and His Spirit outpoured not only upon the community but also upon the whole Church."

"A Chapter is measured not by the depth or beauty of its documents, but by its capacity to transform the heart of everyone. Humanly speaking this is difficult. But with two elements present it is possible: the WORD and the SPIRIT."

The Cardinal made a clear distinction between the Word of God which is Christ who must preside over every Chapter and every moment of renewal in the life of the Church and the words of man which tend to multiply and be the cause of tensions and the source of decrees and guidelines which will leave minds and hearts unaffected.

He made it clear that it is not the genius who is necessary to accomplish great things in the life of the Church but those who are willing to admit the poverty of their being and thus be free to be possessed by the Holy Spirit. It was in the Spirit that Mary uttered the poverty of her own being and so was able to magnify the Lord and the "WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US." It is in the same Spirit alone that His presence is enfolded and dwells in our midst.

A Chapter of religious men and women cannot be held in secret. It must be known by all of us and supported by our prayers. I trust that in the future our religious communities will let us all know that they are entering special days of renewal and are willing to cry 'Help' for prayerful support from the whole Christian Community.

Thanks and Advice to Journalists

Following is the address that Pope John Paul II gave Oct. 21 at a meeting with journalists.

Welcome. Hearty thanks for all that you have done and will do to present to a large public — through the press, radio and television — the events in the Catholic Church which, during the last two months, have brought you to Rome several times.



Certainly, merely on the professional level, you have lived through days as tiring as they were moving. The sudden, unforeseen character of the events which occurred has obliged you to draw upon a great fund of knowledge in matters of religious information which were perhaps somewhat unfamiliar to you, and then to face conditions which were sometimes nerve-racking and an imperative which is known as the disease of the age: speed. For you, waiting for the white smoke was not a restful time.

Thank you for having made so large an effort to call to mind, with unanimous respect, the great and truly historic work of Pope Paul VI. Thank you also for having made so familiar the smiling face and evangelical attitude of my immediate predecessor, Pope John Paul I. Thank you, too, for your favorable reporting of the recent conclave, my election and the first duties of the papacy. In all of these cases, this was an occasion for you to speak not only of persons — who pass — but of the See of Rome, of the Church, of its traditions and rites, of the pope, of the great spiritual goals of the present day: in brief, of the mystery of the Church. Let me pause for a moment on this point. It is difficult to depict the true face of the Church well.

Yes, events are always difficult to understand and to report. First of all they are almost always complex.

Sometimes it happens that an element is overlooked inadvertently, omitted deliberately, minimized, or, on the contrary, accentuated out of proportion, so as to distort the present vision and predictions for the future. Furthermore — and I say this with complete respect for all — things that happen in the Church are more difficult to understand for those who look at them from outside the perspective of faith and they are more so to express to a large public which grasps the real significance of these events only with difficulty.

Moreover, you have to stimulate interest and have an audience that will pay attention, and for this reason your agencies often ask for something sensational. Some are tempted to resort to the use of anecdotes. They are concrete and can perhaps be very valuable, but only on the condition that it is meaningful and has a real connection with the inner religious fact.

Others try bravely to make a profound analysis of problems and movements of persons in the Church, with the risk of not taking sufficient account of the essential, which as you well know, is not of a political but a spiritual order.

Finally, on this last point, things are often more simple than one might imagine. I hardly dare speak of my election.

But this is not the time to examine in detail all the risks and good points of your function as religious information specialists.

Let us note that a certain progress seems to be visible here and there in the search for truth, in the understanding and presentation of religious fact. You are to be congratulated on your part in all this.

I hope specifically that those whose job it is to provide religious information can always find the help they need from the appropriate offices of the Church. These offices must collect information, respectful of their own beliefs and profession and must furnish journalists with very adequate and objective documentation, but also propose to them a Christian

perspective, which situates facts according to their true significance for the Church and humanity. Thus you will be able to report religious news with the specific competence it requires.

You are very solicitous concerning freedom of information and speech. And you are right.

Consider yourselves fortunate to enjoy this freedom. Make good use of it to discern the truth as closely as possible and introduce your readers, listeners and viewers to all that is "true and noble, that is just and pure, and all that is worthy to be loved and honored," in the words of St. Paul, all that will help them live in justice and brotherhood, discover the ultimate meaning of life, open up to them the mystery of God which is so close to each of us. Under these conditions your profession, so demanding and sometimes exhausting — I was going to say your vocation, so real and so beautiful — will go on lifting up the minds and hearts of men of good will, at the same time it arouses the faith of Christians. This is a service which both the Church and humanity appreciate.

As if extending an invitation to enter into a loyal pact, I would also invite you to make an effort to understand. In reporting on the life and activity of the Church, try to comprehend ever more fully the authentic, deep, spiritual motivation of its thought and action. For its part, the Church needs the objective witness given by journalists concerning the expectations and desires of this world. Not that it shapes its message to suit the world of its time: it is the Gospel which must always inspire the world's attitude.

I am happy to have this first contact with you. I assure you of my understanding, and I allow myself to count on yours. Besides your professional problems, to which we shall return another time, I know that each of you has your own personal and family cares. Let us not hesitate to confide these to the Virgin Mary, ever at Christ's side. In the name of Christ I bless you with all my heart.