

Facing the challenges of change

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

This morning just before the 6:30 a.m. Mass, Father Tom Wheeland came into the sacristy at Sacred Heart Cathedral to inform me that Monsignor Richard Burns had died during the night. It was, indeed, a sad piece of news because Dick Burns was a good friend and a pastor who taught all of us about love, loyalty and generous care for others.

At the same time, I experienced a sense of peace in the faith that a friend who had served God's people with such tenderness for so many years would now be fully alive in the Risen One. And I shall, along with others, remember the sincerity and courage with which he met his final illness. As Monsignor Burns' body grew weaker, one could more clearly see and be touched by the strength of his spirit.

Before going over to church this morning, I had been working on this column and was searching for ways to share with you the pleasure I experienced during my weekend visit to St. John the Baptist/St. Cecilia in Elmira.

Some weeks ago, Father Dave Gramkee, the pastor of those dynamic communities, invited me to preside and preach at all their Sunday liturgies. I had never visited a parish before using that format, but I decided to do so. It seemed a solid, concrete way to

give concrete expression to my desire to spend more time as a pastor out in the community.

And I am very glad that I accepted Father Gramkee's offer. It was a beautiful experience simply to pray and speak with the people, to go there and be with them just because they were there. I had to meet no agenda, just people. And meet them I did. I met Carrie Feeney, who will celebrate her 100th birthday in November, and I met Lindsay Elizabeth MacIntosh, who turned six weeks old on Sunday and whom I had the pleasure of baptizing during the Sunday liturgy.

In my remarks at all of Sunday's gatherings I tried to include one message. It was a word of gratitude to the parishioners of St. John the Baptist/St. Cecilia for all they have done to respond to a change I asked them to make more than six years ago. At that time, I appointed Dave Gramkee to be the pastor of both parishes. Until that time, each parish had had its own resident pastor. Father Gramkee and the two communities have responded to this new circumstance with a generous and imaginative commitment, and I am deeply grateful to them. They have met a challenge in a way that has deepened their lives. They also have offered an example to all of our parish communities, some of which will need to

make similar adjustments in the future.

The fact that that future has arrived was illustrated by an event that occurred on the same weekend in the same city. At all of the Masses at Ss. Peter and Paul, Father Fidelis, the pastor, read a letter from me to his congregation. That letter announced that the Carmelite fathers and brothers will be withdrawing from service in our diocese in January. They have served here with distinction and leave with reluctance, but they judge that their diminishing numbers make the decision a necessary one. We shall miss them very much.

I met with the clergy of the Chemung-Schuyler region on Saturday evening. I shared news of the Carmelites' departure with them and asked their assistance in determining how best we can serve the pastoral needs of the people at Ss. Peter and Paul. And we will, of course, be working with the parish reflection teams of Ss. Peter and Paul and surrounding parishes. It is not easy for any of us to live with uncertainty, so I ask all of you please to pray for our sisters and brothers at Ss. Peter and Paul, so that together with them, we can arrange the best possible pastoral care for the community.

One final note regarding my visit to Elmira: Thanks to Father Tom Cleary for the



Along the Way

special, loving gift he was to all of us at the clergy gathering at St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads, on Saturday. Your special witness that evening strengthened all of us. Peace to you. Peace to all.



Adult learning extends beyond catechism

To the editor:

In the column "On The Right Side" in regard to the permanent diaconate program, (*Courier*, July 20: "Wave of radicalism shocked 'folk-religion' adherents") reference was made to Karl Rahner "whose works are not only abstruse but somewhat questionable theologically." A deacon in training was quoted as saying "We don't understand much of it, but we are sticking to the catechism we learned in our youth."

It is interesting to note incidentally, that Father Rahner was almost singularly instrumental in having the restoration of the permanent order of the Diaconate included in the agenda of Vatican II and in promoting its final approval. Undoubtedly, he and the other theologians and fathers of the

Council envisaged not only that the candidates would "stick to the catechism" by cherishing and preserving the basic truths of catechetical instruction, but would also deepen and develop their understanding and articulation of these basic truths. A very accessible aid to this development process is found in the inspiring and challenging documents of Vatican II which were composed, with the mandate, supervision, and approval of bishops, by theologians.

It might be less than precise to speak of "the" catechism rather than "a" catechism since the term includes many different collections and editions of dogmas, Catholic truths and theological opinions which are approved by a local ordinary as a pedagogical tool, primarily for the instruction of

baptized children. The application of the term catechism to this form of teaching and then to the book is about 400 years old, a principal example being the Roman Catechism of the council of Trent. Prior to Vatican II there was widespread dissatisfaction with catechism as a book centered way of proclaiming the living word in the Christian community. The whole thrust of modern Catechetics and of the Vatican II decree establishing a Catechetical Directory is to restore catechesis in the life of the Church. "There can be no question of catechesis ceasing after this initial presentation. It is well to bear in mind the need for a fuller and more detailed treatment, so that the individual believers and the Christian community may arrive at an increasingly profound and vital acceptance of the Christian message and may resolve the concrete problems of the human condition in the light of revelation." (Catechetical Directory, 38). An adult with a typical education would be expected to go beyond the primer with which he learned to read to exercise his literary abilities on more mature considerations. Similarly, an individual catechism text with its particular format and content can be safely viewed as a beginning and foundation of a life-long journey with and into the truths of faith, and not as its climax.

I would hope that the term "questionable" as applied to Fr. Rahner's theology refers to the recognized pluralism of theological approaches in the Church today as in the past, and is not an implied challenge to his orthodoxy. Such a challenge would require a considerable expertise which is perhaps beyond the ken of a typical diaconal candidate, especially in view of the profound influence of Fr. Rahner on Conciliar and post-Conciliar theology and of the high esteem afforded his work by major representatives of the Church.

We all hope that the candidates for the diaconate will match their generosity to serve with the courage constantly to grow and mature in their perception of the basic truths of the faith. It would be an unfortunate self-deprivation were one to cultivate an anti-theological bias and inconsiderately dismiss the positive contributions of theology and theologians to the building up of the Faith of the Church. We pilgrims need all the help we can get.

John W. McGee
Oregon Circle
Houston, Texas

Council leader urges boycott of California grapes

To the editor:

Felipe Franco, the seven-year-old son of farm worker parents from California, was born with neither arms nor legs.

Six-year-old Amalia Larios was also born of California farm worker parents. A piece of her spine is missing. She will never walk.

Following the Thanksgiving of 1987, Mario Bravo, a 14-year-old resident of McFarland, California, died of a brain tumor.

Pesticides are blamed for each of these tragedies and for a number of cancer clusters throughout the extensive agricultural region of California.

The mothers of Felipe and Amalia, like many other farm workers, were exposed to deadly chemicals while working in the Ca-

lifornia grape fields. And such poisonings of farm workers signal an insidious health threat to consumers.

Remember the watermelon poisoning of 1,000 consumers in 1985? The pesticide Aldicarb was responsible for the resulting illnesses. While Aldicarb was not registered for use on watermelons, growers used it anyway — a common violation of pesticide regulations in California.

Such rampant misuse of these toxic chemicals which — kill wildlife, create genetically altered insects, and wreak havoc on our environment — is unacceptable.

What can be done to stop this poisoning? Since 1984, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW) have led a boycott of California table grapes to pressure the growers into ending their misuse of pesti-

cides.

The UFW wants a ban on the most dangerous pesticides; a UFW-grower testing program for residues on grapes; and elections, free of intimidation, accompanied by good-faith collective bargaining. These are reasonable demands.

However, the California table grape industry, the most powerful lobby leading opposition to enforcement of health regulations, has put profit before human protection.

There remains one way we can bring the California grape growers to act responsibly: DO NOT BUY OR EAT CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES!

James Duignan, President
Parish Council

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church

Democratic tampering with church is incompatible with Christianity

To the editor:

Sheryl B. Zabel's letter (*Courier*, July 20: "Hispanics need 'family' in parishes") implies that I do not understand the relationship of clergy, religious, and lay people in the Church. But I do and that forms the basis for my complaint.

That relationship is being distorted when the ministry is exercised inordinately by any of the three groups — clergy, religious, and lay people. The Body of the Church must be, like the human body, in proportion if it is to operate effectively. If proportionality, as Christ established it, is not achieved, the Church Body, like the human body, will suffer "ill health" and

deterioration.

The nostrums of bishops such as Matthew H. Clark do not serve to promote the vigor and health of the Church Body. Rather they tend to accentuate the debilitation we see all about us. They create an imbalance which injures the true — God-given — proportionality and therefore the health of the Church Body.

The Church is the creation of God through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father is the Successor of St. Peter who was chosen by Jesus Christ as the Leader of the Apostles and therefore the Church.

For man to tamper with that creation of God in a fundamental way as many

bishops, modernists, feminists, and others propose bespeaks a temperament incompatible with a true and genuine Christianity. Let us not forget that we are not participants in a democratic assembly but in the assembly of God as Christians.

No, Sheryl, my intent was not to deny anyone their rightful place in the Church Body but only to indicate the necessity to conform to the creative pattern established by God.

William T. Hammill
Clardale Drive
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: This letter was edited to comply with space restrictions.

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