

The Bishops' Meeting — Point By Point

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — John Cardinal Krol gave his final address as president of the NCCB on Monday morning, Nov. 18th, with a rather olympian air. He would not fall in, he said, with the "prophets of gloom" because, "from its founding, the Church has undergone the severity of trials, has endured a fury of internal disorders, and has survived violent oppression and persecution. But the Church, ever beset, ever ailing, ever weakened by dissension and defection, ever exhausted and expiring, continues to survive and increase in vigor and in numbers." In other words, despite appearances, the Church is immortal — a thing of which one likes to remind oneself precisely when the appearances are sorry indeed.

● Bishop Warren Boudreaux presented the lengthy report of the

Liaison Committee, whose main function is to hear the grievances of lay groups. Up until a year or two ago, the committee was always being lectured to by priests, by ex-priests who wanted work, by housewives who wanted to elect bishops, etc. For the last two years, however, the pattern has been different. Almost all of the groups approaching the committee have been either traditionalist or pro-life in orientation. And the pro-life groups, without exception, have been demanding more vigorous, more politically hard-hitting anti-abortion leadership. So obvious has this turnabout become, that *Time* magazine's religion editor, in town to cover the annual meeting, took note of it and wondered aloud whether the evidence might be pointing to a substantial shift in the concerns

and priorities of Catholics — at least of those Catholics who still bother to talk to bishops.

● A thoroughgoing reorganization of the USCC bureaucracy was presented to the bishops as more or less a *fait accompli*. "If we don't go ahead with the reorganization right away, we will have a deficit of \$400,000," is what Bishop Rausch told those who were trying to get the thing delayed or reconsidered. Since 1971, Cardinal Krol has made it a leading principle of his administration that the Conference shall run in the black. Under Dearden, expenditures and deficits had been steadily increasing, but since Cardinal Krol took over, the NCCB-USCC budget has remained constant at about 3.2 million dollars. Hence the necessity for the

present reform: 3.2 million dollars paid for a lot more bureaucrats in 1971 than it does in rampantly inflationary 1974.

The reorganization involves extensive staff cuts as well as office reshuffling. For instance, the Division of Religious Education has lost its separate status within the USCC education secretariat. The Division for Latin America is also gone, leaving behind only a staff for the Bishops-Committee on the Church in Latin America (NCCB) and a desk in the Social Development and World Peace menagerie. For these and other reasons, the reorganization did not sit well with the religious education establishment, which is the greatest single bureaucratic empire within the Church, both nationally and in the dioceses. The bureaucrats complained to their most dependable friends in the Hierarchy, men like Malone of Youngstown, and Borders of Baltimore. So, predictably the liberal wing of the Hierarchy tried to get the reorganization deferred. Bishop Rausch answered them by talking dollars and cents. But interestingly enough, Cardinal Krol, the very apostle of economy, took a different line. He stressed that this reorganization will "get rid of private empires" within the bureaucracy at 1321 Massachusetts Avenue.

Private empires? Really? Now, what could the Cardinal be talking about? The private empire that Louis Colonnese used to have? The one that William Tobin tried to obtain? The one that James T. McHugh still has? Well, whatever Cardinal Krol meant, the changes at the USCC will bear careful watching in the next few months, because the "liberal" bishops got nowhere in their attempt to stop the reform.

● Bishop Loras Watters of Winona, Minn., gave the report for the NCCB Committee on priestly Formation, which is responsible for seminary education. Within the last few years, the committee claims to have "visited" thirty-two American seminaries, including such notorious zoos as Theological College at the Catholic University, St. Patrick's in Menlo Park, Calif., and Notre Dame of New Orleans. But if Bishop Watters found anything wrong in these or other places, he didn't say so. Whereupon, Cardinal Carberry took exception. He brought to the Bishops' attention a memorandum which had been prepared for him by a well-informed (but unnamed) priest. Among other interesting things, the priest said: "Theology (as taught in the seminaries) seems to have lost its memory and may soon lose its mind." Not half an hour later, Cardinal Carberry and his priest-informant gained a surprising second from the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Jean Jadot, who gently chided the American Bishops for not acting more strenuously to implement a Vatican norm on the teaching of philosophy in the seminaries.

● At a Monday, Nov. 18th, noon press conference, Archbishop Joseph Bernardin was asked his opinion of the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood. He replied that he disagrees with those who claim that this is a purely sociological or cultural question. Rather, he said, "the ordination of women faces a theological difficulty on the basis of the constant Tradition of the Church."

● Fr. Bryan Hehir, director of the USCC Division on Justice and Peace, gave the Bishops a stirring lecture on the world food crisis, complete with a denunciation of American eating habits and stronger denunciation of Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz. Butz's mischief, according to Hehir, is to treat food as just another market commodity. Apparently impressed with Hehir's analysis, the Bishops have set up an *ad hoc* committee to talk about recommending renewed fast and abstinence. The idea seems to be that such fasts and abstinences will produce a surplus of food domestically, which the government can then give away overseas.

More coverage of the reports and events at the annual Bishops' meeting will be published in next week's *Wanderer*.