

# The Bishops' Meeting — Point By Point

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

(Continued from last week)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Tuesday afternoon was almost fully taken up, once again, with debate on capital punishment. Despite minor revisions, the Bishops were still not satisfied with the seven-page statement which they were supposed to promulgate on this subject. (The first drafts of the statement had been written, by the way, by Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw.) As the debate drew to a close, Cardinal Krol ruled that a seven-page document was too long to be considered a "resolution," and hence would require a two-thirds vote. Thereupon the statement was decisively rejected — 119 opposed to 103 in favor.

Bishop May of Mobile, Ala., was appalled at the thought that the Bishops might leave town having said nothing on the subject. So, he introduced a one-sentence resolution as follows, "The USCC goes on record in opposition to restoration of the death penalty." Debate was about to center on this, when Cardinal Carberry moved to table the motion. This carried. On Thursday afternoon, however, the motion was taken from the table and passed 108 to 63, with two abstentions. The small figures are testimony to the fact that when the vote was taken, many Bishops had not yet returned from lunch.

Wednesday morning was devoted to regional meetings in which the theme, "Renewal of Faith," was again discussed along with the principal obstacles to such renewal and the steps to be taken to remove these obstacles. Archbishop Quinn summarized the regional discussions on Friday morning for the whole Conference. According to his summary, seven regions cited "confusion over what the Church teaches" as the primary obstacle. Another region cited the "neglect of popular devotion," and another, "disintegration of family life." This promising line of reflection was not shared, apparently, by some other regions. Six regions cited "the gap between what we say we believe and the witness of our lives" as the primary obstacle. Others mentioned "the sense that the Church is impersonal" or "lack of conviction and sense of identity in being Catholic." Four regions cited "neglect of the sense of the spiritual, giving into materialism and secularism."

Now for the remedies proposed. Six regions called for more Christ-

centered homilies. Two regions called for an "updated apologetics, a rational and intellectual foundation for the Faith." Others called for "continuing education of the clergy" or "visitation by priests to families," or, indeed, "more extensive dialogue between Bishops and theologians." Two regions, however, came up with especially interesting answers. One was "more clarity in the content of the Faith" and the other was this: "More involvement of lay people in the apostolate, especially involvement with the parents in the religious education of their children." This last proposal, officially adopted by one of the twelve regions (I don't know at the moment which one), could assume historic significance, if parents are prepared to act upon it.

After Archbishop Quinn presented this report two of the experts who had addressed the Bishops on Sunday, Frs. Thomas and Peter, were brought forward to answer questions. Fr. Peter was asked what the content of the "updated apologetics" should be, and he gave an answer that would have infuriated G. K. Chesterton. He said that a new apologetics would determine the proper "point of insertion" for Christian language and symbols in the fabrics of man's experience. In his opinion, this "point of insertion" should be "the future, the unknown, the theology of hope." I will not pursue that point because a much more interesting question was posed to Fr. Thomas, S.J. Bishop Gossman of Baltimore asked him what could be done to strengthen family life. The Jesuit's answer was not entirely clear, but he seemed to be suggesting that the Church adopt a much more restrictive policy on marrying people, because the large number of those who come to church for marriage today do not understand the sacramental system and simply will not live up to its obligations. As far as Catholic beliefs are concerned, Fr. Thomas said, "the present generation is somewhat confused, but the next generation will be totally confused." This judgment was not challenged by any of the Bishops. But, then, where does that leave the claim of the new catechists?

Wednesday afternoon saw a number of interesting reports from NCCB committees. Archbishop William Baum of Washington, D.C., presented the report of the Committee on Ecumenism, routinely expressing satisfaction with the progress of various dialogue-projects currently going forward. Bishop Joseph Sullivan, recently appointed to the See in Baton Rouge, took exception to one phrase in the report. It read: "We may be allowed the hope that the restoration of peace and of Christ's Church," etc. Bishop Sullivan asked whether it was appropriate to speak of a "hope" for unity. "Since unity is a mark of the Church," he observed, "it does not seem we should have to pray for that." Instead of using the term,

"Christ's Church," Bishop Sullivan proposed to substitute the term "Christians." Archbishop Baum readily agreed to this amendment.

Then Cardinal Cody got into the discussion. In the Roman Catholic-Anglican discussions, Cody wanted to know whether any mention had been made of "our priests who were defecting, apostatizing, and joining the Anglican Church" — and their number. Cody persisted, is not just a few. He himself was aware of four who had thus defected. He also wanted to know whether mention had been made of the recent ordination of women in Anglicanism. "These items," he said, "do not seem very favorable to ecumenism." Archbishop Baum had to say that he did not believe either had been discussed.

Bishop John Fitzpatrick (Brownsville) presented the report of the Latin American Committee. He announced that Fr. Frederick McGuire, C.M., is retiring from the division for Latin America of USCC where he has been the jefe ever since an exasperated Bishop Bernardin fired his predecessor, Louis Colonnese. Mr. Thomas Quigley (no improvement) will take over McGuire's job.

Bishop Mark Hurley of Santa Rosa heads a project for dialoguing with scientists under the umbrella of the Ecumenism Committee. Bishop Hurley came to the press conference on Wednesday afternoon and generated considerable excitement. Evidently talking to top research specialists in a number of theoretical and technical fields is the best possible way to liberate oneself from the twenty-years-out-of-date notion which still dominates high school and even college textbooks. For instance, Bishop Hurley cited two articles recently published in the French periodical *Chromosoma*, according to which recent discoveries in genetic science rule out the kind of mutations called for by classical evolutionism. When asked about educational theories, Bishop Hurley suggested that educators had been much too quick to put the theories of Dewey and others. "Maybe we've swallowed more than the premises justified," he said.

Thursday morning was devoted to the executive session. The only information which was given to the press concerned a letter drafted by Cardinal Cody's Pro-Life Affairs Committee and sent to the Chairmen of the Senate Rules Committee and the House Judiciary Committee on Friday morning. The letter dealt with the Rockefeller confirmation hearing. It was about a page and one-third long double-spaced. Cardinal Krol summarized a portion of the letter for the press; what he said was as follows:

"With due respect to the public service of the nominee as an elected and appointed official, the letter called attention to his public statements and actions on abortion. It asks the chairmen to question the nominee on his

present position on providing legal protection for unborn human life and ascertain that he will not use the office of vice president to promote a personal viewpoint on permissive abortion."

In response to questions, Cardinal Krol insisted that the letter objected to an "issue" and not to a "person." He declined to suggest that an action of this kind was "unprecedented." The crucial question, of course, is what the Bishops had in mind by saying that the nominee should not use his office to promote a "personal viewpoint." Cardinal Krol explained that this did not refer to the Supreme Court decision but to more extreme positions (such as, perhaps, forcing Catholic hospitals to perform abortions or urging Medicaid to pay for them, etc.).

Thursday afternoon was full of depressing reports. Cardinal Cooke presented his "plan" for a pastoral response to world hunger which the Bishops accepted. Instead of simply restoring the traditional fast and abstinences for the traditional reasons, the plan recommends a novel abstinence for a novel reason. This abstinence is any kind of cutting down on food intake and may be observed on any two days of the week. The motive is neither ascetical in the classical sense (mortification) nor is it justice in the strict sense (as though each one of us owed our supper to a peasant in India). Rather, the motive is supposed to be social or distributive justice, whose binding force on individual conscience is a murky question. The money thus saved on food is supposed to be contributed to charitable agencies for distribution abroad. But the abstinence is only one part of the plan. There are also legislative proposals, which the Bishops will presumably advocate. These include: (1) income maintenance for American farmers; (2) curtailment of the powers of certain major corporations, and (3) modification of the free market where world food supplies are concerned. I asked Cardinal Cooke how much this legislative package would cost the American taxpayer, and he did not know. Apparently the question had never occurred to him. I asked the same question of Fr. J. Bryan Hehir, the Bishops' chief adviser on this question, and he replied that, to his knowledge, the research had never been done.

Next came the report on Catholic University (CU), presented by Archbishop Baum and Dr. Clarence Walton. Baum praised the new School of Religious Studies which has been launched with four hundred students enrolled and the faculty of "internationally renowned theologians and canonists" (e.g., Avery Dulles). The Bishops have raised five million dollars to endow chairs in this school and, thanks to Archbishop Hannan's influence, the Catholic Daughters of America have pledged 750 thousand dollars to the same end. Meanwhile, CU as a whole received about 3.4 million dollars a year from diocesan funds. Dr. Walton, the president of the university, reported that all this money was no longer enough and begged the Bishops to send him more, as well as more students. There are now 6,945 students at CU. However, there has been a sharp decline in the number of Religious being trained there. In 1970, there were 1,200 seminarians or nuns or postulants of one

description or another. Today there are only 682. Walton desperately wants the Religious orders to start sending their people back. After Walton finished speaking, Cardinal Carberry, of all people rose to commend the university on its splendid work. (Is there something Cardinal Carberry knows that we don't?) Cardinal Cody then rose and praised the place in the same vein, boasting that he had sunk 2.7 million dollars of Chicago Archdiocesan funds into it.

Next came the equally depressing report from the liturgy committee. Bishop Curtis of Bridgeport announced that the Bishops had been told by mail upon whether to accept the ICEL translation of the breviary, with the result that two-thirds did accept it. However, even Bishop Curtis had something cheery to say: Frederick McManus, the man who did more than anybody else to saddle the English-speaking world with a Dick-and-Jane liturgy, is leaving the Bishops' Liturgy Committee on Feb. 28th of next year, "because of increased duties at CU." Fr. John Rotelle will take his place.

Archbishop Whealon of Hartford gave the report of the Committee on the National Catechetical Directory (NCD). The full text of the first draft is now finished, consisting of nine chapters. Copies should be available by Christmas. The NCD is being published tabloid form, with space included for notes and corrections. Negatives of the document will be furnished free to all Catholic newspapers. The entire project thus far has cost 90,000 dollars but 72,500 dollars of this sum was contributed by foundations. I asked Archbishop Whealon to identify these foundations, but he declined to do so. The grants were made, he said, on the condition that the donors remain anonymous.

Archbishop Whealon said a number of Bishops had expressed to him the desire that the NCD would put an end to controversy by stipulating what doctrines were to be taught at each grade level. But this, he said, the NCD will not do. Such stipulations belong to a "program," not to a "directory." Frankly rather exasperated with this multiplication of entities praeter necessitatem, I asked the Archbishop whether the Bishops intended, then, to go ahead and publish a "program" after completing the NCD. He replied that he took it for granted that this would be the case.

Despite an extensive reorganization and extensive staff cut, the NCCB-USCC machinery is so expensive that by 1976 the Bishops will have to choose between deficit spending or cutting "essential" services. This was the message of Archbishop Thomas A. Donnellan of Atlanta, the treasurer of the Conference. Rather than run headlong into that dilemma, Donnellan proposed that the Bishops agree to increase their diocesan contributions to the Conference. Presently, each diocese gives on the basis of its Catholic population — six cents per Catholic. Donnellan proposed raising that figure to seven cents as of Jan. 1st, 1976. This was submitted to a written ballot, in which only ordinaries had a vote. The proposal passed 109 to 7, with five invalid.

Bishop Hugh Donohoe of Fresno pushed through yet another resolution in support of farm workers. This one, however, was not too bad. It simply called for legislation to assure the farm workers "the right to election by secret ballot of the union of their choice."

On Friday morning, the final day of the meeting, the Bishops took an advisory vote to determine whether a majority would favor a return to the practice of having two annual meetings, one in the Fall and one in the Spring. This practice was abandoned two years ago in favor of Spring "regional" meetings. Now, several of the regions are complaining that such meetings are a waste of time. Moreover, many Bishops have bluntly said that they don't favor any more meetings if the format is to be as bad as the existing one for the national meeting. To remedy the format problem, Cardinal Dearden of Detroit moved that the president of the NCCB set up a special committee to study "locale and procedures" for a second national meeting. This passed. Then the advisory vote was taken on whether a Spring meeting was on the whole desirable. This passed also, 106 to 52. The figures indicate how many Bishops left the meeting before its end.

Well, so it went. But I should like to pass on a last detail. As Cardinal Krol adjourned the meeting, he asked all the Bishops to stand and join him in singing the *Salve Regina*. They did; they all knew it; they sang it in Latin, with the graceful melody which in one of the glories of Gregorian Chant. I was deeply moved; and then, I confess, I got mad. I thought a number of unprintable things about Bishops who keep treasures to themselves and give the ICEL to us and our children.

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