

# The Bishops' Meeting — Point By Point

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

(Continued from last week)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Monday afternoon, Nov. 18th, was devoted to departmental reports from the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), which is the civil corporation and social action arm of the U.S. Bishops. The most important of these reports was from the Education Department, presented by Archbishop William D. Borders of Baltimore. Borders is chairman of the Bishops' committee which is supposed to oversee the operation of the Department, but very little overseeing, in any useful sense of the word, has been done for some years. Borders is the hand-picked successor in this job of Auxiliary Bishop William McManus of Chicago, a man who achieved national notoriety in 1971 by publicly identifying himself with the bitter resentment of the USCC educationalists against the General Catechetical Directory issued by Rome.

Borders concentrated on the renewed interest which the USCC is taking in public schools, which nearly seventy percent of Catholic children now attend. Although these are not in the Church's direct sphere of interest, it is vitally important, Borders insisted, "that the Church's concern extend to institutions and programs over which it does not have direct control. This would involve the conscious development of ways of relating to Catholic parents, citizens' groups and institutions, thus indirectly but very properly, in a free society, influencing public education."

Borders continued: "It is a strong wish therefore of the Committee on Education that the Department of Education acknowledge, perhaps more explicitly and with greater priority than in the past, its responsibility for public education as such. For as representatives of a Catholic citizenry which in cooperation with all other Americans is obliged to provide enlightened, albeit critical support for public education, the Department of Education ought to manifest an effective concern for all educational institutions serving American society."

"In keeping with this commitment," Borders said, "members of the departmental staff and of the committee itself have just recently participated in a significant ecumenical consultation on education which, involving one hundred religiously oriented educators, explored in earnest dialogue the problem of 'value education in a pluralistic society'."

The "consultation" to which Borders referred was sponsored by the National Council of Churches in New York on Sept. 22nd to 24th. This reporter attempted to attend the event, since "value education," a term which denotes the replacement of Christian morality with a nondogmatic "value clarification process" (that is, the child is supposed to be taught how to think ethically without holding any definite ethical doctrines), is already widespread in many so-called Catholic schools. But the "consultation" turned out to be a closed affair. No Roman Catholics other than those already invited by the USCC, were allowed to attend. Thus top level policy decisions regarding the teaching of morality are made (or at least explored) while parents are not only not consulted, but are not even allowed to know what was decided!

At any rate, in view of this renewed interest in public schools, I called Archbishop Borders' attention to the textbook rebellion now raging in the public schools of West Virginia, Indiana, Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere. I wondered, therefore, whether the Department of Education of the USCC had offered any assistance to these parents as an ecumenical gesture of Christian service, and if not, why not. Archbishop Borders replied that as far as he knew, the

Department had never been approached about the matter. He pledged, however, that "if any group requests the assistance of the Department in evaluating textbooks, our services will be made available to them."

Embattled parents should please take note. Requests for assistance should be communicated to Msgr. Olin Murdick, Department of Education, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C., 20005.

Meanwhile when Borders finished his presentation, Archbishop Hannan asked that the report contain thanks to parents who have maintained the Faith in families and who have been strong even in correcting teachings heard under Catholic auspices. Archbishop Hannan said he didn't think the conference or the Bishops had expressed adequate thanks to parents.

The entire remainder of Monday afternoon was occupied with the proposals of Auxiliary Bishop John J. Dougherty of Newark, the silver-haired and talkative chairman of the Committee on Social Development and World Peace. First he tried to get the Bishops to adopt a statement on the urban housing crisis, but that ran into a number of criticisms and was postponed. Then came a long speech on the world food crisis, followed by the appointment of an ad hoc committee to work out a "pastoral response." Then Bishop Dougherty tried to push through a statement condemning capital punishment, which came under a barrage of criticism and also had to be postponed. There was a general feeling among the Bishops that the statements had not been well drafted, particularly the one on capital punishment, which couldn't seem to make up its mind whether the issue was a moral one or not, whether the death penalty was intrinsically wrong or just inopportune. But the afternoon's work produced a stronger reaction from many lay people. There response seemed to be one of absolute exasperation. "What the devil are they talking about that stuff for when the Church is falling apart?" The same note was struck on the previous day when a large group of lay picketers marched in front of the hotel and distributed a well-printed yellow flyer. The headline read: "It Is Time For The Bishops To Put Their Own House In Order."

Next year, at least, the proposals of this committee will be a little better thought out, since Bishop Dougherty has been replaced as chairman by an Auxiliary of St. Louis, Bishop John McNicholas, a man who has little tolerance for ideological excesses.

Tuesday morning, Bishop Thomas Grady (Auxiliary of Chicago) received a strong ovation (but also some challenges) for his report on Priestly Life and Ministry. This was the first report of the permanent committee by that name, instituted last year to replace an ad hoc committee of the same name. Bishop Grady asserted that there is a "continuing need for theological reflection and study upon the nature of priesthood and priestly ministry." This emphasis drew quick fire from Archbishop William Baum of Washington, D.C. "You said we need a new theological study," Archbishop Baum said, "but we already have a body of doctrine. The dogma on the priesthood is well articulated, and these do give us a splendid basis." Then, apparently in reference to yesterday's marathon session on housing and food problems, Archbishop Baum concluded: "The dogma on priesthood is at least as well settled as social doctrine."

Elsewhere in his report Bishop Grady made a curious statement which seemed to accept as normal the existence of theological "dissent" and seemed even to suggest that in such a situation a priest might not be obliged to preach against that dissent. For the record I should like to quote the entire passage:

"In the area of moral theology, a priest is placed in a difficult situation. On the one hand, the Magisterium expresses its constant doctrine. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic theological community publicly expresses dissent on some points. Since he cannot find a clear consensus, in public, in the pulpit, the parish priest is tempted to remain silent and to run the risk of being caught unformed or uninterested in the confessional or in private counseling a parish priest might be very competent in explaining the teachings of the Church. The opinions of

theologians, and personal applications yet run the risk of being considered by some people as not loyal to the Church and by others as not well enough versed in modern theological teachings."

This seems rather clearly to be a reference to contraception and seems equally clearly to assert that the existence of "dissent" relativizes the authority of *Humanae Vitae*, in such a way that both the encyclical and the dissent must be taken as somehow "Catholic." If something like that is indeed the meaning, then the implications of this passage for Bishop Grady's personal orthodoxy (assuming, of course, that he wrote it) are very grave.

Archbishop John R. Quinn (Oklahoma City) presented the report on Pastoral Research and Practices. First up was a committee statement on Pentecostalism, which drew a good deal of fire, especially from Bishops Law, Begin, and Graves. Next came some clarification on the new *Ordo Penitentiae* or Rite of Penance, which will go into effect in a few months. First of all, Archbishop Quinn explained that the *Ordo* allows general absolution only if two conditions are simultaneously fulfilled: there must be a large crowd, too large for the available number of confessors, and it must also be the case that without this general absolution, the people would have to go a long time without the Sacrament. In other words, a large crowd by itself is no justification, since the people would usually be able to confess another day or next week. In short, general absolution is something that would be very rare outside of remote areas where a priest may be able to visit only twice or three times a year. The person who must decide whether the appropriate circumstances really exist is the local Bishop, after consultation with other Bishops.

How widely must this Bishop consult before making his decision? Archbishop Quinn's committee thought it would be sufficient to consult the other Bishops of the province (there are thirty-eight provinces in the United States, including the Eastern Rite eparchies). When this proposal was put to a written ballot it was rejected 140 to 96. Most Bishops felt the consultation should be national in scope, so that there might be one, consistent policy for the whole Country. Another question was the proper location for the new penance rite. Since the priest is supposed to extend his hand over the head of the penitent, some modification in the design of the confessionals seemed to be required. Quinn's committee proposed getting rid of closed confessionals and replacing them with small chapels or "rooms of reconciliation," in which one would have the option of kneeling at a fixed grill or facing the priest conversationally. This proposal passed without debate, 167 to 63. However, the proposal is considered "advisory," so it remains to be seen how much actual tearing up of existing facilities will take place. Frankly, to this reporter, in view of grave crises in doctrine, controversies in religious education, and frightful challenges in the social order, it seems nothing short of Kafkaesque for the Church to be wasting its time, money, and effort to redesign confessional boxes — and this in the name of "pastoralism."

A third vote was taken on a proposal to provide several options for the penitent's Act of Contrition. This proposal also passed.

Tuesday morning's business concluded with Cardinal Cody's report on behalf of the Pro-Life Affairs Committee. Although most of his comments were to be held off until the executive session on Thursday, Cody did make it clear that everything having to do with the human life amendment was being shifted out of his committee and put into the hands of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA), headed by Robert Lynch. This organization is a separate corporation set up in Washington by the State Catholic conferences. In other words, the Bishops did not want their own conference involved in the politics of the amendment any longer. There will not even be a special Bishops' committee for liaison or policy review as far as Lynch is concerned. Insofar as Lynch receives orders from the Bishops, then, it will presumably be directly through the officers of the conference (especially the general secretary, Bishop Rausch) or the Catholic Administrative Committee.

In recent months the Bishops have been under great pressure from the pro-life groups to take more effective action. Is this shift of responsibility a way of escaping the heat? Or, by getting the Cody committee out of the picture, will the shift allow quicker, more flexible leadership? Time will tell.

In any case there was an ironic note in the beginning of Cardinal Cody's report. He spoke of the progress which has been made in the pro-life battle last year and singled out two things in particular: the Helms amendment to the foreign aid bill and the Bartlett amendment to the HEW Appropriations Bill. What the Cardinal delicately neglected to mention is the fact that in both cases the Bishops' own Capitol Hill experts refused to support the amendments, discouraged other pro-lifers from supporting them, and swore that the Congress would never pass them.

Two Bishops responded to the Cody report by conveying messages to the conference from pro-life activists in their dioceses.

Bishop Brzana of Ogdensburg, N.Y., conveyed a request that the Bishops' conference get down to the business of agreeing on amendment language. Bishop Hoch of Sioux Falls relayed the message that the Bishops should communicate their support of the Bartlett amendment to the House-Senate conferees. (Note: The Bartlett amendment has since been rejected by Congress.)

The Tuesday noon press conference was a solo performance by the newly elected president, Archbishop Bernardin. This reporter wanted to get his opinion of a speech delivered to the Bishops on Sunday, Nov. 17th, before the official start of the meeting. The Sunday program had been billed as a "day of prayer, study and reflection" on the subject of "the renewal of Faith." The program had been put

together by Archbishop Quinn's Pastoral Research and Practices Committee. There were three main speakers: Fr. John Thomas, S.J., a sociologist at Georgetown; Fr. Carl Peter, a member of the theology department at Catholic University, widely known as a theological "moderate," and a certain Mrs. Casey, a housewife from Saginaw, who told the Bishops how sweet and peachy-keen the new catechisms are. The only one of these talks whose text was made available to the press, however, was that of Fr. Thomas; and it was on this speech that I wanted Archbishop Bernardin's opinion. I read the following passage from p. 20 of the text:

"Does theology give us an authoritative exposition of divinely revealed truth, that is, all the divine information stated in propositions to be taken as the sacred object of religious Faith; or is religious truth purely symbolic in character, that is, the fallible, human expression of human

reflection on various types of religious experience? As an increasing number of contemporary theologians either accept or move toward this latter position, a new source of confusion develops within the Church."

The question was as follows: Do you agree that "contemporary theologians" are accepting or moving toward this latter position? If so, how is this position different from textbook modernism? If it is not different, do these men deserve the name "Catholic theologians"?

I am sorry to report that instead of answering the question, or any part of it, Archbishop Bernardin gave me a fine little talk on the role of theologians in the Church. I realize that a press conference is not the ideal place for a Bishop to start flinging around the charge of heresy off the cuff, as it were; but let the record show that the question still stands.

Additional reports on the Bishops' meeting will appear in next week's Wanderer.




## PIME MISSIONARIES

The Missioner's Corner

### Is The Missioner Only A Social Worker?

By Fr. S. Acquaviva, PIME

Up until a few years ago, mission areas — such as Africa and Asia — were almost exclusively known only to missionaries. Today, not only industrialists, technicians, businessmen and sociologists, but also waves of tourists invade these countries, admiring their natural beauty and returning impressed by their extreme poverty. This category of visitors is far more shocked by the poverty of material things than by that of the spiritual order.

In such places, the missionary no longer is the "hero" who has left fatherland and family and buried himself forever in distant unknown country. He has now become one of many foreigners living in a mission country and only his work will show that he is not a businessman, politician or scholar. He is the bearer of a message. He is the visible sign of the invisible Church, the body of the living Christ.

Christ preached in word and deed and the missioner must be the witness to His message and His love. Therefore, the keen interest of the missioner for progress, development and social work must not and is not his only mission but only a derivation of the message of the Gospel. Human progress is not in itself the history of salvation; it is the achievement of the salvation of humanity.

Brought into this light, Christian charity will not be destroyed but integrated and given new values. For instance, hospitals and their staffs, while trying to care for bodies, also attempt to make people understand how to treasure their suffering and purify their souls. Leprosy colonies,

while curing the disease and rehabilitating mutilated bodies, are intended, at the same time, to bring to Christ such people who, rejected by society, are nevertheless the object of the loving care of the Son of God.

While visiting an orphanage in Warangal (South India) a PIME missioner proudly told me that, since the day he started running his orphanage, 30 girls had become Sisters, 6 boys had become priests and many other boys were trained as catechists. Thus, what many people look upon as merely a social enterprise can become a base for irradiating faith and love — if the elevation of human dignity and the improvement of social progress is intrinsically interwoven with the supernatural mission of the Church.

I admit I was quite surprised when I learned that the Vicar General of the Diocese of Taunggyi (Northern Burma) — a charming, soft-spoken, amiable young man — was the son of leprosy parents. His mother — still a patient and living in the Leiden Leprosy Colony run by a PIME priest — is very proud of him. When I visited her, I felt like embracing that little old lady who, in her sorrow and suffering, had found the strength and courage to instill the Faith into her boy and direct him toward the priesthood.

Many times while visiting charitable institutions in the Far East, I was moved by the sight of sick people in their hospital beds smiling at me; orphans kneeling down and asking for a blessing; leprosy victims attending Mass at 5:00 a.m. and singing their beautiful native songs; weak

and aged people saying the rosary with great fervor.

It was not merely the food, shelter, clothing or anything physical those people were receiving. They were not there simply to get an education or training... a shot, pill or a bandage for their wounds. They were receiving faith, hope and love along with the food, shelter and clothing the missionaries provided. They were getting close to God through education and training. They were learning how to offer their suffering to the bleeding Christ as they were given medicines and bandages.

The missionaries receive back much more than they give. When they see smiles on starving faces, a flash of joy in eyes more given to tears — when they put the baptismal water on heads that only the day before were far removed from Christ — then they realize that social institutions are not the ultimate goal but only the means for bringing Christ and His message to people everywhere.

So, when you support the missions, when you contribute to the alleviation of world hunger, when you respond to campaigns for leprosy or foster a little child, you respond to the call of charity. You fulfill Christ's words: "What you do for the least of My brethren you do for Me."

Above all, you channel your efforts toward spreading the Gospel through social works and you make the missioners aware that they are not simply social workers, but men who touch the hearts of their fellow-men through universal charity.

## TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST THROUGH WORKS OF MERCY



Because of his training, background and skills, a missionary's presence in a remote outpost can well mean the difference between life or death to some poor, undernourished and underprivileged child or neglected, suffering adult.

Touching the hearts of people in mission lands and winning their devotion to Christ cannot be done by words alone, as missionaries are only too well aware. A person is convinced more by deeds than rhetoric... as proof of sincerity and love. To this end, the PIME Missionaries operate, in the missions entrusted in their care: 720 schools with over a quarter million students enrolled; 100 orphanages with nearly 8,500 children who have either been abandoned or who come from destitute families; nine leprosy centers with over 9,000 patients; 166 hospitals and dispensaries which annually dispense nearly a million and one-half free consultations. These are in addition to the seminaries, catechist training centers, old-age homes and rehabilitation centers run by our missionaries. They are practical examples of Christian concern in action — visible signs of the invisible Church. Certainly, the importance of winning souls to Christ by caring for the physical and spiritual welfare of the people in the missions — and the contributions thereby made to world peace — is immeasurable.

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