

SAINT MARY OF THE LAKE SEMINARY
MUNDELEIN, ILLINOIS 60060

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VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
Monday, October 7, 1974

It has been the custom for some years, here at St. Mary of the Lake, that the opening Formations Conference of the school year would be what has been commonly known as "A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE." This conference would be given by the rector of the seminary — and its purpose, as I understand it, would be to give an over-view of the direction of the seminary for the coming year. The very title of this initial Formations Conference intrigues me. I inquired regarding its historical basis, wondering whether the title was chosen because the Simon and Garfunkle song, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, was popular at the time. I also wondered if the title was taken from one of the five bridges that circle our property here at the seminary. Depending on which bridge referred to, the whole thrust of the presentation could have different meanings.

One of the bridges over the lake spans a pool of stagnant water - a view from that bridge is quite depressing. A view from another of the bridges is one that has a flow of water constantly going beneath it - rushing forward, onward - with a purpose and a direction. While still another bridge offers the opportunity to look at the entire lake and see the various hues and colors of trees changing from summer green to autumn red and yellow and brown.

The bridge image could also be based on the view a person has from the bridge of a ship. On many ships the bridge is in the midst or center of the ship itself. It is not isolated nor separated from the men and machines responsible to make the ship go forward. Rather, it is the place, the location, which is the nerve center of the total combination of effort of men charting their way through rough waters, smooth waters, choppy waters - of what could be unknown seas.

All these images of the bridge have much in common and much diversity. However, the common element is based on the perspective that a view from the bridge offers; the diversity occurs in realizing whether the view from the bridge is an isolated, independent one or one taken in the context of the perspective ahead.

I, myself, hope that this view presented to you this evening is a realistic one. One that is not isolated or independent from this community of St. Mary of the Lake. But rather one that expresses the shared concern and hope of where we are going this coming year. I hope at the same time that the perspective I offer is a perspective that is wide and all embracing, so that the work of the coming year will take into account the unity and diversity of each of us as individuals, yet in the context of the task that is ~~always~~ ^{ours} of preparing men for priesthood and service to the people of the Church in the 70's.

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My perspective this evening is based on the totality of one year's experience. Though limited as this may be, my remarks are also based on the experience of Church which I have had over the last fifteen years as a priest working with people in various ways and functions.

What is the basis for my view from the bridge this evening. Candidly and openly I must say it's base is built on pride. This pride is not one in the sense of a capital vice, but rather in the positive thrust which the word implies. I take pride, personally, in being connected with St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. That pride is based, not on the buildings or the location, but in the whole experience of seminary education. This experience embraces faculty, students, staff - the human element which makes what we are about not an impersonal objective - brick and mortar experience alone, but rather the dynamic, educative, maturing, growing process involved in preparing men for the priesthood. Because of that pride which I think is so essential to seminary education, my dream, my hope for St. Mary of the Lake Seminary is that when people throughout this country, throughout the world, want to know how men can best be trained to be priests, to serve people in the Roman Catholic Church, they will say - "go to St. Mary of the Lake and find out how they do it."

That is why one of my major desires for the coming year is to emphasize recruitment of students for this seminary - students from the archdiocese of Chicago - students from other dioceses throughout the midwest and the country. An active recruitment program on the part of the seminary, I believe, is essential to the life of the seminary. This recruitment program should center on men actualizing and articulating the desire for service as ordained Roman Catholic priests. Any institution, if it is to stay vital and alive, cannot afford nor tolerate complacency and status quo. This complacency and status quo is contradicted by a vigorous challenging announcement to a world that we have got it all together or are trying to get it all together -- and would enjoy and profit from other people sharing in the same experience.

With recruitment as a major priority for the coming year, the question became very prominent in my mind as to what we were recruiting men for. The answer, of course, is the Roman Catholic priesthood. But, if this pride I spoke of is real and honest and candid, then what is it here at St. Mary of the Lake that would give us the audacity to say that we are the best, to say that this is where men can best learn and grow to prepare themselves for Roman Catholic priesthood. The answer to that question is the basis for the view from the bridge which I share with you this evening.

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If we are to maintain our own interest and growth and development in the Roman Catholic priesthood and attract others to do the same, then we had better know well where we are going.

Where are we going? What is the view from the bridge, as far as I see it regarding seminary education? I think that answer is based on how we see the task of Christian priesthood for the future. This future is not the year 2000, nor is it 1990, nor even 1980. I think it is today and tomorrow. That future has been expressed by Henri Nouwen when he describes the characteristics of quality of Christian ministry for the future.

According to Nouwen the prognosis for the Christian priest of tomorrow implies the assumption of three roles which must in turn be the base for seminary education. The leader - the priest leader - of tomorrow must first be the articulator of inner events. Secondly, the priest leader must be a man of compassion. Thirdly, the priest leader must be a contemplative critic. Within this description of the priest leader, I see the direction and goal of seminary education here and now. What do I mean?

The priest must be the articulator of inner events. This gift of articulation does not occur on ordination day. It does not occur in a flash as a result of field experiences, one theology class, or an ~~an~~ *pentecostal* orgasm. As the articulator of inner events within the life of man in the world today, the priest must be able to clarify the immense confusion that exists in the world; he must be able to teach people to recognize the work of God in themselves; and he has the obligation to articulate his own faith.

First, he has to articulate his own experience to others as a source of clarification and consequently, he puts his own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask for help. In this sense, he is truly a servant of servants because he is first to enter the promised but dangerous land, the first to tell those who are afraid what he has seen, heard and touched.

How does a man become an articulator of inner events? I believe in practical terms it means a man must be rooted in theology; it means that the academic dimension of seminary education has a priority that cannot be ignored, neglected or compromised. The theological education of a man in preparation for Roman Catholic priesthood has to be taken seriously. The study of theology - not only in the classroom, but on one's own initiative - is not to be an experience squeezed in among others, but rather integrated into a man's whole life. Without theology as a base to articulate inner events, we could well change the purpose and function of this institution to a school of social service or a counseling institute. Theology is what makes a seminary different from all other institutions, academically. This theology is the base from which a man goes into the depths of himself to articulate his own faith and to become the articulator of inner events to others.

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In practical terms, therefore, when recruitment programs begin and men inquire "What is going on at Mundelein? What is going on at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary?", the first answer I would love to give would be that we are training men theologically now to be articulators of inner events within themselves and for people whom they will serve. This involves a seriousness of approach to theology on the part of the entire seminary community - students and faculty. I would really call for the highest possible demands and expectations in this area from both students and faculty.

The second quality of the priest leader of tomorrow is that he become or be a man of compassion. The compassionate man stands in the midst of his people, but does not get caught in the conformists forces of the peer group. Such compassion really becomes authority in the best sense of the word because it does not tolerate pressures from an "in-group" or cliques or divides people into categories. The compassionate man is the man who will not tolerate the limited view of the world or the Church. Nor does the compassionate man become so expert in one field or skill that he falls into the temptation of doing his own thing and eventually winds up being more frustrated and disappointed than other men in society.

The man of compassion is not born. He is a man who forms himself and is formed by others. In practical terms, I see this quality of the priesthood of tomorrow being developed here at St. Mary of the Lake through the Formation Program - a program, hopefully, designed to widen men's horizons and at the same time, to narrow our inter personal relationships with each other. The compassionate man is a man who sees relationships with others and works with them. The compassionate man is the man who retains his individuality, but is conscious of the need for community. This need for community is not only in theory but in the reality of living out of community in a cam within the total seminary. This is why the present seminary education program challenges men in formation to experience different field education sites, to participate in the various and sundry dimensions of the programs available here at St. Mary of the Lake.

The formation program at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary clearly spells out its goals. It involves a double process of becoming fully human, where maturity as an individual and maturity as a member of the human community is essential. It also has the goal of asking men to become fully Christian - which involves the love of self, the love of neighbor, the love of God. The final goal, as a result of the fully human and fully Christian maturing process - is to become an effective priest before people. This means a man must be prepared to become the shepherd and the prophet.

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The principles behind the formation program are principles of freedom, co-responsibility and accountability. I think our danger at times can well be that we take one of these principles and let it over-ride the others. One person's unbridled use of freedom can be the invasion into other person's lives - whether those with whom we live or those to whom we owe service in the future. The principle of co-responsibility cries out that together we share both ~~rights~~ rights and duties. Likewise, far too often, we are tempted to emphasize our own rights and minimize the duties we owe to each other and to the community.

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The principle of accountability at times demands a confrontation - painful as it might be. But such confrontation is not an vindictive one but a concerned one of the part of those whose responsibility it is to speak on behalf of the People of God and to challenge men who wish to be ordained as Roman Catholic priests.

Despite at times the cry I hear for our involvement in so many areas of the Church's life - in the city, in the urban ministry, with the people, etc. - I wonder perhaps if all energy is so spent on those outside this community that we fail to share this thing with those with whom we live. But, then, perhaps - that is the hardest thing to do - and maybe that's why we neglect it.

The third quality of the priest leader of the future is to be a contemplative man - a contemplative critic. As a contemplative man, the priest leader should not put himself behind walls or within a monastery - but rather, the contemplation essential to the priest is inherent in the man himself. This contemplation or spirit thereof is something which does not just happen to a man in the Roman Catholic tradition. Contemplation and the spirit thereof must be bred and formed within a man. How does this occur? What is the process?

The contemplative man is the result of the process of private and community liturgical prayer experiences. Consequently, ^{to} such prayer experiences - I would ask this community to give a high priority. What are such experiences? It would involve everything from the general ~~lit~~ community liturgical celebrations to Cam liturgy, to daily liturgy, to the experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Prayer can definitely be something individual and must be individual -- but it also must and should be expressed in the context of the Roman Catholic tradition. And that tradition is the tradition of Eucharist and sacraments.

In parish life, we call upon our people over and over again to celebrate liturgically with us. As parish priests, we are called upon to celebrate the liturgy almost every day of our lives. Should not the same priority be given to this daily experience in liturgy NOW while we are in preparation to be the priest leaders of tomorrow? Without this contemplative, prayerful dimension which I believe is essential to seminary education, I wonder if we would be that much different from a school of social service preparing men to help others.

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The priest leader has to be able to articulate the movements of the Spirit within his own life - through the drudgery at times of repeated experiences, but experiences ever new inherent in a worship of God that liturgy offers. But more than just being a contemplative man, the priest leader of tomorrow must be the contemplative critic. The contemplative critic, in the words of Nouwen, "takes away the mask of the manipulative world and has the courage to show what the true situation is. He knows that he is considered by many a fool, a madman, a danger to society and a threat to mankind." But that has always been the task of the contemplative critic ^{as} Jesus himself walked this earth.

In reality, these qualities of the priest leader are merely nothing more than rephrasing the fact that the priest has to be in the future - ^{at} what he has always had to be in the past: a man of prayer... A man who has to pray and pray always. The man of prayer is a leader, precisely because ~~he is a man of prayer~~ through his articulation of God's Word and work within himself, he can lead others out of confusion to clarification: ~~through his compassion he can guide them out of the closed circuits of their in-groups to the wide world of humanity: and through his critical contemplation, he can convert the falseness, the destructiveness and to create work for the new world to come.~~

The above that I have spoken of is an ideal. But it is an ideal I believe that we are striving for here at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. The problem with ideals is that they must confront reality. No matter what programs, classes etc., are held, they are but the skeleton without the flesh and bone, the flesh and marrow and blood that is needed ^(shake) this ideal a living entity. This is where the student community of St. Mary of the Lake must be involved - to which they give of themselves, to share this dream, to share this ideal, to share this vision of submitting themselves to the process involved in becoming the priest leader of tomorrow.

Last year I spoke about an open agenda which I hope would characterize my own approach to being rector of St. Mary of the Lake. I hope that open agenda policy will still be the way to approach questions, problems, decisions. But even the open agenda has parameters -- parameters of financial realities, parameters of hopes we wish could be achieved today (and we might have to wait until tomorrow), parameters of personality conflicts and so many others. It is an exciting experience to be part of tomorrow today -- this is how I see my own role at St. Mary of the Lake. This is the view from the Bridge I offer in the hopes that through trust and confidence and dialogue we may together achieve the shared joy and exhilaration of serving people within the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Thank you.