

NTR

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Daniel McLellan, O.F.M., and Donald Senior, C.P.

Preparing the Next Generation for Pastoral Leadership— Two Theology School Presidents Speak Out

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15). This beautiful admonition of the First Letter of Peter is as timely today as it was when first written to an early Christian community struggling through a time of great difficulty. It also inspired the title of a major study of American Catholic seminaries by Sr. Katarina Schuth, O.S.F. (*The Reason for the Hope*, 1989). The Catholic Church in the United States continues to live through a serious and heartbreaking crisis. The sexual abuse of minors by trusted pastors has dismayed, discouraged, and angered great numbers of people. The handling of these crimes and misbehaviors has led many to experience a crisis of confidence in the leaders and institutions of the Church.

Are there reasons for hope for the next generation of priests and lay ecclesial ministers? As presidents of two schools of theology and ministry that educate men and women for the ministries of the Church, we are well aware of the attention focused on us and the work that we do. People are anxious that the new generation of priests and lay ministers we are preparing will be healthy and trustworthy. In fact we do have great hope in the work of our schools and in the men and women we are educating. The editors of *New Theology Review*

have asked us to reflect on the reasons for this confidence, and to share with you our “reasons for the hope” that continues to inspire our work in these difficult days.

The Founding Impulses of Our Two Schools

Both Union schools began in the late sixties, inspired by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the winds of change that were blowing strongly through our country and our Church. The Washington Theological Union began in 1967 when several religious order seminaries clustered around The Catholic University of America established the Interseminary Cooperative Organization (ICO) to foster communication with one another as they addressed the implications of Vatican II. These schools soon realized that any serious engagement of the council needed to have an ecumenical component. The ICO became the Washington Theological Consortium as Protestant schools joined the conversation. It soon became clear to the religious communities that, individually, their schools lacked the resources needed for the kind of quality theological education needed by priests in the post-conciliar Church. In 1969, six of these schools came together as the Washington Theological Coalition and so began a deliberate process of forming a new and independent school. By 1977 the

“temporary alliance of distinct parties” had evolved into a stable educational institution that henceforth would be known as the Washington Theological Union. Today, seven religious institutes make up the Union’s corporate membership.

The inspiration that led to the formation of Catholic Theological Union was first sparked by a speech of Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens of Belgium, one of the leading voices of Vatican II. He gave a speech at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1964 in which he called for a new vision for seminaries in the wake of the council. Moved by his speech, the dean of the Divinity School, Gerald Brouwer, himself a Lutheran, invited several Catholic friends to come to Chicago and join with already existing Protestant divinity schools in the university setting of Hyde Park. Eventually three orders—the Franciscans, Passionists, and Servites—responded to the call and forged the new Catholic Theological Union, setting up shop in what was formerly a ten-storied hotel and beginning classes in the fall of 1968. Today twenty-five religious communities are the official sponsors of CTU.

While both CTU and WTU have always maintained their primary mission of providing excellent theological education for the religious order candidates of their members’ communities, the schools recognized early on the ever-growing importance of theological education for other ministries in the Church, as well as for the personal and professional enrichment of those seeking to deepen their life of discipleship. Today lay men and women make up half of the enrollment at both schools.

Elements of Our Experience

In 1992 John Paul II published the apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* in which he synthesized the work of the 1990

Synod of Bishops dealing with priestly formation. The exhortation highlights the important values that should inform the education and formation of priests. As we look at our respective schools through the lens of *Pastores dabo vobis*, we see programs that meet the high standards set by the Pope.

The overarching theme of the synod and the Pope’s exhortation is the need to pay careful attention to the context of education and formation. The synod considered questions of priestly formation “in terms of today’s society and today’s Church in preparation for the third millennium” (PDV, 5). The Pope noted that candidates for ministry come from particular human and ecclesial contexts which shape and form them, and it is to these contexts that the minister returns. It was this same conviction that motivated the founders of both our schools. The new educational ventures were designed to prepare religious priests to be effective pastoral leaders in the context of a postmodern world and a postconciliar Church.

Our founders were clear that formation for religious priesthood would be accomplished best in an environment where the full richness of religious life in all its diversity could be appreciated. Traditionally, formation was often kept parochial for fear that candidates would not develop sufficient loyalty and devotion to their own community and charism if mixed with those from different traditions. Our experience has validated the conviction of our founders. Rather than resulting in a confused mix, our schools have become opportunities for the specific identities of our religious communities to stand out. Rarely in our thirty-five year history have candidates from one religious community decided to join another. More importantly, the collaborative nature of our institutions gives individual religious communities a

chance to highlight the particular charism of their institutes for the benefit of all. At the Washington Theological Union, for example, there is a specially funded lecture series in Augustinian studies, an endowed Franciscan Center for Theology and Spirituality, and an articulation agreement with the Carmelite Institute of America. At Catholic Theological Union, the Society of the Divine Word and the Maryknoll Missionaries have each established chairs and accompanying lecture series that focus on world mission—a special emphasis of the school's curriculum—while the Franciscan community has established a chair and a special institute for Franciscan spirituality.

The Pope's exhortation gives new emphasis to human formation. Referring to the priest as a "bridge" for others in their meeting with Christ, the Pope highlights the human qualities to be nurtured in the work of education and formation. Priests should be "balanced, strong and free, educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity, and, especially to be balanced in judgment and behavior." Cultivating the priest's "capacity to relate to others" is at the heart of the process of human development. To relate to others requires that the priest "not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console" (PDV, 43).

The Union schools provide a highly suitable context for the manifestation of these interpersonal skills and the development of a student's capacity to relate with various types of people. The teaching and learning communities of our schools are a genu-

ine cross-section of the Church. Drawn from at home and abroad and rich in diversity of race, gender, and ethnic background, students are challenged each day to manifest the virtues and habits necessary to live and learn and serve in a global environment.

The unique make-up of our faculties, staff, and student body helps us meet a further challenge to educating pastors with the charity of Christ. Citing his predecessor Paul VI, the Pope reminds us that "Christ became the contemporary of some men and spoke their language. Our faithfulness to him demands that this contemporaneity should be maintained" [PDV, 52; Paul VI, Address to the participants in the 21st Italian Biblical Week (September 25, 1970): AAS 62, (1970), 618]. Our schools are designed in a way that the educational environment fosters this contemporaneity by keeping a diverse student body in constant contact with each other. Students come to us from all walks of life, age groups, and regions of the world. Academic programs are open to any eligible applicant. Classes normally include a diverse mix of students enrolled as priesthood candidates, lay, religious, sabbatical students, as well as priests and others who minister locally. Common prayer and ministry as well as study and research are contact points that allow students to enrich each other.

The priest needs to relate not only to those he serves, but also with his partners in ministry. Over thirty thousand lay men and women are currently serving effectively in positions of pastoral responsibility through the U.S. Many are graduates of our schools. We have learned that they serve not out of a need to accommodate a scarcity of priests. They serve out of a sense of vocation, a call from God rooted in their baptism. As the face of ministry changes, it is critical that those called to

ministry, presbyteral and lay, develop a deep appreciation of one another's vocation. Future pastoral leaders need to develop an appreciation for the particular gifts God gives to the Church through their service and be able to relate and work collaboratively with each other for the common good. Far better that a capacity for mature collaboration be tested and developed during one's years of preparation for ministry and ordination than to discover its absence when it is too late and can do grave harm to the Church.

Our schools share the vision that a learned ministry goes hand-in-hand with a Church engaged in the critical issues affecting peoples' lives. Thus, we wholeheartedly agree with the Church's emphasis that study is not a secondary or external part of priestly and ministerial formation (PDV, 51). Theological study, a work that leads from faith to faith, is complex and demanding. The quality of our intellectual formation is a point of particular pride for us as schools sponsored by religious communities. Each member of our respective faculties holds an earned doctorate in his or her field. In addition to their high quality of teaching, both faculties have reputations for scholarly research and publication. We take particular pride in the thoroughness and rigor of programs that not only provide our students with a synthesis of our Catholic tradition but with methodologies that help them, as men and women of faith, to continue to ask critical questions of that faith (PDV, 53). Because the religious communities have collaborated and pooled their individual resources, we are able to maintain quality faculties that would be beyond the capacity of any single religious community to provide.

In helping our students develop the capacity to stay in touch with the minds and hearts of those they will serve, we take seriously Pope John Paul's admonition

that pastoral formation is not mere apprenticeship, becoming familiar with this or that skill or technique (PDV, 58). Pastoral formation aims to fine-tune the sensitivities of the student to the sensitivities of Christ. It is a matter of developing in the student capacities of service and leadership that are motivated by faith and reflect the application of the Church's theological tradition. Such an education takes place through practical pastoral experience and serious reflection on that experience. The wide and varied works of our religious communities make it possible for our schools to provide opportunities for carefully supervised ministerial experiences in a variety of pastoral settings worldwide. At the heart of the practical experience is theological reflection, faculty-led exercises of "mature reflection" (PDV, 57) which lead the student to put on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5).

While our schools take special responsibility for the intellectual and pastoral education of our students, we recognize that the Church expects those who minister in its name to be well prepared personally and spiritually as well as professionally. Each of our schools fosters a close working relationship with those responsible for the spiritual formation of our students who are members of religious institutes. We are careful to coordinate our academic activities in a way that complements the work of the formation directors. At CTU, for example, a formation council composed of each of the formation directors of the religious communities meets monthly with representatives from the school, and representatives of the communities have a seat on all faculty committees. We have also developed programs of spiritual formation especially designed to meet the needs of our lay students. These programs are intended to help students deepen their personal relationship with Christ and to grow

in their vocational commitment to service in the Church. While human and spiritual formation of religious candidates for ministry is the proper responsibility of the candidate's institute, several religious formation programs have begun to collaborate with the WTU lay formation program sharing in monthly prayer, fellowship, and discussion. CTU collaborates with the Archdiocese of Chicago in preparing Hispanic and African American lay ecclesial ministers for the local church, and all of the school's lay students participate in a newly established archdiocesan formation program as well as in the school's own more extensive program.

The future context for ministry in the U.S. will be ecumenical and interreligious. Our schools are members of ecumenical consortia in our respective cities. Consequently, faculty participate in structured conversations with colleagues according to academic discipline, inter-library use is permitted and students may cross-register for courses in any member school. In addition, Catholic Theological Union has programs specializing in Catholic-Jewish and Catholic-Muslim Studies. Additionally, CTU is part of the Chicago Center for Global

Ministry that coordinates its mission and urban ministry programs with the nearby Lutheran and Presbyterian seminaries.

Conclusion

What began as exciting experiments in ministerial formation have now become proven examples of quality pastoral education. Catholic Theological Union of Chicago and Washington Theological Union are integrated and collaborative educational experiences that now prepare a substantial portion of the religious order priests ordained in the United States and a growing number of the Church's future lay ecclesial ministers. For thirty-five years we believe we have provided our students with the excellent instruction and sound pastoral formation that is so necessary for effective ministry. In the midst of our present difficulties, extraordinarily generous men and women continue to come to us hungry for the learning, skill, and deep spirituality that will make them pastors after the manner of Christ. From our vantage point, at the heart of educating the next generation of pastoral leaders, the future of our Church and its ministry looks very hopeful indeed.