

SAINT MARY OF THE LAKE SEMINARY  
MUNDELEIN, ILLINOIS 60060

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE - OCTOBER 6, 1975

In my three experiences of beginning a school year at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, I believe this year has been unique and singular. This uniqueness is due primarily to the experience we have shared together in the Community Retreat conducted by Rev. Leo Mahon. In so many ways of expressing his thoughts and reflections with us, a certain theme seemed to ring in my ears over and over again. Leo focused in, at least for myself, a simple articulation of the purpose of Seminary. This purpose can be clearly stated in saying that Seminary must provide the climate and the environment and the experience of helping men to be men of faith. That simple definition of all that we do around here could be easily questioned, discussed, and even challenged. Yet, the extension of this definition of Seminary into the various phases of the present Seminary educational system could give us an anchor, a basis, a foundation ~~whereby~~ *whereby* this coming year could be the exciting adventure-filled possibility of which Leo spoke.

To be men of faith is not to be condemned to an experience of boredom or dullness. Rather the very concept and living out of one's faith can be and must be the ultimate adventure in living. To be men of faith is to be involved in the greatest adventure that could ever be offered to any one of us. But somehow or other that awareness must not be something that we are told as such, but rather it must be integrated into our own lives.

Faith, by its very nature and definition, cannot and must not exist in a vacuum. I do not believe without reason. I do not believe without purpose. I do not believe without consequent demands and expectations. I do not believe without realizing that I must be on for what I say I believe. Consequently to be men of faith means that there are assumptions out of which I operate which gives stability and strength to my belief. It is these assumptions that I would like to share with you this evening which offer me at least an overview of the approach that a Seminary must take in fulfilling its purpose of providing the climate, the environment, the experience of helping men to achieve this purpose.

I have six assumptions which I believe are necessary for us to operate from if we are to be men of faith, if this Seminary is to fulfill its purpose. These assumptions provide me at least with the strength and the courage to be hopefully a man of faith, a priest. These assumptions make my life more than just a functional performance of duties and obligations, but rather allow me to live a priesthood that makes sense in the human condition of life itself. At times, these assumptions can be neglected or forgotten. Yet I believe we must focus in on them and use them as constant reminders of what faith can mean in each of our lives.

The assumptions I believe essential are centered around six values which provide the atmosphere in which mature faith can be experienced. The importance and value of each of these assumptions are not really distinct from each other, but actually complement each other in so many different ways.

The first assumption I have regarding Seminary education to fulfill its purpose of helping men to become men of faith is the importance and value of the Lord Jesus. This assumption almost seems redundant or unnecessary. Yet the importance of the Lord Jesus as a person to whom a commitment is made by reason of my faith can never be presumed. This assumption of belief in the Lord Jesus must be activated and reactivated time and time again in the context of my living from day to day.

Historically speaking, there are countless examples of men of faith who believe in ideas and principles. But ideas and principles can remain sterile and ineffectual unless they become incarnated in the human condition of man himself. Consequently this assumption of the importance and value of the Lord Jesus should provoke a faith response not in wordy ideals or generic principles, but in the reality of the person of Christ himself. For some reason or other this value and importance of the Lord Jesus can be lost in sentimental piety or unreal assignment to Jesus of non-human qualities and characteristics. If we are to be men of faith, that faith must be related to the person of the Lord. For he, as a person, must be the motivation for our faith which prompts us to see so much of what we do not in a context of functional tasks but in the far more demanding context of responding to a relationship with a person. Great works of justice and charity and peace are being done in the name of government agencies and social service bureaus or on behalf of individuals within an agency of social concern. But a whole new dimension is added for the Christian man of faith whose motivation is the Lord Jesus himself. Consequently the importance and value of the Lord Jesus is essential for men who want to be involved in the adventure of faith.

The second assumption from which I operate which I believe is necessary for men of faith is the importance and value of Eucharist and Prayer. This assumption seems so logically to follow from the first. The Lord Jesus continues to exist in a way and fashion that he himself promised - through his presence in the Eucharist. Contact with the Lord Jesus is made in the experience of prayer. The value and importance of Eucharist and Prayer is seen from the human experience we have ourselves with dealing with friends. A man of faith who accepts the first assumption of the value and importance of the Lord Jesus cannot be true to this first assumption unless he strives to be in contact with the Lord. This contact is effected best in the tradition in which we share through the experience of Eucharist and Prayer. Faith is not an intellectual game but rather a life experience. Consequently the adventure of living out one's faith in the Lord Jesus is rooted in this second assumption of the value and importance of Eucharist and Prayer on a regular basis.

The third assumption for a man of faith, especially for the man of faith who is to be a leader of the faith community is the importance and value of theology. This importance and value of theology is expressed best in the challenge we are called upon to experience which is the richness of the Gospel message in the 2000 years of the Christian Catholic tradition. The man of faith who is to be the leader of a community of faith cannot remain aloof from the Gospel in the Christian Catholic tradition. Theology is the expression of the Gospel in this Christian Catholic tradition in an organized way. This theology, however, must not be separated from the experience of life itself for the Gospel was not separated from life nor was the 2000 year experience of the Christian Catholic tradition isolated from the human condition. This assumption of the importance and value of theology demands a seriousness of approach to the challenge of theology. Theology should at times, if not at all times, be the basis for the excitement that is asked of men who live out a faith commitment. Theology, even at the most speculative moments, should be able to excite the mind and instill the heart with the spirit of adventure. The attitude that one takes towards this experience in theology must not be one of merely jumping through the hoops in order to fulfill academic requirements. Such games are for children, not for men of faith who are to be leaders in the faith community. Theology must become alive in each of our lives so that the assumption of the value and importance of theology can be conducive towards living out what it means to be men of faith.

The fourth assumption is the value and importance of people. As men of faith who are to be leaders in a faith community, we must work with people and for people. It would be so easy to perform functional tasks in relationship to people and to consider them more or less as objects of our work. But as you well remember from the Retreat that we shared together, the insistence was made that we are to be men of faith ~~on~~ behalf of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not only an eschatological event, but is lived out at the moment in the present context of the human condition. The Kingdom of God is within the people, the people with whom we work in parishes, in hospital situations, in counseling situations in the various and myriad activities of field education. The value and importance of people is exactly that, a respect for people where they are at in their unique cultural, ethnic, and racial identity. We contradict this assumption by the arrogance which is ours at times in imposing what we think, what we believe, what we say on others. We display an unmitigated arrogance to people by a new form of authoritarianism in the name or renewal by not being real men of faith, and being satisfied in giving them sterile and superficial responses to the questions which they are asking in so many ways, shapes and forms of where is the Lord, where is God, where is hope. At the same time, we can become so caught up in the value and importance of people in the field education experience which is ours, that we forget the fact that people live in our own midst, next door to us, down the hall from us in the same building. Somehow or other we relegate each other to a non-people category and all the charity, care and concern we extend to others outside of this Seminary, we often do not give here. Our ~~concern~~ concern at times to the workers, the staff, the others whose existence around us is taken for granted seems to be a very low priority in many of our lives. And yet the assumption for the man of faith is to experience the importance and value of people. We cannot be restrictive about the people we choose to touch, the people we choose to be kind towards, the people to whom we give the gift of ourselves. It is far easier to be concerned about people beyond this community and fail to see the obligation I believe to live out the importance and value of the men here, the staff here, the various people who are connected with this Seminary called St. Mary of the Lake.

The fifth assumption that I believe is essential for men of faith is the value and importance of personal growth and maturity. Human life must be an experience of growth. Otherwise, I believe, one of the first field education tours each of us should take is of the nearby Catholic Cemetery known as Ascension on the outskirts of Libertyville. For once we refuse to admit that we can grow and mature, then we are dead. Men of faith are not to be dead men, they are to be alive. Alive, with the Spirit of what prompted the Apostles to experience the adventure of the early Christian Community. Personal growth and maturity demands a candid assessment of our own talents and limitations, of our own abilities and weaknesses. The value and importance of personal growth and maturity makes it obvious that within our lives there are areas that cry out for growth whether in interpersonal relationships, whether dealing with people, whether in cooperation, or in the many dimensions of what it means to live as a human Christian man of faith. Men of faith also have a certain maturity which is not a static experience but rather a dynamic one. Maturity involves an awareness of decorum, an awareness of respect, an awareness of openness. Maturity involves a process where we do not hang on to set ideas and have closed minds to so many open questions today. Men of faith need to operate from the assumption of the value and importance of personal growth and maturity. In living out this value, it could well mean that we must open ourselves up to others to be subject to criticism, to be subject to suggestion, to be subject to feedback. The mature man will not resent this, but rather profit from it and increase the faith life which is his.

The final and last assumption for the man of faith who is to be the Christian leader of tomorrow within the faith community is the assumption that calls out for the value and importance of priesthood. All Christians are called to ministry. Ministry, however does not demand ordination. Ordination presumes ministry, but it is the specification of ministry, a specification which means that priesthood must be seen in its context of leadership in the faith community by men of faith. To place priesthood and ministry together in one lump - understanding is the misunderstanding of both priesthood and ministry. In specifying priesthood as the dimension of ministry which calls for Christian leadership by men of faith, we are not asserting ourselves to be "superior to others" rather we are living out the faith tradition of a community of believers who see the value and importance of priesthood. Far too often because we do not see the value and importance of priesthood so much of our time is taken up with tasks and functions that others within the Christian Community could do so much better. The Church of tomorrow needs a better understanding of the various ministries and charism within the Church so that the priest can be what he must become, a man of faith, a leader of faith within the Christian Faith Community.

Are these assumptions ~~some~~<sup>for</sup> men of faith exhaustive? Far from it. They are however assumptions regarding values and priorities within a context of what I think Seminary is about and must be about - to develop men of faith who will be leaders within the Christian Community.

How will all of this be achieved? No one man can assume to himself decision making responsibilities in a vacuum. If the Church within parish structure calls for shared decision making, shared responsibility, that experience should first be had in the whole experience of preparing men to be men of faith. I call for your interest, your input, your suggestions, your involvement in this whole process of Seminary education. Consequently when decisions are made that affect each of our lives, they are not made in a vacuum or from selfish motivation of any one of us or from selfinterest. Decisions made within the Seminary Community context must be seen in the context of the larger faith community which is the Church and the responsibility which is jointly ours of preparing men to be men of faith within the Christian Catholic Faith Community.

I feel very comfortable in sharing these assumptions with you regarding Seminary, regarding this whole process of Seminary education. My reason for saying this is my own awareness of the rich resource that this Seminary possesses which is not to be measured in terms of buildings or acres, or rabbits or carp. The rich resource that this Seminary possesses is the faculty of men and women who staff this seminary, whose main motivation and purpose in being here is to share their faith through witness and communication with men such as yourself who are to be the future of the faith community in the Roman Catholic Church. Challenge, <sup>us</sup> But also ~~ask~~<sup>challenge each</sup> other and ask us in turn to challenge you. "In reality, the question of challenge and sharing should not be looked upon in terms of us and you or we and them," but rather in terms of what the seminary could be about and should be about - the preparation of men of faith to be leaders in the Faith Community.

In the past I have spoken of open agendas, I have spoken of qualities of what the priests of tomorrow should be as outlined in the Wounded Healer, I have spoken about my worries regarding the experience of Seminary education. Tonight, I speak of an ideal, an ideal which I believe caught hold of all of us during this past week on Retreat, the ideal of preparing ourselves to be men of faith. But these too could be empty words unless they are based on valid assumptions. The assumptions to my mind our clear, they are the assumptions of the importance and value of the Lord Jesus, the

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importance and value of Eucharist and Prayer, the importance and value of Theology, the importance and value of People, the importance and value of personal growth and maturity and finally the importance and value of Priesthood itself. I just really wonder what would happen if there was a general agreement on these assumptions *we operated from them. We might have begun to implement "the dream", we might find ourselves really believing we have the best seminary in the world.*