Troubled Transition in the Church

The Priesthood and the Council’s Documents

In their deliberations at Vatican II, the bishops of the world emphasized the roles of prelates and parishioners, and especially the poor of the world. With prelates the issue was authority and collegiality. Supreme power over the Church belongs to the bishops in union with the Pope. The expanded role of the laity emphasized their priesthood and their right to participate actively in the same service of God. The laity also possesses charisms, and it is the responsibility of the bishops to listen to and take advice from them. The Church Fathers also paid a great deal of attention to ecumenical relations with the rest of the Christian and non-Christian world. But what about the priesthood?

At the beginning of the Council, very little was said on the priesthood in the major documents. Because it was inadequately treated in the Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), several separate drafts were prepared for the Third and Fourth Sessions, but it wasn’t until late in the final session that a decree on the priesthood was passed (Abbott and Gallagher, 1966). One has only to read the tables of contents of books on Vatican II, such as Küng (1967), MacEoin (1966), and Novak (1964), to appreciate this lack of emphasis on the priesthood at the Council.

Many priests and especially some *periti* at the Council were quite disturbed with this turn of events. An unintended consequence of this less than thorough examination of the modern priesthood was the creation of further ambiguity in the definition of the priest. The decree on the priesthood emphasized the traditional definition of the priest as mediator between God and man through the Eucharist. It saw the priest as a delegate of the bishop and his power as an extension of the hierarchy. But nothing substantial was spelled out on the theological and structural meanings of collegiality as applied to the clergy. Still less was anything mentioned about the rights and
freedoms of the priest. It seemed that the Council left the priests as marginal men between the bishop of whom they were an extension and the laity who they were to train as leaders of the community.

**THE LOSS OF FUNCTIONS**

This definition of the status of the priesthood came at a time when the priest in the United States was experiencing a loss of functions. With the rapid development of industrial technology, science, the professions, and other forms of knowledge, and the rapid increase of urbanization, the priest could no longer be, if he ever was, all things to all men (O'Dea, 1968: 21–24). Ministry was more purposeful when the immigrant population came to him for help, advice, and decisions. The priest fulfilled the expressive function of 'Father'. He served his flock, but he also ruled. His prestige came from two directions—love and respect. He combined quite nicely the expressive and instrumental roles of his office. The priesthood was defined theologically and legally for him, but he was able to work out that definition pragmatically to the fulfillment of his psychological and social needs.

But this was no longer possible. It became difficult for the priest to be 'Father' when he was serving large congregations. His people did not come to him for a wide range of advice. Instead, they went to professionals who had specialized knowledge and experience. Even in regard to certain theological and ethical questions many priests found themselves lost. Thus a dilemma arose for the priest. He was losing his functions. He was neither fully 'Father' nor fully a professional (Donovan, 1966: 113–120).

The problems of identity and self-worth are related to this structural dilemma. It is the dilemma of the priestly office seeking legitimacy in a bureaucratic society which values utilitarian function rather than the expressive activity of forming a community of faith. It is a society that rewards specialization and professionalism. The priest in the secular world is looked upon as a 'good guy' but is ignored or devalued because his credentials are not relevant.

The theology of the priesthood didn't provide answers to these dilemmas and questions. What is the proper ministry of the priest?
What can't a lay person do that a priest can do, except offer Mass and hear confessions? Is the secular world the sole domain of the priesthood of the laity? There was a crisis of the priesthood.

Before the Council, the priest lived in an atmosphere that stifled most questions or doubts he might have. Authority of the bishop and pastors has become so exalted and absolute that the priest, by and large, resigned himself to silence whenever he encountered irrelevant or harmful requirements. He helped count the Sunday collection because it was a good administrative experience. He obeyed his pastor and didn't go visiting the homes of the parishioners. He remained aloof from the people, remembering that his seminary training told him that a priest was set apart; but he also knew that the pastor was jealous of popular young priests. The priest was trained in obedience and docility to the point that he accepted infringements on, and injustices to, his personal rights as temptations of pride. Although this is an over-statement, it does characterize the climate in which a great number of priests lived and worked.

This climate of the church was depicted by Bernard M. Kelley, the Auxiliary Bishop of Providence, Rhode Island, in his letter of resignation (Cogley, 1973: 129):

... The Vatican Council promised to bring the Church into the world but ... I have come to the painful conclusion that the United States Bishops ... are determined to preserve as far as possible the structure and forms of Trent. ... I feel obliged in conscience to protest ... by my resignation.

Problem of Definition

The crisis in the priesthood was indeed one of authority and leadership, and I will discuss this later. But central to the problem of the priesthood was the question of identification. What is the role of the priest? Just what can he do? There were lay leaders that told priests to stay out of the secular world. Ed Marciniak, a well-known social-actionist, attacked clerical activism as an encroachment on the role of the layman who is the secular 'insider', the initiate of an expertise quite different from the clergyman's. If conscience is going
to mediate between moral teaching and politics while preserving the wall of separation between Church and State, then laymen must be the mediators. The clergy speak too directly of moral imperatives, making churchly claims too little negotiable, too unyielding, for the pluralistic marketplace (Wills, 1972: 151).

Marciniak has isolated the core issue of the definitional problem of the priesthood. Priests don't have the expertise—so stay out of society. From the passing of the Gemeinschaft society to the Gesellschaft society, the principle of competence has replaced the principle of investiture; specialization has ruled out the notion of universal competence. No one any longer sees the 'power of orders' as the source of all types of diversified expertise in the Church or in society. Such expertise assumes a long period of special training and long practical experience (Pin, 1969: 53).

That is why many priests, especially the younger ones, felt inadequate for the tasks that they were assigned. They felt ill-trained in counselling and human relations skills, as well as lacking in personal growth and maturity (Kennedy and Heckler, 1971: 7-13). They pointed to the inadequacy of their seminary training. Fichter (1968: 204–205), in a study of American priests who were not pastors, states that these respondents reported a deficient career preparation for the very functions that absorb most of their time and energy. They were constantly dealing with people, counselling them, serving them, and yet they complained that they had practically no training in social relations or in how to handle practical organizational problems.

The basic fault did not lie with the seminary but with the Church leadership in not apprising themselves of the changing needs of society and of the trends calling for new professional values. The priestly role and definition didn't mesh well with the reality of modern society, and this lack of articulation between what a priest was trained to do and the requirements of the pastoral and social ministry has caused the crisis of definition and identity (see Stewart, 1969a).

As mentioned, the Council didn’t clarify matters either. In the document Presbyterorum Ordinis, the Council explicitly affirmed the need for order and structure, emphasizing the importance of priestly collaboration with the bishops in sanctifying and governing the
Church. Priests were viewed as ‘prudent cooperators’ with the episcopal order and its aids and instruments. Yet, on the other hand, the bishops stated that ‘all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank and status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity’. And in pursuing that common vocation, ‘Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men of the modern world ever more generously and effectively’.

The Council held out a new but confused vision of the priesthood that contrasted sharply with the actual life of the diocesan priest (O’Brien, 1971: 452).

But this new vision became painful to many priests when they reflected on their professional inadequacies. Experiencing both frustration and anger, many became rebellious and confrontative (see Ellis, 1969: 163–255). O’Brien (1971: 452) expressed the dilemma in this way:

Caught in the conflict of loyalties to the institutional forms in which he has been trained and through which he had worked, and his equally powerful desire for thorough professional training and for the freedom to identify with the cause of the poor . . . the priest necessarily entered a period of anxiety and unrest.

The Council told all Christians to exercise their freedom and use their judgment in renewing the ministry of Christ in the modern world. Priests, religious, and laity alike took the advice seriously. The questioning and open discussion began, sometimes logically and responsibly, sometimes not. But the discussions did make priests aware of their common problems. However, their reactions were not all the same.

A large number of priests went calmly about their ritual functions as if the Council had hardly happened. Some were annoyed because the Council called for a change in the routines. These tended to be older priests who had worked out a model of separating the sacred and profane. Their only concerns were to preserve the style of the ministry to which they were accustomed and to hold onto certain interests that they had gained.

A second group of priests, mostly younger men, was unable to reconcile this new vision of the Council and the institutionalized routines of pastoral work. Obedience and celibacy, in particular, became intolerable constraints. The Council had emphasized obe-
dient submissiveness over personal responsibility. Moreover, theology was rediscovering the spiritual significance of sexual relationships (Pin, 1969: 50). This had an impact on the thinking of many priests. For these men, authority was repressive and the institution of the priesthood was no fraternity, but a lonely crowd. Many began to resign from the ministry.

A third group experienced a deep insecurity. They were neither young nor old. They had worked very hard in their parishes, especially in building and expanding Catholic schools. Many were the post-war, brick-and-mortar priests, but much of what they did was peripheral to the pastoral ministry itself. Time was consumed with administration and management (Roche, 1968: 182). They were priests who, on the whole, would not be leaders of renewal. They waited for leadership to develop, expecting it to come from the bishop. They became confused and sometimes angry at younger priests for taking initiative and leadership.

The last group sought to implement the new goals of the post-conciliar Church in whatever ways possible. These priests were in their 30s and 40s. Though they were troubled and frustrated at the pace of renewal in the diocese, they didn’t have the insecurities or needs of the other three groups. They weren’t concerned with the symbols and prerogatives of status. These men had the conviction that they had a share in making the renewal work. Most also had the courage and perseverance to ‘hand in’. Garry Wills (1972: 246) captured the sentiment of some of this group in the following statement:

Those Catholics who go underground would not be so offensive to ‘normal’ Catholics if it meant going out—leaving the Church, the priesthood, the Christian fellowship, once and for all. Timorous episcopal ‘fishers of men’ would gladly shake these fish out of their nets; but the unwanted catch just laughs and hangs in there. Philip writes to Daniel, ‘We’ll muckle through for old Mother Church’. Daniel says that the institutional Church nibbled away at Christ. Yet Christ was there to be nibbled at . . . . Mother [Church] may be a wacky dame at best, but these disturbing sons . . . pay her the compliment of finding her ‘serious’ and ‘interesting’.

These priests saw the Church as a servant of mankind. For them the
incarnation of Christ continued in His people, giving hope and seeking justice for all mankind. They weren't content with a narrow definition of the ministry. They were 'value'-oriented, concerned about the needs and rights of the common weal. They weren't taken by clerical interests, prerogatives, and status. But they were very concerned that their world-view would have little meaning and relevance without experience and competencies.

**THE MALAISE**

These years immediately following the Council were times, then, of theological controversy, discontent, turmoil, and great discouragement. It was a stormy period when laity were increasingly ignoring Church law about such things as Mass attendance and birth control regulations. Priests were resigning in great numbers. Seminaries were closing. It seemed for a time that the Church was experiencing wholesale anomie and facing widespread disintegration. The whole edifice of law, custom, and religious practice that had supported Catholic stability since the Council of Trent was threatened (Cogley, 1973: 125–26).

Whether it was the bishops who were primarily to blame for the crisis of American Catholics, particularly the priests, or whether it was the impatience of priests and laity who pressed for changes beyond Vatican II, is not the relevant question here. What is important is the nature and consequences of an irrelevant definition of the priesthood. A solution to this crisis would go far in solving other problems related to this definitional one. The problems of authority, leadership, and freedom; of institutionalization and personal autonomy; and of faith and a meaningful world-view are directly tied to the crisis of identity (see Greeley, 1972a).

Many priests were troubled because they were continually frustrated by the institutional rigidity of the Church. They found themselves helpless and powerless. They were torn between loyalty to the Church organization and their commitments to the needs of the people. They saw the Church as a total institution allowing little freedom to experiment. Many also found themselves harassed or punished if they entered social controversies. For some the Church
became an obstacle to faith in the ministry of serving the societal needs. For others the Church ceased to be an authentic sign of Christ. Priests saw many of their leaders living comfortably, with little concern about matters of social justice. Frequently enough they incurred their bishops’ displeasure for being involved. Thus arose the problem of disbelief in the Church as a meaningful sign of salvation. This problem became more acute because the blanket of legitimacy over episcopal authority had been thrown off. Many priests no longer believed in their bishops, nor in the priesthood.

The Fraternity

Priests also had problems with one another. They experienced difficulty in cooperating with each other. Moreover, the clerical caste system didn’t evidence a sense of fraternity and mutual support. Related to this was the problem of episcopal distance. The bishop wasn’t viewed as an elder brother in the presbytery but, often as not, as a man removed and feared. There was neither redress of grievances nor mechanisms for control of the arbitrary use of authority. Collegiality was yet to be born (see Greeley, 1967; Commonweal, 1968a and 1968b).

Without this fraternity and support, priests experienced loneliness and isolation. They had the ordinary needs of human persons for companionship, compassion, and understanding. For many the priesthood itself didn’t satisfy these needs. Moreover, Church policy discouraged them from mixing with the laity for fear that priests become a source of rumor and gossip. Many adjusted reasonably well to this situation. Some simply resigned. Others who didn’t resign developed problems with alcohol and mental illness. Others frittered away empty days with poker and the horse races to keep their sanity. Thus the priesthood faced a general malaise in the post-council period which shook its very foundation. I will now turn to some specifics.

Authority and Autonomy

Every organization needs authority to set goals and coordinate activities. The Church is no exception. Hence it is not a question of
authority, but of how authority is to be structured and exercised. Modern organizations are essentially interdependent systems based on the need of mutual competencies and specializations. Because knowledge is so vast and specialized, authority must be shared and coordinated. The pluralistic and decentralized nature of modern bureaucracies requires broad participation in decision making. The function of authority is to promote the most intelligent kind of participation (Greeley, 1966: 61–70).

Effective decision making, then, rests on study, discussion, and expertise. The decisions in a specific area are left to those who are more knowledgeable. This autonomy builds morale and increases motivation. Application of these principles to the ministry would help it to be more effective because there would be a greater respect for personal and professional freedom and little waste of talent. This type of authority would satisfy important psychological needs of freedom, creativity, and growth (see Kennedy and Heckler, 1971; Hall and Schneider, 1973). The Council understood the implications of modernity. It saw the need for subsidiarity and autonomy, on the one hand, and collegiality and shared responsibility on the other. But these ideas were not clearly spelled out in terms of bishop-priests relationships on the local diocesan level.

Back in the home dioceses there was control and silencing of those priests pressing for decentralization, arguing for autonomy of thought and action, and seeking social change. This suppression was demonstrated by the words of Father Peter Riga, a nationally known student of the Church’s social teachings (Roche, 1968: 183):

When you get home from a chancery office after being told that you may not speak on Vietnam when your conscience tells you to speak, or that your sermons ‘disturb’ people because you tell them of their sins of racism and heartlessness with regard to the poor—then you go to your lonely room and cry...

In his study of American priests, Fichter (1968: 203–04) found that the basic expectation of the priests was that authority required wide consultation, free and open two-way communication, a willingness by superiors to credit them with maturity, and an honest admission that neither their decisions nor the implementation of them can be the work of one man alone. But in reality, many priests who first tried to take seriously the Council declaration that every Christian
had to make his own responsible judgments and act accordingly were both undercut and sanctioned by their superiors.

Priests began to define the people of God as something larger than the Church. They assumed para-relationships with the bishop and chancery office. This often neutralized the bishop’s power without creating any confrontation. Such ignoring of authority was probably a more lethal weapon in the erosion of episcopal power than anything else. Osborne states (1969: 47):

Chancery directives and policy they douse with salt and mix with their own common sense and conscience. The norm of obedience is thus being transformed into one which allows for authority, yet brings into play humane and religious values prior to ecclesiastical goals and values.

Matters went even further. More and more priests no longer felt bound by everything the Pope and bishops decreed. Many did not accept the official teaching of the Church on birth control, celibacy, and divorce. Married priests were performing the liturgy in underground churches; others were telling parishioners that it was all right to use artificial contraceptives, and some were performing marriages among divorced Catholics. Furthermore, some began publicly to announce their dissent. For instance, a group of priests in the Washington, D.C., Archdiocese caused national headlines by stating that the issue of birth control should be left up to the individual conscience. Some were suspended by Cardinal O’Boyle without due process. Their case was finally settled after a three-year ordeal.

What was happening to priests was that a basic change of perspective toward authority was taking place. Blind acceptance of ecclesiastical documents and episcopal decisions would no longer happen. The Pope and the bishops would have to provide rationales to convince their people of the wisdom and rightness of their statements (Cogley, 1973: 123).

The Leadership Vacuum

As painful as the authority crisis was, a more crucial problem was the lack of leadership. Prior to the Council, most of the episcopal leaders were legal and managerial types. Higher degrees among the
bishops were most likely to be either licentiates in theology from the North American College in Rome or doctorates in canon law. The bishops did not have reputations as theologians or scholars of the arts and sciences. They were not the leaders of the liturgy and social justice.

One did not find in the pre-Council hierarchy men like Murray, Weigel, Ellis, Hellriegel, Hillenbrand, LaFarge, Higgens, Egan, Putz, and Gremillon. It was the influence of such men that was to be the source of leadership, filling in the vacuum of the late 1960s. Within the framework of the Church they knew, the bishops limited their leadership to building up the immigrant Church spiritually, educationally, and, not least of all, physically.

When the Council came, the bishops depended a great deal on their *periti*. In attending one session of the Council, I was surprised to find that the bishops were taking, on the side, brush-up courses in theology and scripture from the renowned *periti* of the Council. The point is that the bishops went home insecure and bewildered with what they had wrought. They were especially fearful that power would slip from their hands, not because of a loss of personal prestige, but because diocesan power had traditionally been defined in their office. Some thought that it would be immoral, if not heretical, to share this power.

More importantly, the bishops didn’t know how to lead or innovate. They were used to a leadership which stabilized and managed spiritual and temporal affairs. It was anathema for them to make mistakes, especially ecclesiastical ones. Overwhelmed with responsibility and inexperienced at innovation, they waited for Rome to act.

Most of the bishops, then, were unequipped to develop replacement models for developing norms and values that were relevant and meaningful for their people. They were unable to engender a sense of purpose, wonder, and even excitement about the renewal of the gospel. They were not wise men providing steady but forward steps through the turmoils of uncertainty.
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TOTAL INSTITUTION

Besides the leadership crisis there was the problem of institutionalization. The impersonal processes of the large-scale diocese submerged the personal life of the priest. The fact that the rectory office was also his home symbolized that the priest had gone public, but with much bitterness and alienation on his part. He had no life of his own. The artificial and sometimes oppressive relationships in the rectory turned him into a lonely man. If he was an innovator, the fraternity would peg him as an oddball.

CRISIS OF FAITH

This period was a time of questioning just about everything in the Church. The bishops were learning painfully to consult with their priests. Nuns were no longer hidden in the convents. Lay leaders demanded to be heard. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church was in the throes of a democratic revolution. According to a Harris poll taken at this time (Newsweek, 1967), 70% of the laity wanted the Church to lift its ban on birth control. About 60% would approve abortion if the life of the mother was at stake, and about 65% said they would like to see the Pope provide annulments allowing the remarriage of the innocent party. These findings suggest that American Catholics were moving away from the moral standards regarding family life as taught by the hierarchy.

Moreover, the younger and better-educated laity, as well as many priests, were aware that the mind of the Church on fundamental questions of faith was no longer made of whole cloth. Theologians lined up on both sides of a question. For instance, Gregory Baum (Newsweek, 1967) argued that as man changes so does his perception of truth, such as in the doctrine of infallibility. He thought that this doctrine needed reformulation in the light of modern culture. But other theologians and Pope Paul himself condemned the relativistic mentality that destroys objective truth. Many Catholic scholars believed that the mysteries of faith cannot be interpreted by the Church from one philosophical framework. And so confusion and debate continued.
Solutions to Anomie

The Council held out a new vision of man and the world. New expectations and goals were set forth, but the norms and means of implementation were lacking. The expressive goals of the Church require communities in which members are regarded as persons rather than as employees, and this is a major dilemma of the contemporary Catholic Church. With a highly centralized structure, the Church must confront demands for new services and innovations arising from Vatican II, as well as from pressures arising from the secular world with its need for competencies. The bishops are faced with the alternative of allowing greater voice to those who possibly do not share their own outlook or of losing the loyalty of many of their ‘employees’, the priests.

In the meantime, priests on their own have begun to take steps to attain these goals of renewal. The motivation for this activity was certainly due to the Vatican Council, but the rapid changes in the secular milieu also accounted for these aspirations.

Priests were seeking the attainment of such human values as (1) recognition and respect from their bishops; (2) confidence in the knowledge that what they are doing is worthwhile and meaningful to them and to those they serve; (3) a feeling of belonging and acceptance among their fellow priests, regardless of their work and outlook; (4) a sense of freedom and responsible autonomy to experiment in applying the expectations of Vatican II to their local situations without fear of punishment; (5) the importance of redirecting priestly activities to the crucial needs of the poor and oppressed; (6) professional rights and due process to protect their work and good name from ill-formed or misguided sanctions; and (7) privacy of life and optional celibacy (Fichter, 1968).

These men were faced with the problems of adjustments both in their ministerial roles and in their personal lives. They sought solutions to both the structural problems in which there were few articulated responses for renewing the pastoral mission and to the personal meaninglessness of the priesthood. But how to begin? From where would the leadership come?

Priest-leaders in the lay, social action, and civil rights apostolates began to interact and to communicate with one another, seeking
opportunities for advice and direction on how to proceed with renewal. A historical landmark was a meeting in Chicago of priests from all over the country. They came as observers to the second congress of the Association of Chicago Priests in the spring of 1967. Through subsequent meetings of a similar nature, there was created ‘The National Federation of Priests’ Councils’ (NFPC) in May, 1968.

At about the same time, several other priests’ organizations were formed, including ‘The National Association for Pastoral Renewal’ (NAPR) and ‘The Society of Priests for the Free Ministry’ (SPFM). These organizations represented the ‘left-wing’ of the Church.

Two other groups were formed in reaction to the changes that had taken place already, especially in the area of liturgy and religious education. One was called ‘The Catholic Traditionist Movement’ (CTM); the other was ‘Catholics United for the Faith’ (CUF). All five of these organizations evolved without the membership seeking approval for their existence and activities from the bishops.

**A TYPOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO ANOMIC CONDITIONS**

The organizational responses of the NFPC, NAPR, SPFM, CUF, and the CTM provided different opportunities for priests and laity relative to the anomic conditions found in Catholicism shortly after Vatican II. The NFPC provided access to unconventional means in attaining the goals of a relevant ministry. While abiding by the norm of celibacy, the members were mobilizing their talents and energies for renewal through unauthorized means. In short, their earlier tactics were to institutionalize innovation and militancy vis-à-vis the bishops.

The NAPR and SPFM also accepted the goal of a renewed priesthood, but many of its members rejected the norm of celibacy. Thus, the membership of the NAPR was composed of a significant number of priests who had resigned, many of whom had also married. During this time, some had set up alternative forms of the ministry and continued to offer the liturgy, usually with ‘underground churches’. They represent a form of rebellion.
The members of CTM were retreatists who rejected the goal of renewal and the legitimate means of modernizing the priesthood. They were traditionalists who clung to the Latin liturgy and rigorously conformed to priestly conduct based on outdated norms.

The CUF members were also retreatist. They wanted to preserve Catholic doctrine in the form and substance of the Baltimore Catechism.

Finally, the NCCB (the organization of bishops) and, on the local scene, most diocesan senates, represented the conformists’ response. Adaptation to change would take place in an orderly way guided by ecclesiastical authority.

The means-end model of Merton’s deviant adaptations to anomie provides a typology of organizational responses to the structural strain felt by a sizeable number of priests, as presented in Table 1.1. (See Merton, 1957: 131–94.)

The National Federation of Priests’ Councils

Where will the Church find its leaders? This book is about one source of leadership. The NFPC has taken up the challenge of renewal. In the process, it has moved away from what Allport calls extrinsic religion, with its fixed dogmas and norms, toward an intrinsic religion, based on the inspiration of the gospel and the human condition. How well the NFPC is doing the job of service is another question. This book is primarily a sociological analysis of its effectiveness. It interprets the NFPC’s worth from its foundation to 1975.
The NFPC has been an ongoing attempt to provide leadership, relevancy, and models for the pastoral and social ministry. In a period when the Church was losing five priests through death, retirement, or resignation for every two seminarians it ordained (Newsweek, 1971b), the NFPC became a mechanism to bargain with the bishops. At times there was eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, but most often the NFPC initiated strategies, sometimes quite subtly, to bring democracy, autonomy, and professionalism to the ranks of the clergy.

Some senates might deny that the NFPC has any influence in the diocese, but one wonders where local councils would be without this national organization. It has taken on tough issues, such as due process and professional rights. It has been very effective on these and other issues, such as social justice programs.

The NFPC was responsible for the establishment of the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy, and the National Catholic Coalition for Responsible Investment. It efforts have been with the farm workers, peace education, amnesty, and religious education.

The NFPC has muddled through some issues and has made mistakes in policy and organizational development, but it is a sign of courage, leadership, and vision. Most readers will remember the state of turmoil and paralysis, the frustration and depression, that the Church experienced in 1967 and 1968. The NFPC was born out of this situation. Priests were hurting. The hierarchy was in a quandary. But there were priests of vision and courage who would design and create a representative organization. It would be an organization set up in an autonomous and democratic way. However, this was organizational deviance par excellence, for nothing touching the priesthood has ever existed in the American Church without hierarchial approval. But exist it does, as a representative voice of priests calling for a more realistic participation in the Church's decision making.

An important goal of the NFPC is to clarify and redefine the role of the priest, still one of the major problems facing the priesthood. Utilizing the wisdom and experience of local councils, the NFPC is steadily reshaping this definition of the priest. It has the capacity to
do this because policies, goals, and models of the ministry come from the grassroots. Democracy is an arduous process within the priesthood, but it has given dignity and power to those who were an afterthought of the Council.

Although at times it has been difficult, the NFPC has combined within itself two structural and ideological variations, the senates and free associations. This duality has provided the NFPC with both flexibility and creativity, on the one hand, and a balance and stability on the other. With these ingredients built into the structure of the NFPC, the priesthood of the United States has a reason for hope. I will now turn to discuss how the NFPC was launched.