

## FOUNDERS' DAY 2008 MOST REVEREND THOMAS J. COSTELLO

I was born too soon. I was ready for college a year before LeMoyné was ready for me. I do remember Ellsworth Alexander, the President of the Ushers' Society at my parish, visiting our home one Sunday afternoon soliciting funds for the new Jesuit school in Syracuse. Be assured that what my parents contributed was modest, but does recent experience not suggest that it pays to ask?

Had I not skipped second grade I might conceivably have been a member of that Class of '51 which initially met in rented facilities on the James Street campus.

It was apparently a tumultuous time. Bishop Walter Andrew Foery, arguably THE founder, exasperated at the pace of construction (or rather the lack thereof) wrote the Jesuit Provincial in December, 1946, "For my peace of mind, not to say my prestige, I shall no longer be publicly associated with LeMoyné." His bark was worse than his bite; in September 1948 he presided in all of his glory when Grewen Hall finally was dedicated.

Had I attended LeMoyné, young and impressionable as I was, if they would have had me, I might well have discerned a Jesuit vocation. And would that not be a fascinating scenario?

As a young diocesan priest I was impressed in the early fifties by your Fr. John Fernan's adaptation of John Courtney Murray's plan for and outline of A Theology Course for College Students. Theology for lay people? It was not a little "avant garde", but a sign of the times. Some of my older confreres were not reticent in their disapproval. Nonetheless, each Spring for four consecutive years a new title, a next volume, arrived in the college bookstore for use beginning in the Fall semester.

Those who did matriculate at LeMoyné in that early time of its history still identify this theology course as the most influential, most significant component of their academic experience. Fernan and his associates – Bernie Murray, Andy Brady, Bill Scott, Lew Cox, Tim Curtin, Bob Mitchell, their names are legion – deeply impacted the lives of my friends who claim to have discovered at LeMoyné not only the enlightenment of the Christian message but the inspiration to make Christ the way, their way of life.

In the second semester of the Junior year of Fr. Fernan's course the topic was The Church, the vehicle, Pius XII's Encyclical Mystici Corporis, The Mystical Body of Christ . . . the Church with Christ as its Head and the Holy Spirit as Animator . . . the Church working at once for the personal sanctification of individuals, and for the salvation of humanity.

Formative in my own life has been Fernan's observation that, were we to fully grasp and finally understand what Church truly is, the implications of Catholic Social Teaching would be self-evident. In that context, LeMoyné's Theology Course for College Students, claiming to be socially minded, socially conscious, from beginning to end, professed confidence that the emphasis given the Church, The Mystical Body of Christ, would birth a clear understanding of social responsibility. There was neither time nor need to examine the Social Encyclicals – at that time, Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum and Pius XI's Quadragesimo Anno. A right ecclesiology commands social advocacy. That has been axiomatic for me.

More recently, Pope Benedict's first pastoral letter addressed to the Universal Church made this same point for me, albeit from another context.

The Unlikely theme of this teaching is LOVE. In the initial reading there seem to be two parts, first a theoretical treatment of the essence of love, and a second which speaks of ecclesial charity. Benedict, however, sees them as a unity.

With Fernan, the Pope affirms that love, charity, is not a form of social assistance that is casually added to the Church's reality; rather it pertains to the very nature of the Church. On its face charity involves helping the neighbor; but its essence is communicating to others the love of God which we have ourselves received. Charitable commitment goes beyond philanthropy; it is rooted in our spirituality. God is its motivation. It is the very God whom we bring as gift to the suffering world.

Christian or ecclesial charity is a corporate responsibility, an integral constituent of the Church's mission, right along with the ministries of Word and of Sacrament. But there will never be a situation where the personal charity of each and every one of us is unnecessary, because in addition to justice people need love.

Charity is a simple response to specific and immediate needs. Charity is the works – of-mercy, done with heartfelt concern and love. But charity is not only giving some "thing"; it is giving my very self.

It is my understanding of Church, my ecclesiology, it is my understanding of God's love fore each one of us that urges me on, that impels me to strive to realize my Episcopal motto, "**As One Who Serves.**"