

"POLARIZATION"

July, 1969

An eventful year on many university campuses has just closed and our own colleges in the Philippines begin the fall semester this week. What we have witnessed in the campus turmoil during 1968-69 is a confrontation between various sectors of our society; consider for a moment two results of that stormy encounter.

First a negative result - It seems to me that some harm has been done to us all interpersonally as a consequence of the bitter slogans, accusations, direct action, and reaction that have become the major product of the confrontation of student and school administration, son and father. Intense points of view are not unhealthy but what is dangerous is the increasing willingness of people to write each other off because of real or assumed controversies that have to do with social opinion; all of which has led to an arrogant isolationism for those who practice it. Isolationism of all kinds has never worked regardless of the painful logic that supports it yet ironically it is the predominant summer mood. You see it in parents who back off from irreverent and critical youth. You see it in the new left which scorns any opinion on any subject that varies slightly from its own particular prescriptions on morality, politics, religion, etc. You see it in voters who get even with the turbulent school situation by means of sharp financial cutbacks and defeated bond issues. In one way or another it amounts to a denial of the solidarity we have with each other and in that loss is the real harm.

But there is a positive side too and I think it is a hidden gift that has sprung from the very dynamism and turbulence of this year. Each of us has been compelled to think through the meaning of such institutions as our colleges, businesses, cities and we as Christian have had to come up with more than superficial "paper" definitions of what the Christian Church is and must be in the world. Added to this we have seen our sins on CBS on Channel 5, in the Times

and a lot of other places too, therefore no one who is honest can really claim infallibility when school starts this week or in September.

What next? This is the very big question on everyone's mind. The answer depends on our motives, our hopes and what we do with what we have learned. We either build bridges toward each other: fathers towards sons, and sons toward fathers, white and black, East and West, poor and rich or -- there will be a terrible shredding and polarization of the society. It is going to take hard work to achieve this kind of renewal of our community because at the very heart of the bridge-building that matters is justice and good will and these realities cannot be mimeographed, they must be lived day to day whatever the cost.