

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Ecumenical Coalition Project

Ecumenical Coalition Experience

O.H. 186

BISHOP JAMES W. MALONE

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

April 8, 1981

So. Coll
196
History
186

BISHOP JAMES W. MALONE

The third bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown, Bishop James W. Malone, was born in Youngstown on March 8, 1920, the son of James and Katherine Malone. He was educated in the parochial grade schools of Youngstown and attended Ursuline High School from 1933 to 1937, where he was an honor student. He then went on to St. Charles College in Baltimore, Maryland and received a degree in Theology from St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland. He later attended the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and was awarded a Master of Arts in Education in 1952 and a Ph.D. in 1957.

Bishop Malone was ordained a priest in 1945 and from 1945 to 1950, was an assistant priest at St. Columba Cathedral. From 1950 to 1954, he taught at St. John's College in Cleveland and also at the Catholic University of America. In 1954 he was named superintendent of the six county Diocese of Youngstown Schools, and he served in that capacity until 1960 when he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese. Following the death of Bishop Emmett Walsh in 1965, he was appointed Bishop of the diocese of Youngstown.

His Excellency has received honorary degrees from Walsh College in Canton, Ohio, Youngstown State University and the University of Vermont. He is the past president and a General Board Member of the Ohio Council of Churches.

Donna M. DeBlasio

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Ecumenical Coalition Project

INTERVIEWEE: BISHOP JAMES W. MALONE

INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: Shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube,
Ecumenical Coalition, Steel Crisis
Conference, Community Worker Buyout

DATE: April 8, 1981

B: This is an interview with Bishop James Malone for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program concerning the shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube and the foundation of the Ecumenical Coalition by Philip Bracy at the Diocesan Office on Wood Street on Wednesday, April 8, 1981 at 4:00 p.m.

M: I do recall that Bishop Bert, the Episcopal Bishop of Ohio, telephoned me following the announcement of the closing of the Sheet and Tube operation in Youngstown in September of 1977. His call was a friendly one because he and I had served years before as fellow ministers in Episcopal and Catholic churches side by side here in the city. He called to offer his sympathy to me--as one who lived in Youngstown whereas now he lives in Cleveland--on the calamity that had fallen the Valley. During the conversation he said, "I do have an idea as well as sympathy to offer and that is to recommend a sociologist and economist, who is of the Episcopalian faith and serves as a consultant to a meeting of Episcopalian bishops called the Urban Coalition of Episcopalian Bishops." Bishop Bert said, "This scholarly gentleman might have something to say to clergymen of Youngstown and if you would be interested in gathering a group of clergymen together, I will volunteer to see if I can get this gentleman to come and address the group."

MALONE

I agreed to that proposal because I thought it would, at least, give us some perspective on our dilemma-- the dilemma facing the steelworkers of Youngstown.

We arranged the meeting, as I recall, on a Monday morning in St. Columba Rectory. Persons invited were ministers of various faiths, a Jewish rabbi, and some Roman Catholic priests. What we did was listen to the reflections which this scholar presented, on the way in which industry is leaving the north for the south, and the way in which corporations make decisions affecting the lives of persons without consulting those persons or, at least, making them aware in advance of the corporate decision. In general, he gave us, I suppose, a sense that what is happening in Youngstown is an illustration of what is happening in other parts of the country.

As a result of that meeting, we agreed that we'd meet again. Now my memory kind of breaks down. I can't remember when we decided we'd meet again.

B: Do you remember the essence of the second meeting or any decisions that might have come out of that?

M: My recollection of the second meeting was that it was an expanded group of clergy and laypeople over at the First Presbyterian Church. To that meeting were invited participants including Mr. Gar Alpervitz, who is the director of the Center for Economic Alternatives, Washington, D. C. My recollection is that we met in discussion groups and each discussion group had one or other professional person who had some background in economic conditions of the country or in social concerns. Some of them were staff members from the national level of the various churches. Each group was to respond to the question: What do you think we can do in our community?

My recollection is that one of the more persuasive summerizers of our plight and more articulate spokesmen for a course of action was Mr. Alpervitz. So he presented us with the possibility that there was, indeed, something we could do if, as community persons, we wanted to do it.

At the time, I recall that one of the important participants in that meeting was Attorney William Sullivan. He was then employed as staff person or the director for the Western Reserve Economic Development Agency and

MALONE

came in that position. It seems to me that he made us aware that there had been a study done by WREDA, the Western Reserve Economic Development Agency, and that the study was funded in part by funds from, I think, by EDATA, the Eastgate Development and Transportation Agency, that's the organization that was headed by Bill Fergus. I remember that it was a meeting that seemed to gain momentum, at least for me, because I went expecting to hear persons describe the plight we were in with no possibility of our charting a course out of it. I became more encouraged as the meeting went on that maybe there was something that people could do. Perhaps the only other thing that I remember specifically from the meeting, was that representatives of the various churches got together and pledged some small amounts of money to get an initial church-sponsored budget going to confront the social situation in the mills. There was some dynamic, then, out of the meeting, that we pledged ourselves to a follow through, but I can't, at this moment, summarize what that was.

B: Most of what you've been describing was from the Steel Crisis Conference that you held in October of 1978?

M: Yes.

B: I believe, if the information is correct, that you were responsible for initiating a meeting on Saturday morning, October 29, to see whether or not some organizational framework and possible funding sources could be found, is that information correct?

M: I think that's correct. I hesitate to say in all of these things that I was the leader. It's true that at the time that all of us engaged in the initial meeting felt a need for organization and a recognition of the practical need for funding of whatever we were going to try to do. We met together, as I recollect it, at my invitation but it was a concensus that we had. We had to do those things.

B: There were four things that were stated as a result of the conference or, at least, in the release of the Ecumenical Coalition after that. The first was a draft of a pastoral letter which would state the moral and ethical issues raised by the Lykes Corporation move; the second, to initiate a study of the feasibility of a community worker takeover of the Campbell Works; third, to advocate the formulation of a national policy

MALONE

to retain basic steel associated jobs in communities where steelworkers lived; and finally, to focus national interest on Youngstown as means of developing a model for retention of basic jobs in severely impacted communities.

Was there an agreement as to a division of labor as to who should do this and how? Was there anything of that kind to come out of it?

M: I think on the first point, namely the development of that statement, that it was agreed that we would frame, as a community, the broad outlines of what we wanted to say. But I pointed out to them that we had available, from the national office of the Catholic Church in Washington D.C., a man who did research writing for us, a Mr. John Carr. If we would give him the concepts that we were interested in developing, he could prepare a very good statement and he would then come to Youngstown and we could critique it with him. I remember we had that division of labor at least and we wanted to publish the letter during the Thanksgiving Advent season in the churches and synagogues. I remember that.

We agreed that we would publish it in the newspaper. We had the idea that the one way in which we could get a lot of different people to buy into this project was to ask them to sign the statement if they agreed with it. We each took a given number of names to whom we circulated that letter when it was completed and critiqued; and that's how we got the names of those people.

The second part on the division of labor was to initiate the studies on the feasibility of a worker community takeover. That was an idea that was proposed to us, I think, initially by one of the staff persons from the Presbyterian Church. I've forgotten his name. But it was taken up and stated that it could be pursued by Mr. Alpervitz. I'm not quite sure at what time Mr. Alpervitz really came on board with us on a regular basis, but I think it's fair to say that the second part was there.

Now this second initiative, it seems to me, was something that was pursued by Father Stanton and Reverend Campbell and others. That's my recollection of that. When we turned to the idea of advocacy of a national policy to focus national interest on Youngstown, we saw that as a ploy. Frankly, if we only whimpered about what was happening in Youngstown, we didn't think

MALONE

that would be very significant or newsworthy. We felt we could gain more attention by saying that what's happening to Youngstown is happening all over. And in fact, that strategy worked. Now that the dust has settled and a couple years have passed, it's fair to say that out of the whole enterprise, one of the tangible outcomes was that we certainly did make the USA aware of the plight of Youngstown.

B: Who originated the term "Ecumenical Coalition"? Was that the press label that was put on the group or did that originate from within?

M: I think it originated with us. It seems to me it's on that statement that was published by us. I think we called ourselves that from the beginning. Now, strangely enough, it's a misnomer because strictly speaking in church circles, when you have the Christian and non-Christian people, it's really an inter-faith. But anyway, ecumenical was what we called it.

B: I have one final question, Bishop Malone. On December 23, 1977, a mailgram was sent to the Departments of HUD and Commerce signed by Congressman Carney, Mayor-elect Richley, Frank Lesiganich of the United Steelworkers, and signed by the Ecumenical Coalition informing them that the Ecumenical Coalition was incorporated and was to be the main planning agent, but that the Center for Economic Alternatives was to do actual planning concerning community worker buyout. Could you tell me about a meeting that took place on December 22, 1977 and who attended and what the topic of discussion was?

M: The meeting was attended by Mr. Carney, who was then our congressman and now that you mention Mayor-elect Richley, I'm quite sure he also was present because he was about to take over as our mayor and also in attendance were Mr. Lesaganich, who at that time was head of the District 26 of the Steelworkers, myself, and I think a couple of other members of the Coalition, the Congressman, the Mayor and I think a couple of the commissioners. What the federal spokesman said to us was, "You men go home and get your act together and then make an application."

The Ecumenical Coalition really felt that we should move quickly and so I invited these gentlemen to come. The point that I made to them was that the only group that really had a plan of what to do was the Ecumenical

MALONE

Coalition. We were all interested in helping the Valley. Let's go with the Ecumenical Coalition, see what happens.

We talked in those terms and the members who were there, recognized that this was a plan that was ready-made, agreed to it and we sent the mailgram. If you note the date, December 23, I must say we all felt that we were under the gun with our timing because when Christmas comes you lose a couple of weeks with most people. I'd say that Mr. Carney, as the congressman, was very supportive of that move, as was Mr. Lesaganich. Father Stanton had talked to Lesaganich earlier before the meeting about it and Lesaganich was in agreement. The sole purpose of this meeting was to respond to the December 20 statement.

I remember I had felt kind of angry when I heard the federal spokesman say in Washington, "Go home and get your act together and come back and we'll listen to you." So, that action was the basis on which we were designated as the recipient of the UDAG Grant.

After Mr. Richley became mayor he developed, almost immediately, a very representative committee of people in the community, including both elected and non-elected officials to deal with the steel crisis. It is my opinion that if such a committee had been in place at the time of the December 23 meeting, and if they had some plan, very probably their plan would have been the one that would have been accepted; because as a group of church people, we had no mandate from the public as elected officials do. In my opinion, and if they had a plan, probably that plan would have been the one that we would all have sponsored when we went to ask for the UDAG Grant.

- B: Do you think the Ecumenical Coalition effort was a success by whatever criteria you want to measure that by?
- M: Well, certainly by the criteria of whether we got the mills reopened, we didn't succeed. We didn't succeed in explaining the concept of worker owned facilities and so we didn't succeed there. We really did not succeed in galvanizing widespread public support for our concept. Otherwise, we would have had more people attend the meetings that we called.

I do believe that we succeeded in other ways. One is that I believe that we succeeded in focusing attention on Youngstown as a city that needed special help

MALONE

and consideration. Had we had more political clout in the Valley--I'm not speaking of the Ecumenical Coalition because I don't think we could deal on those terms as church people--but if in the Valley, at that time, there had been more political clout, the White House would have listened to us, presumably we could have received further money for more study and perhaps we could have moved toward worker ownership. There were other factors that mitigated against that, however, including charges made that Mr. Alpervitz was Marxist and that his idea of worker ownership was anti-capitalistic, if not anti-American.

However, I think there were some good outcomes. One was that we responded positively at a time when there was a lot of pessimism in our community. I think there was a note of optimism that was interjected by our efforts. Our critics state that we held out hope that had no foundation. In our feeling, we never did that. We felt that we talking about a plan that could happen if all things came into place, but in fact, it didn't happen. I think that we strengthened the feeling of cooperation among people in the city across religious lines, among the Christian, Jewish and Roman Catholic. I think that's a significant thing, I believe that our statement of 1977 stands as a very good statement of the dignity of the human person and of the concern that all of us who respect that dignity should express in times of crisis.

It has been my conviction, too, that the intangibles that come out of a story like this are intangibles that continue to influence people in their relationships. I think, perhaps, in some ways, these last features that I've mentioned may have improved or continued what is already a good climate of cooperation among people in the Valley even though they differ in religious faith.

- B: Do you think the effort itself also stressed the corporate social responsibility issue more in this case rather than in some of the other communities that have been hit by shutdowns?
- M: I think we articulated that. I'm not so sure that we presented it persuasively either to the persons who lost their jobs or to the persons who were responsible for it; but we're on record as having said it anyway.

MALONE

B: I'd like to thank you for donating your time this afternoon.

M: It was a real pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW