

Bishop Leech of Harrisburg Counteracts Blanshard Plea for Intolerance

(Continued from Page 1)

...the clearest of all. Mr. Blanshard knows that, and is using it against America, and the Church quite effectively.

MR. BLANSHARD knows that, too, and in using it against America and the communities which make up America, but apparently he doesn't see that point.

In any case, it's an effective way to fill his lecture halls and to sell his books, and he's welcome to do that. The Dale Carnegie, by the way, whom he was threatening with a libel suit last year, wrote, "I have been anxious for some time to retire on a comfortable income for life."

The announced topic of his speech for the United Churches of Greater Harrisburg and Dauphin County was the question of whether the President of the United States should send an ambassador to the state known as Vatican City, of which Our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, is ex-officio the head.

I CONSIDER that question a most natural one for any American citizen to think about and to discuss, whether publicly or privately, precisely because, like our sending an ambassador to Catholic or Mexico, or England, or Russia, or anywhere, it is always a question of whether or not the step would be for the best interests of the United States of America and that is the only criterion by which the President and the Senate, that is to say the people, should make the decision.

Now the only point that I make is this: Why get one's blood-peddling up and blast the Catholic Church?

WHY BURN THE POPE? HE

didn't do it. He didn't even initiate it. If any American citizen doesn't like the idea and doesn't think it would be for the best interests of our country, I say tell the President, or tell the Senate, or tell both. It's the President's idea, and presumably he's got the answers.

But why condemn us Catholics for something we have nothing at all to do with, whether we be bishops or priests or laymen? You know, to hear Mr. Blanshard's talk, you would think that we American bishops, at the command of Our Holy Father, have been sitting up nights, searching for ways and means to get an ambassador from the United States to Pope Pius XII.

IF WE BISHOPS were ever interested in that step, there is one place where we might be expected to discuss it, and that is in the meeting where we all assemble, for three days, every November, in Washington.

Now, as a bishop, I've been attending those meetings for 15 years, and never once, even for a moment, has such a question ever been mentioned.

Yet, you have the stranger's word for it that we Catholics are at the bottom of it all.

We Catholics, of course, like our fellow citizens, have our own opinions on the various public questions, and so on this question, I, for example, have my own opinion on this particular question and my reasons for it, and I think my opinion would surprise Mr. Blanshard; but that is my own business as a citizen, and I assume that our priests and people and our neighbors have their own respective opinions, as they ought to have, and that they make them known as they want to.

BUT TO MAKE of this purely

civil measure, which the President seems to consider expedient, a dark and scheming plot of the Catholic Church against the civil and religious freedom of Protestant America—well, that's a little hard to swallow, I submit, and I think that here in our own community, where we seem to get along together pretty well as friends and neighbors, our people are not too much convinced by the stranger who accepted Harrisburg hospitality and remained long enough to show us how not to be a good neighbor and a Christian gentleman.

The real reason of Mr. Blanshard's coming to speak here, I am convinced (I do not say the reason of his being invited), was not to speak on the question of the ambassadorship at all, because, as a matter of fact, he simply did not treat any way adequately the office and the work and purpose of a United States ambassador.

He did make a very nasty caricature of our beloved Holy Father, but I've been wondering what our neighbors thought of those ill-mannered remarks.

THERE MUST be hundreds of our Protestant neighbors round about Harrisburg who have seen Our Holy Father and met him and heard him speak—men and women in the armed services, neighbors and friends to whom I have personally given letters of introduction.

I rather think their impression of him was like that of the prominent Harrisburg newspaper woman who said in her column, "When he blessed me, I knew that I had been blessed."

But it took a stranger to come to our community and tell those neighbors that they are all wrong and if they really want to know what kind of man the Pope is, take it from Mr. Blanshard, the man who never met him.

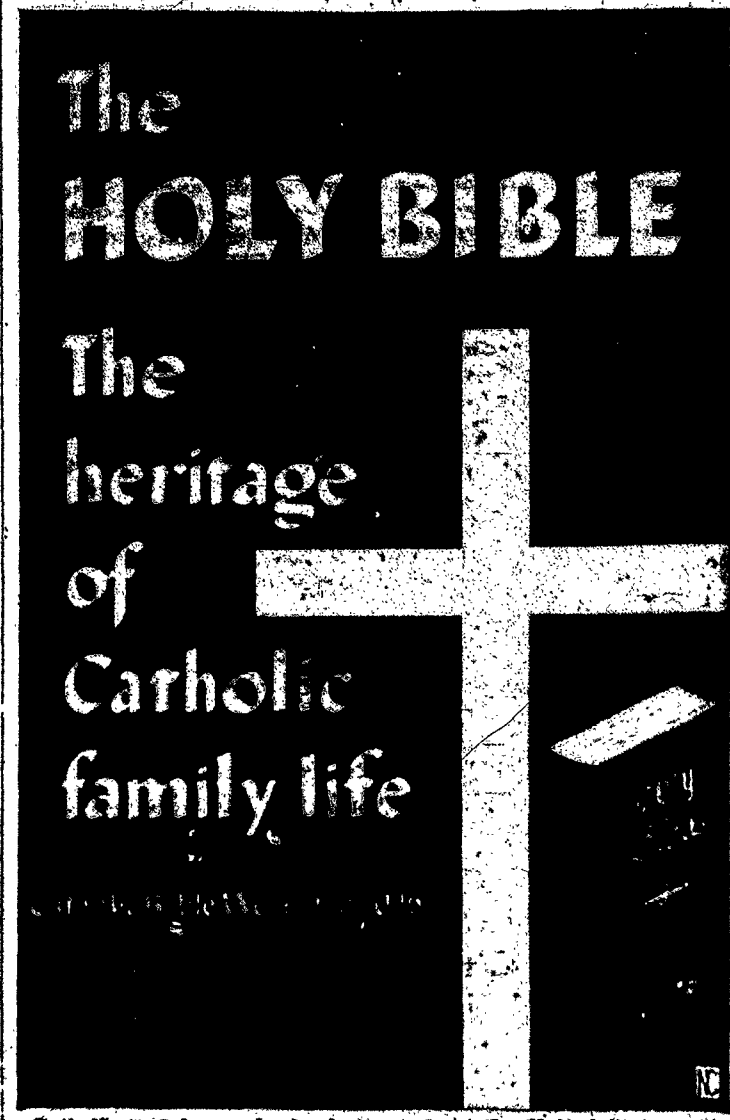
It's all rather silly, isn't it?

NO, THE REAL reason why the stranger came to our community was to do what he actually did, and that was to dress up, in his own very talented and plausible way, some of the old calumnies against the Church, which we heard back in the days when they were burning down Catholic churches in Philadelphia, and a more recently in the days of the Ku Klux Klan, which Mr. Blanshard disavowed, by the way, but whose anti-Catholic line he followed essentially all the way.

The ambassadorship, as one of my Protestant friends was quick to notice, was only a timely peg on which to hang all those familiar old items which are a poor bigot's delight, including our religious schools, our Sacraments, especially marriage and confession, and above all our strange happiness and contentment in the Church, and our uncompromising devotion to the Church and for all time established

and for all time established

OBSERVE CATHOLIC BIBLE WEEK



Catholic parishes and schools throughout the United States will observe Catholic Bible Week, February 19-24. A colorful poster (above) has been issued for the occasion by the Catholic Bible Association. (NC Photos)

by Jesus Christ, whom we openly confess to be God Almighty and whose spiritual authority we recognize in his Word on earth, while at the same time giving our full and unqualified allegiance in all civil things to the lawfully constituted civil authority of the place in which we live, whether that authority be vested in a president or a legislature or a governor or a judge or a mayor or whoever the civil official may be.

ACTUALLY, WE are strictly bound in conscience by the law of God and of the Church to honor and reverence and obey all civil authority placed over us lawfully whether by election or by appointment, and neither pope nor bishop nor priest has any more to say than the King of England about what a Catholic should think or say or do in his quality of citizen of any nation, except to urge him to exercise his citizenship for what he considers to be the best interests of his local community and the nation.

And on that, my dear neighbors of the community, you may take our word or Mr. Blanshard's.

I apologize to you for feeling that I had to say that, and I wonder just how long we shall have to say it, in a community where we can be seen and known for what we are.

WHEN IT COMES to spiritual things, however, that is, the sanctification and the saving of our immortal souls through the beliefs and practices of our holy religion, there our Catholic people follow the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and of their lawful spiritual shepherds, their chief-bishops, their local bishop and their local pastor; and because of the unity of our Catholic faith and doctrine, you may be sure that our Catholic religious life is essentially one throughout the world.

We believe that Christ is true God, as well as true man. We believe that He founded the Church on Peter, the Rock, and that He still abides in the Church, in fidelity to His own promise, "I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."

WE BELIEVE the Church received, and exercises in Christ's Name, the spiritual authority of Christ, and that when He said, "He who hears you hears me," He was guaranteeing the Christian truth and confidence which our Catholic people have in the Church for spiritual guidance and direction.

For this spiritual guidance and direction our Catholic people depend upon their chief-bishop, their local bishop and their local priest, and if this makes them pliable subjects of a foreign imperial power, well, I must leave that to your common sense.

Last Pentecost Sunday, here in the Cathedral, I confirmed over 500, 564 to be exact, new Catholic converts. Those men and women live here in Harrisburg and in these nearby towns and counties. They are your neighbors, perhaps your acquaintances and companions, and I think you would credit them with at least average intelligence.

THOSE MEN and women made a lengthy study of the Church before entering it. Indeed, you can take their word and their word, if they knew precisely what it means to be a Catholic, before they freely asked to be received into the Church.

Now I ask you, do you suppose that any one of them thinks that, in becoming a Catholic, he or she has become less an American, or has become to any degree the subject of a vast foreign political power?

Well, just ask them if you know them, and take their word or the stranger's.

I CANNOT, of course, in the time allowed me, treat specifically every one of the old half-truths and untruths which Mr. Blanshard offered to the intelligence and self-respect of his audiences, but if I have the time, I do want to advert to one or two more which may be of more practical interest to our local community, where we have been getting along together pretty well without the help of the stranger.

Once he took leave of his announced subject, the ambassadorship, it was inevitable that he would, sooner or later, attack our

Catholic religious schools. That kind always does. The Catholic school is a favorite whipping-boy for those who don't like us and in Harrisburg last week we had the "chump" himself.

MR. BLANSHARD, I dare say, would be utterly horrified to know that here in Harrisburg, and in other places throughout the diocese, we are embarrassed at the requests of Protestant parents asking us to take their Protestant children into our religious schools.

I mention this as no reflection upon our public schools, but it is embarrassing really, because first of all, it's a struggle for our Catholic people to accommodate their own children and of course their whole school day is permeated with religion and the supernatural, explicit or implicit.

But these continuing requests from those who are not of our Faith are perhaps a genuine expression of America's traditional yearning to be a thoroughly godly nation and at the same time, these requests may be the most appropriate local answer to the stranger's attack upon our Catholic religious schools, and by the way, he did not mention the various Protestant religious schools, like the one in Middletown, but after all he had no practical reason to because he came here to talk only about us Catholics.

THE STRANGER to our community said that our religious schools are fighting our public schools. Well, that's news to me. The only fighting I see going on is an occasional battle on the football field or on a basketball court between John Harris or William Penn and Catholic High, and I don't see any great damage done, except that our side loses so often.

In my 16 years here in Harrisburg the only public reference to our public schools made by a Catholic as far as I know, was one that I made myself, when I addressed the assembled veterans in the Forum on Armistice Day of 1940, and if that was opposition, the stranger was right.

On that occasion I was pleading, in the name of God and of America, that we return to our original American tradition and make available to our public school children some measure of instruction in religion and moral principles, at the hands of their own respective pastors and ministers, during the school week.

The point I raised was that we simply cannot leave the formation of our youth's attitudes and principles and habits on a merely natural plane for six days of the week and then expect to elevate them to the supernatural plane (and that of course is what religion really implies) with an hour in church on Sunday.

And there you have in a nutshell the reason why we Catholics, together with some other religious bodies, build and operate our religious schools; and I think you'll find that they stand up pretty well in a scholastic way too.

ACCORDING to our Catholic faith and teaching, there is no activity or circumstance of life whatsoever that should not reflect in us the realization that we are creatures of God and subservient to God and bound to observe the moral law of God as it is made known to us by the Church, which speaks to us in the name of Christ, the Son of God.

Not that we attain to this ideal of our faith perfectly, by any means. We fall and we fall all too often. God help us.

But we do know what Christ means to us and what Christ wants of us, and we cannot instill it into ourselves too deeply or too early in life, for as life is not worth living unless it be lived in every detail through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, and according to Christ; and if you ever take a good look at one of our religious schools, and you are most welcome to it, that's what you'll find us trying to instill into the youth of our community.

Science or civics or history or religion, it's got to be Christ all the way or we fall Christ and we fall the America of tomorrow. (And by the way, did you notice that Mr. Blanshard, who came here under Christian auspices and to speak about the Church, never once mentioned the name of Jesus Christ during his entire speech?)

THE STRANGER in our community said that our religious schools are causing division among our citizens and removing from what he calls the normal stream of American culture.

You see, he doesn't catch the meaning of our national motto, "E Pluribus Unum." He thinks unity requires uniformity. That sounds more like Hitler and Stalin, doesn't it?

Now, the American slant on it is this: Our American slant on it is one of diversified origins. We are, in color and creed and social backgrounds. That is the plain fact and there's no point in blinking it.

The genius of our America has been that we found unity in diversity. We have found the way to live together in true tolerance by respecting in others the civil and religious rights which we claim for ourselves.

THERE IS ONE certain nation today, together with its captive nations behind the iron curtain, where unity does mean uniformity—uniformity in word and action and even in thought, and where anything else is considered deviation and division.

We don't envy that nation, so let's not try to imitate it here. Our various religious schools, academies and colleges, whether Catholic or Lutheran or of any denomination, are just as much an integral part of the great American system of education as any other schools in the land. The Supreme Court of the United States defined that 27 years ago. Listen to an excerpt from its historic opinion:

"The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not a mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations."

AND THERE you have our common American right on religious schools for our children. To this right the stranger in our community did pay eloquent lip-service last week, only he considers us Catholics somehow un-American for using it.

Our various religious schools, Catholic or even, are not opponents, nor even rivals, of public education. As a matter of fact, we all believe in public education. We support it like everybody else, and we would strenuously oppose any movement to abolish it or to misuse it.

BUT THE POINT is that we have to be true to our Christian conscience and to our understanding of Christ and what it means to build up Christ into our minds and our wills and our attitudes and our actions and the totality of our being, whether as Christians or as citizens, so that we just do not understand education without religion, any more than the Founding Fathers of America could understand it.

Well, then there was also quite a fire on our Catholic marriage laws and our Catholic doctrine on morality and religion in the family life. (That has a lot to do with a United States ambassadorship, hasn't it?)

I THINK our judges and lawyers and the overworked social agencies and the several Protestant churches of the community ought to be particularly interested in this one.

And I think they will all agree with me that marriage and family life is a rather big and important subject in itself—too big, in fact, and too important to be treated in a passing way; but the stranger in our community ten days ago made it all so very simple and, of course, the Church was the villain again.

You know, when you wear red glasses everything looks red, and our friend just won't take off those red glasses when Catholics are around.

TELL ME, are our Presbyterian and our Episcopal neighbors, for example, un-American because they have their own marriage laws? Or, do they escape the stranger's condemnation because they are not Catholics?

You see, I am trying to follow Mr. Blanshard's reasoning, and it's not too easy, at least for me. Is it the State Legislature here in Harrisburg, or the Congress in Washington, that is to set up the terms of our Christian morality?

OK, DO WE take that from the teachings of Christ and the Sacred Scriptures as they are made known to us?

And does not our religious freedom under the Constitution mean precisely that any citizen is free to follow his conscience and subscribe to the moral code of any religion of his choice?

Certainly we Catholics have standards of morality and justice in marriage and family life, but that these standards of ours ever contravene the civil law of the land even Mr. Blanshard would have to deny.

And because we Catholics subscribe to and try to attain to certain high standards of Christian morality, must the Catholic citizen keep silent when these matters become the subject of public and official debate?

WELL, THAT, as I see it, is the un-Christian and un-American doctrine that Mr. Blanshard was preaching to our community. The fact is that the faithful husband and the faithful wife know that they have no greater champion of their marriage bond than the Catholic Church.

Well, I'll say this for Mr. Blanshard, he certainly hung a lot of extraneous items on the pig of a United States ambassadorship. That was an interesting one, about our Catholic people not owning their own churches. If anything showed him a stranger unqualified to instruct our community, that one did.

THE PLAIN FACT is, of course, as any lawyer will tell you, that in perfect accordance with the law of the Commonwealth, every bit of the diocese is held by the Bishop "in trust for the Catholic congregation" of each particular parish; and, of course, each of the various deeds is on public file in the proper court house.

The fact is, as any lawyer will tell you, that I, as the trustee for the people of St. Francis, for example, could not sell one iota of their parish property unless the people of St. Francis so decide at a congregational meeting and the court of Dauphin County issues an order approving the sale as being for the good of the people of St. Francis.

There was another interesting stratagem, where Mr. Blanshard harnessed up the Catholic Church with Atheistic Communism. Now that, as they say, was "one for the book," and I allow it to fall by its own weight before any man of elementary common sense.

BUT, SPEAKING of Communism and its technique, this may interest you in your appraisal of Mr. Blanshard's main purpose and his technique throughout the whole speech.

V. J. Jerome, head of the Communist Party's Cultural Commission, gave out this party line in the Communist monthly called "Political Affairs," in 1946: "The struggle must be waged so as to drive a wedge between the reactionary hierarchy and the masses in the Church."

And further on, that success in destroying Christianity will come "only when we connect the struggle against the Vatican's policy with the general struggle against capitalism, reaction and imperialism."

Now I find that very interesting, in reading the speech which Mr. Blanshard made here in Harrisburg, and I say in all charity that, wittingly or unwittingly, Mr. Blanshard, in attempting to accomplish his own purpose, was making use of the same kind of strategy which is aimed at destroying Christianity as a whole.

AND NOW, in closing, I extend my thanks to you for your kindness in hearing me, and, as I promised, I now tell my own beloved flock what is expected of them by the way of reaction to the painful and public humiliation which they suffered twice in one evening, from a Harrisburg platform and over this radio station.

You must and you will react to it, my people, and you already know how you are to react, without my telling you.

You are hurt, aren't you, deeply hurt, and your priests and I feel hurt with you. Someone was trying to drive a wedge between you and our priests and me, for that, apparently, was the clever and persistent aim of the whole speech.

But you and I know that it only served to bring you and our priests and me closer together, and all of us still closer to our Spiritual Father in Christ.

THAT WEDGE is a very old device, but Our Lord put his finger on it in a final warning to us the night before He died, when He quoted Zacharias: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

That is Stalin's device. That is Tito's device.

That's the device which has so many of our Bishops and priests in prison today.

IF HURTS a lot, but it really doesn't work, and it won't work for Mr. Blanshard either.

You will go down on your knees, my people, and thank God for your Catholic Faith in Christ and your privilege of suffering for it. "Blessed are you," He said, "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, because of Me." You will forgive, and you will not commit the sin of harboring resentment and ill-will. Be Christian and, like Christ, return good for evil. "I tell you," He said, "love your enemies, of good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and insult you, that so you may be true sons of your Father in Heaven."

BE A GOOD Catholic and you'll be a good American. Be charitable, and be charitable-minded. Don't find enmity towards the Church where none is intended. Give every man the benefit of the doubt.

The Church is the Bride of Christ and the only ones who don't respect her and love her are real brethren of yours who just never came to know her. In a word, my people, live your Catholic Faith in every trial and circumstance of life, and leave the rest in the hands of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. God love you.

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