

When Words Are Little Help

By DENNIS J. GEANEY, O.S.A.

I answered the phone. It was a Marine. He wanted a priest to go with him to break the news to a family whose son had been killed in Viet Nam. I agreed. He would pick me up in fifteen minutes.

In the car he told me that he had done this many times. Many people, he told me, take the news bitterly and curse out the Marines. It helps to have a clergyman aboard on this voyage of unrelieved grief.

We knocked at the door, but no one was home. A neighbor directed us to the mother's place of employment. When she saw the Marine and priest come in to the store, even though we were separated, she knew. She was in tears when I met her. I merely said that it was true.

We brought her home. The next task was to call her husband at work and ask him to come home to his sick wife. Her great fear was that her husband could not take it. The son was an only child, the apple of his eyes. The father was partially disabled, having lost a leg in World War II. He lived only for his son. When he came home, he knew. I merely said that it is true. He was stunned, but never lost control.

The four of us communed in silence for some time. Gradually the parents began to talk about their son. He had joined the Marines shortly after graduation from high school. He joined with a high school chum. They both went to Viet Nam. They had made a pact to pray for each other. Apparently, it was not the casual "pray for me" like a good-bye. They both took their religion and prayer very seriously.

The parents were obviously very devout Catholics. They had stormed heaven daily for deliverance of their son. His buddy had been killed - not too long before, but they kept the news from him.

I made a few more phone calls to relatives and when one of them appeared on the scene, I felt it was time for the Marine and myself to leave. But, how could I leave without saying something as a priest?

The Marine delivered a speech. Words seemed out of place, but he felt he had to say something. Patriotism was the theme. He spoke the words standing erect. The words sounded a bit hollow, but his feelings were deep. His stomach had been in knots he told me from the time he started on the journey.

In the Darkness, Trust
What could I say? I was mute before the facts of life. My priesthood did not seem to offer me any special insight. Here were good people. They loved

God, their Church, their family and their country. They were faithful to all these commitments beyond the call of duty. Death was not a blessing as it is to a person ravaged with a lingering, painful and incurable illness. Death had nipped life in the bud. I could not leave without saying something. What surprised me was that these people somehow understood God's ways better than I and accepted them as coming from God's loving hands.

Finally, I summoned courage to comment on God's design for this family - I told them - that I was as stunned as they were in trying to find an explanation. Life is a mystery that I cannot fathom. God loved them and yet He permitted their son to be taken from them under these conditions. I could not attempt to explain this mystery in human terms. How this fits into the divine design, we shall not know before eternity. I went home with some serenity. I had met people who could face life and death and accept the greatest tragedy possible with an unflinching faith in God's fidelity to his promises.

This experience was a refreshing contrast from our present day demythologizers who explain everything and leave no mystery and no God. They make secondary cause primary. "Some must be in Viet Nam and some will be killed. Such is life."

The more sophisticated might try to express themselves philosophically or theologically, but the Marine's parents met God in the death of their son with an Old Testament understanding of God's dealings with man in history.

God is Lord and master of creation and all history. You and I are making decisions that truly affect our lives and others, and thus make history. Yet, God is the Lord of History and he makes all history and rules mankind through our decisions, through the history we make. God pieces a design beyond comprehension out of the mistakes we make. It is a mistake to try to explain this simply.

"My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts," says the Lord. The parents of the Marine added a fervent and eloquent, "Amen."

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On the Right...

David and Goliath?

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

As a result of a much advertised controversy between Editor Father Atwell and myself, both the Sisters at the Cenacle for Retreats and Nazareth College Msgr. Shannon invited us to hold a debate last May. It was the end of the school year. The matter was dropped. Five weeks ago Dr. Shannon asked: "Would you be able to come to Nazareth College for a debate, Wednesday, November 15 at 8:00 p.m.?" In a moment of weakness, like the non-fearing angel I replied: "Not to debate. But I'd be glad to have a dialogue."

Later the thought came: "Why should a country pastor, occupied and pre-occupied with the care of souls, a parish school, with repairing bricks and mortar; with raising funds to keep the Institutional Church effectively serving the people, get involved in such a forum? Father Atwell's whole life has been study, analyses, interviewing, travel, public discussions. He is the idol of non-Catholic ecumenists. He is the mentor of many of the ultra-liberal talkers of the Diocese. What folly!"

I felt like a blundering Goliath before a lithe David. I envisioned a caption: "David slays Goliath. Israel saved." And shouts of "The Church of Vatican II devastates the Tridentine

Hold-outs!" But this was pure egotism. Who would be that concerned about such a forum?

However, it is because I have thought the New Israel, the Catholic Church, was being wounded by the ultra-liberal Catholic press these past half-dozen years, and by a badly distorted image of the Church in the secular press that I entered first into a sincere series of letters with Father Atwell. Since an editor strongly influences the thinking of his readers and hearers, I had been appalled at some of the items in the Courier, and in public utterances. Over two years ago I had begun occasional personal protests to the Editor, always courteously acknowledged. Our local Doctor Fulwider kept check of my blood pressure to prevent a stroke.

The letters finally erupted into print in the Courier. It astonished the lady. It entertained the clergy. Our ideological disagreements in no way lessened our personal friendship. One letter that set his teeth on edge I fixed in wrathful indignation after a talk to the Auburn Curia of the Legion of Mary, held in Geneva, Nov. 13, 1966. It read: "... The title of Mary and the Church was like the ads in the movies - but in reverse. The title, so hopefully pious, gave way to

the sensationalism of many debatable points. It is a pity that you who are so gifted seem not to sense the unhappiness and distress that you cause so many good people as you bulldoze your notions before any kind of audience. Were you discussing these with theologians I should be content. But to give such a lecture to the non-theological circuit causes me concern. I honor your sincerity and zeal. I regret your judgment and the opportunity you have to spread what I believe are misleading or erroneous ideas. Well, since we are as we are, I suppose it is inevitable that we shall remain at contrary poles. At least, may we be one in the Sacred Heart of Christ Our Lord."

His response was calm, kind - and disagreeing. It was short, I am sure, but he invited me to write a column for the Courier to express a point of view held by some in the Church. It is a mark of the times that we who love the Church greatly, and who have strong convictions should clash in ideas. God grant that from these sparks of such clashes, Christ's Holy Church will be seen - even the more clearly seated on the mountain top for the whole world to love it for what it is: Christ teaching; Christ ruling; Christ inviting; Christ embracing.

Joseph Breig

The Consequences of Affluence

I would guess that a distorted image of what America is like has been created in countless minds - not only abroad but even among some Americans - by the repeated emphasis, in the communications media, on what is called, with capital letters, the Affluent Society.

America is wealthy, yes. Its gross national product is immense; its technology is stunning; the "American way of life" includes material things which kings and emperors, a few generations ago, could not have imagined.

There are, however, three considerations (in particular) which tend to be forgotten - or not known - and if remembered, help to balance the picture.

The first is that great national wealth and power bring with them enormously expensive international responsibilities. The U.S. (whose gold reserves have been steadily declining) has poured vast resources, during and since World War II, into the defense and reconstruction of the free world. And the nation remains deeply engaged in numberless points where freedom is menaced.

As Secretary of State Dean Rusk remarked the other day: "Think of the world map if we had not been concerned about the invasion of Korea, about the Huku in the Philippines, the trouble in Malaya, Lebanon, the Congo, Cuba, Indonesia..."

Rusk might also have said, "Think of the world map if we had not been concerned about Poland... France... Belgium... England... Holland... Hawaii... Australia... New Zealand" or (after the fighting stopped) about the rebuilding of Western Europe and the defense of West Germany, France, Turkey, Iran, Greece, Italy and so on. And think of the map of tomorrow if we did nothing to help Latin America and the emerging nations of Africa and Asia.

All this, even apart from America's grave domestic problems (which have resulted in considerable part from preoccupation with the world's problems) means heavy taxation.

The second consideration is the fact that when all is said and done, the great majority of Americans are not wealthy. They must work hard and economize to make ends meet in an era when (for example) burdensome expensive education is necessary to prepare children for the demands of today's world.

Finally, millions of Americans - Negroes, Spanish-speaking people and old settlers in such areas as Appalachia - are desperately poor, inhumanly housed and grossly undernourished. They are caught in a vicious circle of poverty and ignorance. As a famous medical man once said, "The poor are poor because they are sick; and they are sick because they are poor."

Or as Dr. Martin Luther King has expressed it, what is the sense in killing a man to lift himself by his bootstraps if he has no boot-

In fact of these vast problems, America's greatest hope is by means her material wealth. Her hope lies above all in the God-fearing virtue, industriousness, frugality and honesty of her people - plus her democratic tradition of dialog which (however slowly sometimes) opens eyes and hearts to the needs and rights of others, and results in fruitful action.

Diocese of Rochester
100 EAST MAIN STREET, ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14604

November 3, 1967

Rev. Henry A. Atwell
Catholic Courier Journal
35 Scio Street
Rochester, New York 14604

My dear Father Atwell:

I recall, in the course of our many conversations, that you had expressed a desire to one day be a pastor of souls. It was a matter of regret to me that I was not able to fulfill your request, partly because we wanted a parish for you that would confer recognition on you for your many years of service.

On this, the third day of November, the twenty-first anniversary of the year in which you received your first appointment in the diocese of Rochester, the diocese now has the honor to appoint you as pastor of St. Agnes Church in Avon.

For fourteen years you have served the diocese in the field of communication. The printed page that was issued at your direction during this time was a prolongation of the Word. The reluctance that I felt to take you from this area of diocesan work was very happily overcome by your eagerness to accept the parish which was offered to you.

When St. Matthew was called by the Good Lord from his office, he left everything behind except his pen - he took that with him to write his Gospel. We trust that you will take your pen with you from the Courier and use it to write sermons and messages to your people which will bring them closer to Our Lord during these troubled times.

With sentiments of gratitude and esteem, I remain

Your co-worker in Christ,

Justin Sheen

Bishop of Rochester

Spectrum Of Opinion

Readers Comment on Clothing Drive Need, Questioning Era and School Days

In Name of Charity

Editor -
I would appreciate the courtesy of your columns to inform the many readers of the Catholic Courier Journal that during the week of November 12-18 the Catholic Bishops of the United States will sponsor their 19th annual Thanksgiving Clothing Campaign in more than 17,500 churches across the nation.

It is an appeal in the name of charity and brotherhood for serviceable used or unwanted clothing, blankets, bed linens and footwear which can bring help, comfort and hope to millions of destitute and ill-clothed men, women and children living in the world's vast areas of poverty and distress.

All garments and other usable materials donated to the Thanksgiving Clothing Campaign will be distributed to deserving needy persons, entirely without regard to race, religion or color, by Catholic Relief Services, the overseas aid agency of the American Bishops, which operates relief and welfare programs in eighty countries.

The sorry plight of the increasing numbers of innocent victims of the Vietnam war and the grave needs of the thousand of helpless, homeless, refugees, caught up in the Arab-Israeli conflict give added urgency this year to the appeal of the American Bishops.

Here in the Diocese of Rochester the Catholic Bishops' nineteenth annual Thanksgiving Clothing Campaign will be held from November 12 to November 18 inclusive under the auspices of the Most Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, Bishop of Rochester. Any Catholic church or rectory will gratefully accept bundles of serviceable used or unwanted clothing and arrange for their shipment overseas for distribution to those in dire need in underdeveloped and impoverished lands.

The annual Thanksgiving Clothing Campaign is a great work of mercy. It is an excellent means of observing the genuine spirit of Thanksgiving,

- sharing one's good fortune with those in need. Give thanks this year by giving.

- Father Chester M. Klocek, Diocesan Director, Thanksgiving Clothing Collection

A Questioner

Editor -
I would like to defend the photograph of Sister Helen Daniel in the Oct. 8th Courier. I do not feel that any intelligent Catholic who saw the picture would fear such a leader in the field of higher education had fallen into heresy.

I smiled when I saw the picture to think how wonderful it was that in our age, a nun could even stand on a platform with a Planned Parenthood banner. Ours is most certainly an age of questions and change. An educator or religious who is not openminded to at least listen to diverse opinions does not seem to be in tune with our day.

For many, I am sure that the security of knowing anything with the Church's label on it, is right; may be the easier road, but is it?

I myself prefer to be counted among the questioners. For 16 years in Catholic school I learned my faith and for this I shall ever be grateful to the nuns and priests, but I am also happy that as the mother of six children, the Church is asking for my opinions, since this is the life with which I am familiar, its ups and its downs. I am also grateful for clergy who have left the rectory and come to our homes, bringing Christ's message where it is needed most. -Mrs. Joha Reardon Rochester

Stamps Wanted

Editor -
May we please remind our friends again to continue their missionary work by sending us any cancelled stamps available? We accept all kind-domestic and foreign. Foreign and Pre-cancelled are especially valuable, but all are gratefully received. When cutting them from

envelopes, may we ask that you please leave about 1/4 inch margin of paper around them in order to prevent them from being damaged. They should also be left on only on thickness of paper (not whole corner of envelope), if possible.

Many ask how can cancelled stamps help our foreign missions. All the stamps we receive are sorted and sold, and the proceeds are used to help support our foreign missions in Bolivia, Brazil and Jamaica.

Please send all stamps to: -Sister Marie Rose, O.S.F., St. Elizabeth's Motherhouse, Allegany, N.Y. 14706

Magisterium not in doubt

Editor -

The purpose of this letter is to clarify our previously stated (Courier, October 13) position with greater detail.

Our quarrel is not with the McQuaid Symposium per se, but with all the Catholics who fail to realize any more responsibility to adhere to Catholic dogma or, if they realize such, fail to bear witness to Catholic doctrine.

As you state, the Symposium was held openly and was announced weeks before in the Courier. But, who could know that a symposium, co-sponsored by a Catholic institute, would so completely deviate from accepted and official Catholic doctrine on the part of the participants selected to present the Catholic point of view.

Was the Bishop aware of the content presentation for this program? To question further, did the Courier staff or you, Father, know beforehand of the content? Did you attend? Do you agree with all that was presented? If so, or any on the Courier staff did not agree with any of the presentation; why did you not speak up?

We are sure that our letter did not convey the impression that we wished the Courier to ignore the event. However, the Courier analyzes other moral situations (the Arab-Israeli con-

flict; the racial turmoil) in depth, but feels it has performed adequately by presenting this particular report "factually". As journalists, you must, of course, present material factually; as Catholic journalists, you also have the responsibility to analyze and interpret anything contrary to accepted doctrine. Your silence in this matter, coupled with your striking front page presentation, implies your approval of this deviation from dogma.

We earned from the Courier that about 600 people, including priests and nuns, attended the symposium. You realize of course, that a four-hour drive to and from Rochester daily for a week is impractical for most - impossible when the couple has five small children. Had we any idea of the content presentation, we probably would have accomplished the impossible. Even so, we would have sent a

letter to you to insure that the people in the diocese know that there are yet some who will challenge such a presentation; to challenge capitulation by Catholics to current trends.

The Pope has periodically and consistently warned against public discussion of this sort. On June 23, 1964: "No one should, by the repeated emphasis, in himself to make pronouncements in terms differing from the norm in force." You will tell us that no pronouncements were made. The Courier article states: "The speakers didn't say Catholics could disregard their Church's ban on birth control. They simply said they couldn't agree with the reasons Catholic moralists give which label the practice a mortal sin." Technically, no pronouncements were made. However, by the speaker's assertions in public, and the silence of those in attend-

ance, by your silence, A PRO- NOUNCEMENT WAS MADE in terms differing from the norm in force.

Again on Oct. 25, 1965, and referring to the same topic, Pope Paul addressed the Italian Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology. "The norms until now taught by the Church, integrated by the wise instructions of the Council, demands faithful and generous observance. It cannot be considered not binding as if by the Magisterium of the Church were in a state of doubt at the present time..." We express our confidence in your authoritative understanding and your free collaboration concerning a norm which the Law of God - far more than our authority - and the supreme interest of human life considered in its integral fullness, dignity, and destiny - far more than any partial interest - makes

Any excuse was good for an outing at Mendon Ponds. We noon were ten cents, or free, if had eighth grade picnics, First Communion, altar boy, choir girl, and end-of-the-year picnics. Usually all of the sisters from the school came, bus transportation and food was provided for all. The sisters would sit in the shelter of the pavilion smiling good-naturedly, while the priests grilled hundreds of hot dogs and dispensed gallons of a delicious orange drink they called "belly wash."

That was "kid stuff." Suddenly you were in the seventh grade, or entering high school. The back door of the rectory was always open; you rang and walked in. If you needed a key for one of the meeting rooms, you took it from the board. If you needed someone to talk to, someone was there. The recreation rooms in the church hall were open for dancing, pool, or nonsense, three or four nights a week.

If you didn't actually see a priest, you knew one of them was around and good behavior was "in." The priests at this

time were Father Raymond Whal and Father William Schifferli, who also doubled as basketball coaches, Girl and Boy Scout advisers, and most wonderful memory - laugh us how to sail in the summer!

Father Stauder's top general then was Sister Robertine, the school principal. She could love like a mother, and bark commands like a master sergeant. Periodically, she would round up the children who needed their shoes or haircuts and send them with an eighth grader to the stores nearby. The bill was sent to Father Stauder. There was no lunch room or cafeteria, but if your mother worked you could eat in the classroom and one of the sister took care of you. Sister Robertine could also find jobs for you to do after school or on holidays until she knew one of your parents was home. That was her maternal side.

Her sternest manner was probably felt by one of the local merchants. Several of the older girls were repeatedly coming late to daily Mass. Sister Robertine discovered that they were

being detained by a grocer who invited them in to his store each morning for a little conversation and a smoke. She issued a warning for a few days things went smoothly, and then the girls were late again. The sisters of Holy Redeemer were never seen on the streets except during the annual May processions; but that morning the firemen in the firehouse watched in wonder as Sister Robertine's short immense figure came marching down the street, head hands swinging her rosary beads as if they were weapons. No one ever lingered in that grocery store again.

Today, Holy Redeemer Church still stands as proudly as ever, its twin Byzantine towers stretch skyward, looking like a Russian relic. I don't know if the parish lies in what is officially labeled the "inner city." Twenty years ago the city alums were passing close to its boundaries. There were many parents who couldn't speak English. There were many poor and culturally deprived families. Thank to Father Stauder and his staff, most of us didn't know it.

Bill and Mrs. Albert D. Roszmarino, Watkins Glen