

Postscript On Callahan

Editor's Note:
Mr. Clarence Amann, assistant professor of English at St. John Fisher College, sent in this thoughtful critique of a recent lecture of Dr. Daniel Callahan. Since it was too long to be used as a letter to the editor, yet was an incisive commentary, we are printing it as a separate article here.

On the evening of Wednesday, November 29, one of the most prominent voices in contemporary lay thought was heard locally. Dr. Daniel Callahan, executive editor of *Commonweal*, set forth his views on "Faith, Doubt and Catholic Honesty" in a public lecture at Saint John Fisher College.

Would that the voice had been as articulate as prominent.

It occurs to this listener that the contemporary layman, genuinely interested in promoting the cause of the lay voice in the inevitable redefinition of the Church's magisterium, must come away from many such events sorely disappointed.

An exhaustive refutation of all the points of Doctor Callahan's colorful lecture is not within my competence. Nor is it necessary, for the speaker adequately undid his own "argument." Such a refutation, in any case, is not my purpose here.

This is a lament. It is a lament that, seemingly, the best of lay voices seem at the moment to be so inept, so violently intent upon revolutionizing the substance of Catholic creed and practice. So intemperately eager are they that in the process any legitimate concept of authority, be it personal, societal, or ecclesial, subjective or objective, has been made a defenseless victim. . . . defenseless because its defeat is assumed already to be a donee. What can emerge but an enduring skepticism?

Doctor Callahan appealed to this writer as a teacher and student of literature, particularly of fiction. The hyperbole of his initial characterization of the traditional Catholic was masterful. By the time he got around to underscoring its fictional character (in his penchant for "honesty") the emotions of the *Commonweal* audience were largely with him. His rhetoric proved ultimately better than his logic, or even his consistency.

Some will protest that I oversimplify to suggest his lecture became a confusion of two uncomplex concepts, accepting in doubt and dishonesty. It was comforting to know that true faith is the issue only of a prolonged period of anguish, of wrestling with doubts. It was even bearable, if embarrassing, to learn that we who "cling to the Faith" during the wrestling process are essentially "dishonest" . . . perhaps worse because we refuse, consciously or unconsciously, to acknowledge our "dishonesty."

We were told we must not seek comfort in simple Faith, but must struggle, intellectually and emotionally, to personal conviction . . . and then, alas we were told we can never expect to secure this at all.

Here is where, it seems to this observer, the lecturer began to undo himself patently, as one vocal cleric in the rear of the auditorium not to say of the Church — put it, to "contradict" himself.

Previously, the speaker had indicted the "dishonest" character of the belief most Catholics give/gave the magisterium. Especially guilty, he insisted, were those who had serious questions about the rationale, or the norms, or the other opinions ancillary to the literal magisterial care, or to the magisterium itself and the core, and who yet fail to defect. "No faith," we were assured, "is

better than a dishonest one." And acting in doubt is always "dishonest" in the Callahan ethic.

But then Doctor Callahan began what was apparently meant to be a rebuilding process. We were finally told we must accept ourselves as dishonest. We must resign ourselves to a certain amount of dishonesty in the agonizing process, and stay within "the Church."

Somehow, suddenly it became ennobling to be dishonest . . . dishonest enough to "stay in there" fighting.

"Courageous" was the speaker's characterization in a turnabout that rang resoundingly hollow. Doctor Callahan's emphatic original denunciation of dishonesty had doomed whatever acceptance might have been accorded this nice bit of rhetorical irony.

It now became comforting to know that one could be less than absolutely certain in the empirical, rationalistic sense, and still not be the same kind of "liar" the speaker had originally detailed. It was comforting . . . till one realized it was also contradictory.

It may be more oversimplification, but it seems to this writer that the same kind of contradiction and consequent dishonesty must result whenever a man speaks of conviction, of certainty in regard to metaphysical or moral belief, unless one resorts to the traditional (forgive that dirty word) distinctions between absolute and and moral certainty, between acting on absolute conviction and acting prudently in doubt, between Faith and incontrovertible reason, and I suppose between limited human and omniscient divine.

Shall we say "my heart is restless until it rests in Thee" invests man with an enduring, invincible dishonesty, and that that dishonesty proscribes meaningful belief and effective action on creed? Such seems to be the logical issue of such an argument. The liberating consequences are at once exciting and frightening.

The alternative is to reexamine the notion of authority, with a view to reinstating a proper concept of magisterium, perfectible, fundamentally objective and impersonal, but not ultimately so.

God give us lay professionals articulate indeed, but patient and realistic as well.

—Clarence A. Amann

Israel to Pay For Damaged Churches

Jerusalem — (NC) — Compensation totalling almost \$1 million will be paid by the Israeli government to churches for damage done to their properties during the Arab-Israeli war, it has been announced.



Four Hundred For 'World Poor'

Check for \$400 won in N.Y. State Lottery with ticket bought for "Bishop Sheen-World Poor" is being presented to Monsignor John F. Duffy, Society for the Propagation of the Faith director by William E. Hardies, district tax supervisor, Rochester. The Society distributes donations to the "World Poor."

Rethink Confiscation, Vatican Asks Syria

Vatican City — (RNS) — A papal message to the bishops of Syria from now on will be hopes the Syrian government may reconsider its decision to confiscate all Catholic schools.

The message, sent for Pope Paul VI by Amleto Cardinal Cioognani, Vatican Secretary of State, is addressed to Archbishop Joseph Rabhani, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Homs.

In announcing the confiscation in October, Syrian Minister of Education Sulayman al-Khush said that "the era of missionary work in Syria has ended for good" and that all education in Syria wrom now on will be secular.

Pope Paul "knows" that the Syrian bishops "have tried to work out a reasonable and respectful means of agreement with the authorities regarding the upholding of the distinctive character of Catholic institutions," the letter said.

"The Catholic Church in Syria, as in every other state, sincerely desires to collaborate for the common good, to form

Medical Air Service Initiated in Africa

Lusaka, Zambia — (NC) — A medical air service has been initiated here by the educational secretary of the Ndola diocese.

Mission Medic-Air was established by Father B. Welsford, O.F.M., to overcome the problem of bad roads in Zambia. It is manned by trained medical personnel, men and women, seeking to improve the health and hygienic conditions in this country's rural areas.

The letter concluded that hopes for an improvement are "based on the tolerance which Syria has shown for so long toward its Christian community and on the gratitude of so many of her sons, even the Moslems, who have received the great gift of education in the Church's schools."

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(From Catholic Courier, Dec. 17, 1942)

Senorita Catalina Stoduto of Asuncion, Paraguay came to the Family and Children's Division, Rochester Catholic Charities as the first of ten social workers from Central and South America to take a year's In-Service Training under auspices of the National Conference of Catholic Charities.

House-to-house campaign to acquaint the Rochester area with the "Share-the-Meat" Campaign was the wartime activity planned by Catholic school children for the Christmas holidays.

Brand new pews for the chapel of Our Lady of the Lake Retreat House on Seneca Lake, Geneva was the Christmas gift of Rochester Fourth Degree Assembly, Knights of Columbus to the retreat house.

Prelate Lauds UN Agency

Vatican City — (RNS) — The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was praised here by Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, Vatican under-secretary of state, for its devotion to the good of humanity and the development of nations.

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