

JOSEPH BREIG SAYS

An Episcopalian Voice on Abortion

This column and the next one will be devoted to quotations from an "Open Letter to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church" on the subject of abortion. The author is an Episcopalian laywoman, Mrs. Henry J. Sava of Coral Gables, Fla.

"We are living in a time," she writes, "when the Spirit speaks in a special way in and through the Body of Christ. . . . Since I am a member of the Body of Christ, I would like to express my sentiments on the recent resolution of the House of Bishops concerning the liberalization of American abortion laws."

"I cannot understand a mentality that can be so articulate in its hatred of violence and bloodshed, its burning concern for human life, and in the same breath can condone, even encourage, the killing of the most innocent and helpless of all human beings. Surely, you cannot be unaware that the multitudes being put to death in abortion operations are a

thousand times more numerous than those dying in warfare . . .

"For me, the central tenet of our Faith is that Christ's redemptive death and resurrection ushered in a new creation wherein man is born again to a new life in God through water and the Spirit. . . .

"Every human life, no matter how old or how young, how perfected or deformed, whether living in luxury or squalor, whether warm in his mother's arms or warm in the lining of her uterus, is of inestimable value to the Christian. All life has been redeemed, and every living being, whether a breath away from death or a breath away from birth, has the inherent personal right to exist . . .

"The Church of Christ," Mrs. Sava continues, "has continually denounced abortion as an offense against the Christian conscience and a sin against God's law. The Church sees the life process as one continuous, uninterrupted progression from the moment

of conception until the moment of death.

"Every stage of this life process is inviolable and unassailable by any human authority whether civil or ecclesiastical. The Church has always looked to the Natural Law to express the Mind of God in this matter, and today she finds in the embryonic data clear indication that the human fetus in its earliest stages is irrevocably destined to be a human person.

"To interfere with this life process is to go against the Law of Nature and the Mind of God . . .

"So concerned has been the Church for the salvation of every living being that she even permits uterine baptism if that is the only way the waters of saving baptism can come to an infant. Moreover she urges all women who have a miscarriage to baptize conditionally the aborted fetus . . .

"Is the Church of Christ now so sophisticated that she can't any more be concerned over the eternal salvation of fetal life?"

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

No Man Can Tame a Tongue

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



St. James Speaks

Saint James the Apostle wrote: "We all commit many faults. If a person does not commit faults in speech, he is perfect and capable of controlling his whole body. See how great a forest is set ablaze by a very small fire. The tongue is a fire; it makes wickedness attractive."

"Human ingenuity is able to tame and has tamed every kind of wild beast and bird, reptile and sea animal; but no man can tame that restless—evil, full of deadly poison, the tongue! With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made after the image of God! Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. IT IS NOT RIGHT, MY BROTHER, THAT IT SHOULD BE SO. . . ." (St. James: ch. iii).

With our tongues, bless the Church, which is Christ.

On Wednesday of Holy Week a few years ago, a fortyish matron of the parish who is usually gracious, good natured and sympathetic with other people's problems, including the Church's, telephoned the rectory about 9:00 in the morning. With her usual good manners, she gave her name and then proceeded to pour out a flood of complaints, self-pityings, "I simply can't put up with it any longer", without stopping for breath.

—Her voice bordered on hysteria. Her vehemence was so out of character that my blood congealed.

There flashed through my mind: "Good heavens. That's all I need for the middle of Holy Week! Could she be drinking?" I stood frozen at the phone, listening to the tirade. All of a sudden, Mrs. X stopped. Then she rocked the phone with gales of laughter.

"What in heaven's name is going on?" I asked. "Oh Father, listen! We just got a voice recorder, and I'll play back the conversation we just had on the phone. We've never had so much fun. Listen to yourself replying to my complaints," and she laughed uproariously.

Some gadget in the tape recorder wasn't connected, so the masterful demonstration of tantrums and hysteria will have to remain recorded only in memory. That's a pity, because it was a superlative piece of play-acting. She did play back some other conversations, however, and it was funny to hear people recorded in such innocence, much like the Candid Camera you see on TV some Sunday nights.

Hear Yourself

Since that incident, the thought has kept recurring to me: "If only we COULD hear ourselves in our conversations, in a play-back, I wonder if most of us wouldn't quickly reform in matters of speech."

How many there are who are honest with money, pay their bills, are regular at Mass, correct in marriage, temperate with drink, generous and kind to family and neighbors—yet despite these wonderful virtues, they have tongues like English claw fish hooks.

What is puzzling is that they do not seem to realize the harm they do:

sowing suspicion, misunderstanding, distrust, discord and unhappiness.

There is so great concern about weakness of faith that Pope Paul called for the year of Faith. Can faith endure the sniping at the Church: at her laws, at her members, at the Pope and the Bishops and others placed in responsibility, at her doctrines, at her history?

The Church, like a harried Desdemona, is up for murder by the tongues of her Iago members. Men, like Othello love the Church with a great passion. Will these "men" who love the Church be driven to madness by doubt, then by suspicion, and finally by a dichotomous passion of love and hatred to die a spiritual death in the loss of the Faith.

This is happening within the Church, thanks to the constant carping of these Iagos who sow suspicion, discord and disruption.

Bishop Assails Church Critics

Critics of the Church's doctrines have always been disturbing to the placid faith of Catholics who appreciate that times may change but dread any innovations in the traditional orthodoxy they have grown up with.

The Bishop of Little Rock recently noted in a pastoral letter that today's critics are growing more important and are not "avowed enemies of the Church" but "her own children: priests and laymen, who seem to derive great satisfaction in criticizing the Church."

Bishop Albert L. Fletcher wrote to his diocese: "These people are usually very intolerant in their views and very dogmatic in what they say. They act as though they are directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and no one should question their thinking, and anyone who questions the validity of their thinking is labeled 'old fashioned' and opposed to the spirit of Vatican Council II."

"But they seldom condescend to quote from the Decrees of the Council. They simply interpret the Council according to their own liking."

Bishop Fletcher commented that "most of us have always known there are certain things about the Church

which have changed in the past and will continue to change in the future. Disciplinary laws can and do change as the Church adapts herself constantly to meet new circumstances and conditions in a changing world."

"The law of celibacy for the clergy of the western Church could be changed. It is a purely ecclesiastical law. But the Holy Father recently has solemnly reconfirmed the obligation of celibacy for priests of the Latin rite."

"But the basic teachings of faith and morals in the Church do not change — for example her teaching about the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Holy Eucharist, the sacraments, sin—all those teachings which have been solemnly defined by the Church."

Bishop Fletcher noted that instead of allowing the Church to advise Catholics what to do, some in the Church have "jumped the gun" and want to speak officially for the Church.

"Instead of bringing about renewal in the Church, they seem determined to destroy it, instead of renovating the Church, they advise building the Church on new foundations," he said.

Reds Seem More Willing To Talk With Holy See

By Father Robert A. Graham, S.J.

Father Robert A. Graham, S.J., is a Vatican historian and is considered an expert on Vatican diplomacy.

It is a common error to imagine that the Holy See's opposition to the Soviet system is systematic and a priori, dating from the very first days of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Few are aware of the various desperate tries, in the first decade and a half, to awaken some toleration on the part of the Soviet authorities. They all came to nothing as Soviet intransigence manifested itself.

As a result of this, the new warmth between the Vatican and the Communist countries is not so much a Vatican "opening to the left" as increased Communist willingness to dialogue with the Holy See.

Nevertheless there have been some definite steps taken by the Vatican to encourage Communist response.

—The Vatican's willingness to discuss issues that formerly were considered closed, such as Catholic school subsidies.

—Pope John XXIII's own personal warmth.

—The Vatican's ability to recognize the collapse of the monolithic Communist bloc that existed under Stalin, and willingness to negotiate with local leaders.

—The growing awareness on the Vatican's part that the world's social and economic problems demand worldwide efforts at solution.

—The Second Vatican Council Fathers' deliberate refusal to condemn communism, despite the wishes of some 400 of the bishops present.

All of these considerations, coupled with the increased willingness to dialogue found in many Communist countries, have combined to form

what some describe as "the opening to the left."

The relation of the Holy See to communism is threefold, having religious, social and political implications.

There is every reason to believe that, in the great questions of modern society—which are also questions that concern governments—this kind of moral leadership will not be lacking on the part of the Pope and the Church.

It is not excluded—though this is still a controversial matter—that, given the incessant evolutions of economic and political life, a form of socialism might be at least tacitly approved by the Church which 30 years ago would have been unthinkable. At this point, the work of "baptizing" Karl Marx, to which some small groups of Catholics in various countries of both East and West are devoting their attention, has not made much progress. One success it has achieved, however, is to bring out that the Catholic Church's social teaching should not be construed as a clerical blessing on the capitalist system.

Any attempt to predict the course of Soviet-Vatican relations is frivolous and ignorant if it fails to take into account a primordial element of religious persecution in the Communist sphere of influence.

The Soviet Union has carried on a relentless anti-religious campaign with the clear-cut objective of eliminating religious belief. A profound wound has been inflicted on the body of believers. And what is so clear in the Soviet Union exists, if in less positive form, in the largely Catholic countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.

There is a growing rapprochement between the Holy See and the Soviet, or Communist world—at least in the realm of peace.

Italian Vote Prediction: Status Quo

By GARY MacEOIN

Italy has dissolved its fourth post-war parliament as prelude to its 5-yearly ritual of elections. Italy has over 50 million people and a strategic location. Nevertheless, if proof were needed, two world wars have demonstrated that its military role in world decisions is minor. Its election results can in this sense have only a marginal impact on the balance of power.

In another sense, however, Italy's elections are always tremendously important. Historical reasons, though no longer objectively valid, cause not only on Italian but on overall every change in the Italian power balance to be reflected in Vatican policy situations. Catholic lay organization, for example, still suffers today from an authoritarian model created to meet a local Italian situation in the 1930s.

The best guide I have ever had through the convoluted intricacies of Italian politics is Serge Hughes, author of a recent book, "The Fall and Rise of Modern Italy." Professor of Italian at Hunter University, New York, Serge—in spite of his unlikely name—is Italian-born, member of a family that migrated to Italy from Wales 800 years ago.

The innumerable parties fall into three groups: Liberal, Catholic and Marxist. The Liberals were responsible for Italy's unification in the last century, followers of the Enlightenment, bitterly anti-clerical, often anti-Christian. Today they form the extreme Right, backed by big business, neo-Fascists and other reactionaries.

The papal order to Catholics to take no part in Italian political life, issued in 1867, made more formal in 1877, and given legal status by the Holy Office in 1888, left an Opposition vacuum into which the Marxists quickly moved as defenders of the exploited urban and rural workers. The Marxists, today represented mainly by the Socialists and the Communists, had dynamic leaders and a clear ideology. Their power grew as they organized labor and instilled a political consciousness in the peasants. By 1920, in the wake of the triumphant Russian Revolution, they seemed to have power in their grasp.

The Vatican meanwhile, recognizing the sterility of its ban, had modified it in 1904 and lifted it in 1918. The Catholic Party led by Don Luigi Sturzo soon drew as many votes as the Socialists.

Quickly, however, it ran into a roadblock. It could not rally support for a clearly progressive policy. At the level of theory, it had Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum. But in practice, its dilemma was like that of the United States in Latin America today. It favors social progress but opposes structural changes, fearing that elimination of any of the supports will bring the whole rickety structure down. So Don Sturzo was sacrificed, and many of his followers voted with other Italians to give Mussolini a landslide 65 per cent of the popular vote in the 1924 elections.

After World War II, the Cold War helped achieve the dominance of the new Catholic party, the Christian Democrats. But they suffered even more than their predecessors from lack of a positive program. The machinery was a structure closely bound to Catholic Action through "civic committees" and concrete authoritarian directives.

Economic progress, expanded education and the painful rebuilding of a political awareness gradually drove a wedge between the status quo elements in the Social Democrats and those who derived their inspiration from the Church's social teaching, a teaching grown more radical with Pope Pius XI's Quadragesimo Anno, and Pope John's Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris.

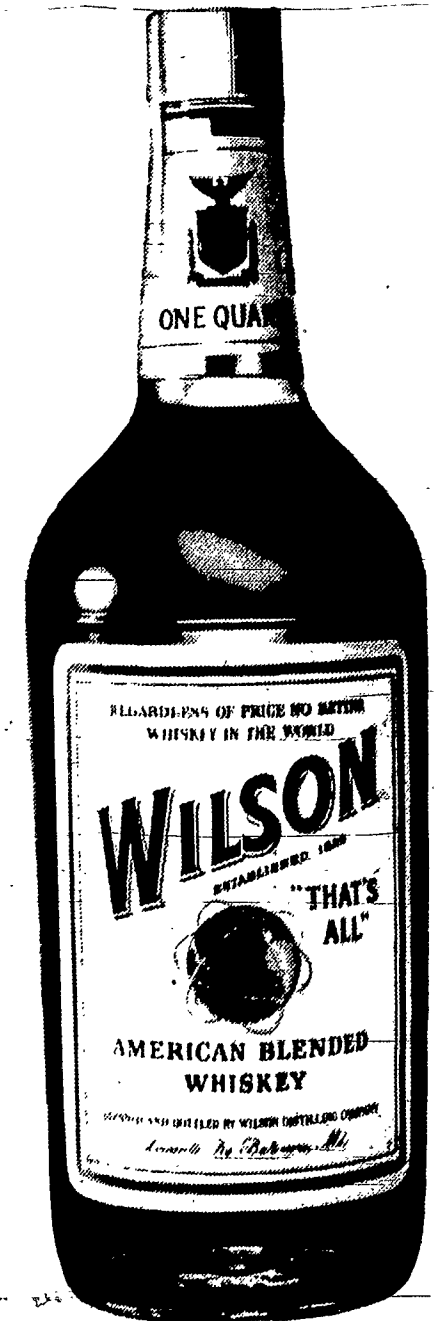
Recognizing that justice as well as political wisdom indicated cooperation with the Marxists (who otherwise would be the sole vindicators of the rights of the poor), Pope John approved the coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialists which has given Italy remarkably stable government for five years.

Weekly Crossword

- ACROSS
- 1. — and the Papas
- 6. Faultily
- 11. Around
- 12. Man from the North Pole
- 13. Soupcon
- 14. Stithy
- 15. Classify
- 17. Age
- 18. Stops
- 21. Equipment
- 24. Title
- 27. Piers
- 29. Orchestrate
- 30. Composer
- 32. God of war
- 33. Napping
- 35. Yam
- 37. Uproar
- 41. Inside
- 44. Grown-up
- 45. Pillar of stone
- 46. Rebellion in British India
- 47. Drink
- 48. County in England
- DOWN
- 1. First name of a famous spy

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