

5 Guide Lines for Faithful

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD

(Nineteenth in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

When automobiles first came into use a pastor decided to raffle off his old horse. He sold a thousand tickets, and the horse died. Mounting the pulpit the following Sunday, he announced: "As you know, my horse is dead. But I have decided to print another thousand tickets. When they are sold, we will then hold the raffle to see who lost the horse."

Are some ideas and practices in the Church so dead that they should not even be retained? Are the new things so alive that we do not care whether we raffle off the traditional or not?

The laity complain: "It used to be that the final local authority for truth was the priest: 'Father said so'; even our children trusted so much in their religious teaching that their minds rested in the authority: 'Sister told us'." Now it seems we are back five hundred years ago when private interpretation reigns—not of the Bible, but of individual feelings.

The faithful are confused. They seem to see two fires blazing once again on the altars: one belonging to Abel who believed in blood-sacrifice, the other belonging to Cain who believed only in an offering which involved no great sacrifice. We know which of the two God chose. (Gen. 4/5) But which shall we choose? Are there any guide lines?

We offer five:

I—Truth is always challenged. Our Lord, who identified Truth with Himself, was crucified. It must, therefore, never be expected that even God's Truth will have clear sailing. At certain periods of Church history, false teachers arise. Satan's favorite disguise is as "an angel of light". Not everyone today, in the Church, is to be believed, as they were not to be believed in the early Church. Even St. Peter himself, the Rock of the Church, had to warn: "There will be false teachers among you today. They will be men who will subtly introduce dangerous heresies. . . Many will follow their pernicious teaching and thereby bring great discredit on the way of truth". (2 Peter 2/1-3)

St. Paul warned the young priest Timothy: "The time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander after man-made fictions." (2 Tim. 4/3)

We live in days when novelty is a form of vanity. One gets much more attention by saying that 2 x 2 = 5, than by being a "reactionary" and saying 2 x 2 = 4. Many suffer today from what might be called "The Gutenberg Syndrome"—anything that is printed is true. If makes no difference how undocumented the statement, the mere fact that it is set up in type, particularly in a weekly magazine, constitutes for many an infallible guide.

The Church today has more swamps than rivers. A river has depth because it has shores, boundaries and limits. A swamp is a kind of river without depths or banks, in which water is so shallow that everything becomes muddy. Swamp-doctrines abound, particularly when the teaching office of the Church is denied and ten million popes take over the authority of the one Pope. The test of truth then becomes the number of signers that one can find to any statement.

Popular though this is at the moment, the majority is not always right. The majority of the mob before Pilate's porch voted for the Crucifixion. Right is right if nobody is right, and wrong is wrong if everybody is wrong. When Our Lord asked: "Who do people say that I am?", He received contrary and contradictory opinions. When Peter gave the right answer, Our Lord said it was heaven-sent, not a majority report.

The majority report of the spies was that the Jews should not enter the Promised Land. The minority report of the two, Joshua and Caleb, was based on the Divine promise that He would be with them. In human affairs, and when there is no revealed doctrine at stake, the most valid test is the will of the majority. A democracy without a conscience, however, can vote itself out of a democracy. And when Divine Truth is at issue, no number of signers to the contrary can destroy what is right and true.

Our Lord warned against popular approaches: "Enter the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it". (Matt. 7/13, 14) The first caution, then, to avoid confusion is: not everything that is taught is true; not everything that is printed is infallible. One helpful test existing to decide whether anyone in the field of religion is to be believed is this: "Does the one who teaches you love Christ? Does that love come out in prayer, sacrifice, self-denial and fidelity to the Church?" This was the litmus-test of Our Lord: "When a man loves Me, he follows My teaching. The man who does not really love Me will not follow My teaching". (John 14/23)

It is only a caution, but it ever remains true, that if we marry one age, we become a widow in the next. With the rapidation of thought in our times, what is popular "right now" is already "yesterday".

IV—Continuity and fluidity—The Church is always in a state of reformation and renovation. The Church is not a continuing thing, but a dying-rising thing. The Church in different ages, like the sun each day, dies triumphantly. Its law is Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The oak tree "dies" in the winter and rises in the spring. In the meantime, all the leaves of the season die and fall away. Adjustments to new thoughts and circumstances are the condition of growth. The Church does not have now, and never will have, an aggrornamento, or updating, equal to that when the Church left a Palestinian background with Hebrew idioms of theology. Going into the Gentile world, it had to translate, as Paul did, Hebrew

recognizes values which the other neglected, but they are not contradictory.

Why, then, do some become so critical of the post-Vatican theology? For two reasons: (a) they have not been studying the development of human thought; (b) and as a result knowledge becomes to them like money-capital. The rich like the economic system under which they become rich; we like also the intellectual system under which we were taught the faith in our youth. In that case, theologians who restate our faith in a new context often appear as "upstarts" and "heretics". But should it not be true also that those who oppose these ideas are "theological misers"? They resent change because it deprives them of "capital".

As a matter of fact, the unfolding of theology since the Vatican Council has been one of the most exhilarating experiences a human mind can have. The continuity with the past without being conformed to the past is fulfillment, not repetition. While there are more errors taught now than in the past century, not everyone who rearranged the intellectual furniture of the Church is a heretic or a wrecker. We may be in for a long winter in the Church, but as Pope John XXIII expressed hope for springtime: "Bread lies under the snow".

III—Old Errors may have new labels. One of the most important disciplines for the understanding of Catholic doctrine in our time is history. Unfortunately the modern mind despises the past and considers it irrelevant. Contempt or forgetfulness of history puts us in danger of repeating the errors of the past, but with new labels. Today we want "instant coffee", "instant relief", and letters often repeat: "If you do not answer immediately we shall . . . (threat)" Because of the stress on "contemporaneity", we are so often answering one another's problems revived from the past and reading only books published within the last year.

History has a future as well as a past. Amnesia can be as dangerous to a Church as to a nation and an individual. Back into the storehouse of memory the Church must dig as a basis for present and future thinking. When stress is put only on the "now", there is danger of "lyricism", which is dancing on the latest tunes piped for us by any system of thought which happens to be popular at the moment.

How much theological thinking today, for example, has been "lyricized" to fit Martin Heidegger. His philosophy holds that knowledge is to be interpreted solely in terms of its effect upon one's present existence. Bultman, the Biblical theologian, accepting this, throws out miracles, angels, demons and, as someone has counted, about 43% of the Gospels, leaving only a Kerygma or teaching message.

Who will forget that Descartes (1596-1650) the philosopher, was once so popular a basis for theology that he was taught in all the seminaries of France? Who today remembers Descartes except historians of philosophy? It must be admitted that the philosophy of Heidegger has been a helpful springboard for the development of doctrine and for bringing new insights into our idea of God. But our point here is: "instant theology" which suits a philosopher of the times may not be the best guide for the next twenty years.

To prove this, recall several other instances of "lyricism" in the history of thought. What Heidegger is today to philosophers and theologians, Isaac Newton was once to the theologians and philosophers of the 18th century. The "lyricism" of Newton was so general that Voltaire used Newton's ideas to attack religion. No one today has written "Heidegger for the Ladies", but Count Algarotti, in those days, wrote on Newton in his day: "Newtonism for the Ladies". The world at that time went mildly mad to find some one rational principle to explain all philosophy and theology. As Newton discovered gravitation for the whole universe, so philosophers and theologians sought one principle to explain thinking.

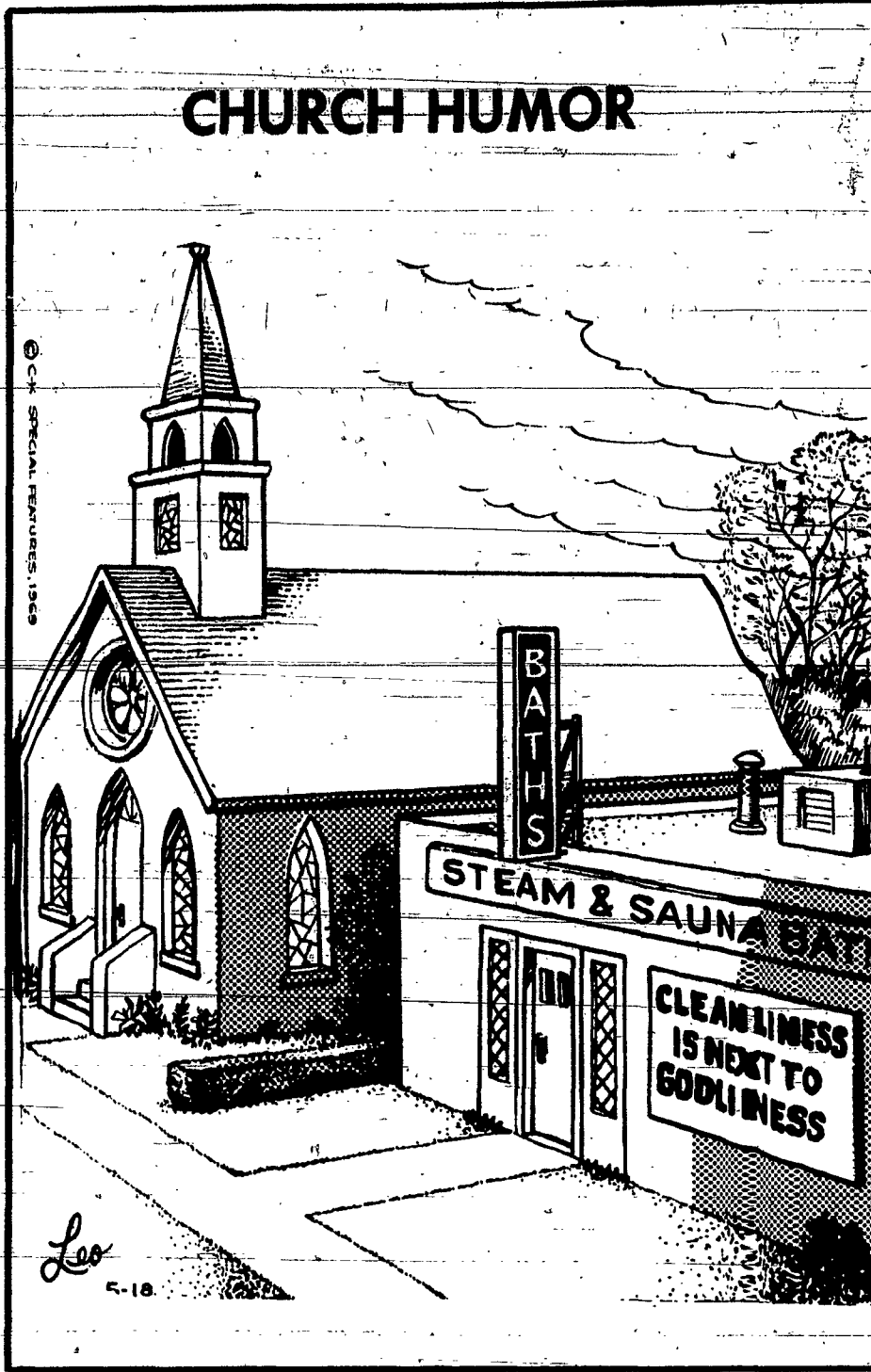
In one hundred years from now, or less, will Heidegger be the basis of Scriptural interpretation and philosophy any more than Newton is today? Let it not be assumed that we should not be influenced by, and use new disclosures of thought, but prudence is necessary. Fashions exist in thought as they do in clothes. Long ago St. Thomas, in his Commentary on Boetius, warned against the "sin of making the methodology of all knowledge the same". Every student of thought knows how Auguste Comte started the vogue for sociology, immediately many theologians and philosophers called God "society Divinized". Darwin blessed the world in the area of empirical sciences, and many theologians unblessed it by countless tomes on "The Evolution of God". All teachers are familiar with the two volume work of S. Alexander on Space, Time and Deity, who "lyricized" Einstein by making Space the Body of God and Time His Soul.

While new depths are sounded by every philosophy and every new discovery in science, students today will have great difficulty in recalling such names as Chateaubriand, the von Schlegel brothers, Schiller, Victor Hugo, Lamartine and Madame de Staël.

It is only a caution, but it ever remains true, that if we marry one age, we become a widow in the next. With the rapidation of thought in our times, what is popular "right now" is already "yesterday".

IV—Continuity and fluidity—The Church is always in a state of reformation and renovation. The Church is not a continuing thing, but a dying-rising thing. The Church in different ages, like the sun each day, dies triumphantly. Its law is Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The oak tree "dies" in the winter and rises in the spring. In the meantime, all the leaves of the season die and fall away. Adjustments to new thoughts and circumstances are the condition of growth. The Church does not have now, and never will have, an aggrornamento, or updating, equal to that when the Church left a Palestinian background with Hebrew idioms of theology. Going into the Gentile world, it had to translate, as Paul did, Hebrew

(Continued on Page 16)



Association of Catholic Laymen

Examine Your Role in Race Issue

The May meeting of RACL was devoted to the subject of racial justice. This is the first of two articles on this topic.

It is very difficult to know just how to approach the subject of racial justice at this time. There has been a tremendous amount of writing and a sizable amount of sermonizing and speechmaking and yet, does any reader believe that all is now well in this area of human concern?

Rather, I think one would be forced to say that a large portion of the effort up to now has missed its mark, either because of the inaccuracy of the aim or the elusiveness of the targets. I believe both causes help explain the necessity for such unhappy disclosures as the Kermer Report and the results of other studies of a like nature.

On the part of those who have attempted to teach Christian principles in the area of social justice, failure to get the message across may be the result, at least partially, of not preparing the ground properly.

On the other hand, in the great body of the faithful who have failed to respond, is there not reason to say that "business as usual" and lack of soul searching effort have made their contribution to this sad state of affairs?

Why, then, do we rush in where angels fear to tread? Perhaps we can profit from the mistakes of the past by starting the teaching of racial justice with a "mea culpa", a confession that specific instruction on the subject is of recent origin. Many laymen and some priests I know have complained that they have been asked to get excited about something that

never seemed to concern the church before. A local pastor once confided to me that he never "got any of this stuff" in the seminary.

Of course, in general this charge is not quite accurate. We have always been taught to love our neighbor. Yet, realistically, were we taught that black people were really our neighbors?

I recall justifications of slavery learned in high school days. Then there was the story of how Nee's son, Chan, was sent to darkest Africa as a punishment from God. These ideas left their mark, especially since the status of blacks seemed to corroborate the judgment. For years I read about lynchings and "lynchings" and "lynchings" for blacks who got "out of line" and it didn't seem to bother me.

My idea of the best a black man could amount to was the good natured buffoon suggested by "Amos 'n' Andy". I expected to be looked up to by Pullman porters and shoe shine boys, even when the "boys" were men.

How great was my personal guilt? I don't know, but I was certainly a product of my society and my conscience was not correctly formed on the matter. Fr. Phillip Berrigan said recently that to be born a white American is almost automatically to be born a racist.

Whatever the guilt involved in this automatic acceptance of society's false values, I have no doubt that once we are made aware of the truth, we have no recourse but to take the axe to the roots of the false growth and get it out of our systems. Otherwise we run the risk of fighting

Letters

Books He Likes

Editor: To me the column that got right to the most needed "Exercise" in our Catholic life was put forth by Father Paul J. Cuddy in the Courier-Journal dated April 18.

He recommended reading the Bible! And he recommended that children read it. How old fashion can he get! In this trouble-torn times of our Catholic Church . . . here is a priest who dares to recommend reading the Bible! God bless him.

What a need there is for spiritual reading . . . especially the growing child!

I wish that a section of the Courier each week could be devoted to dramatizing . . . romancing the reading of some of the fine masterpieces . . . the fine spiritual books that have come down through the centuries.

Let me list what I call some of the very masterpieces:

1. The New Testament by Father Spencer.
2. Teachings of Saint Bernard by Luddy.
3. The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi by Hilmar Felder.
4. The Parish Priest of Ars by Mary Falon Windeatt.
5. The Soul of the Apostolate by Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard.
6. The Imitation of Christ by Thomas A. Kempis.

How many youngsters have never heard of most of them? Why?

Because we fail to romance them . . . we fail to blow the dust off and make them attractive to the youngsters.

—Edwin O'Brien, Waverly, N.Y.

Rev. P. Fred List's, Church sociated in v

23

Twenty-three . . . ard's Seminary the deaconate b Dennis W. Hickmory Saturday St. John the Greece.



Auxiliary F . . . ard's Sem . . . Joseph . . . right

Two Priest

Two young me Pittsford parish to the priesthood day, May 17, in the Church, St. Archbishop The Atlanta, Ga.

They are . . . rrence, son of M. Lawrence, 4716; quito and Fat tone, son of Mr Sextone, 8 Bro

Both priests v diocese of Atlar

Archbishop D the Ordination sisted in the ce of St. Bernard's sung by St. Ber R. Ferris, dire Fedor, organist.

Father Lawre drew's and St. and is completi John Vianney S N.Y.

He will celeb 12:35 p.m. Sun Thomas Church include the Ver ter; of Jasper, ordinarid; Fathe sistant at St.

Sacra Bou

The Religious announced Tues property at 8 P of the Sacred B

The Rocheste eight similar s the Religious of New York Pro also will give their school in in June.

In announcein Sister Conakley, "Our desire field of the ind fine teachers, e grams, and in excelsis educat ership in com schools are loc

"We believe if we realize c ventures, Mann; the six schools' The Academy this year. The

Word for Sunday

'My Father Is Your Father Too'

By Father Albert Shamon

In the new catechism used in our diocese, there is a beautiful chapter on Jesus telling a secret.

Jesus' secret is, "My Father is your Father too, and the Father himself loves you."

Sometimes we think Christ's work was to change God our Father from a God of Wrath to a God of Love. We speak of reconciliation with God our Father as though it means that a change took place in Him, the Unchangeable, and not in us changeables. Christ came to change us, by teaching that His Father is our Father too and that "the Father himself loves us" in spite of our selves. Because God our Father so loved the world He sent His Son — not because He so hated the world.

"My Father is your Father too." How wonderful! One so great is Father to us all — so small. I suppose there is a period in everybody's life when he thinks his father is the oldest man in the world. Believing one's father to be old, it is easy to believe he is old-fashioned. So teenagers often write their father off. "Dad, you're not with it," they say. "Generation gap," they call it.

Perhaps man's two most interesting ages are six and eighteen. At six a child knows all the questions and at eighteen he knows all the answers. Nearly all children have a period in life when they decide they have outgrown their parents.

are lifetime teenagers. Yet Christ spoke of God as Father, not as grand-father.

How refreshing was G. K. Chesterton's vision of God — someone see God like Gubrum.

Crowned with a great beard curled. But I see God like a good giant.

That labouring lifts the world. How beautiful God our Father, strong like a giant — a good giant — who works for his children, lifting them up in His arms, and so the world.

Once a boy kept getting into trouble. His poor father bawled him out time and time again. One day someone said, "If he were my boy, I'd let him go." The father replied, "If he were your boy, I'd let him go too. But he is my boy, and I can't let him go." Because God is our Father, He loves us with a love that won't let go.

There is a novel about a wicked old man who cared only for his little daughter. He loved nothing else in life, but his little girl. One day she died. Someone said to the old man: "Jim, sometimes men repent when God smiles on them. Sometimes they repent when God calls them through a sermon or His written word. But sometimes men don't repent until God strikes them a blow in the face with His fist."

That's a good story, but it is not true. Jesus gave us the true picture of God in the prodigal son parable. God is a Father — kind, loving, ready to give and forgive. He lets us leave home if we want. For He respects our freedom. Trouble will come, terrible blows will fall, but the Father does not strike them.

Life can be cruel, but not our Father. He waits at home for the moment hunger, deep soul hunger, drives us into his arms.

COURIER-JOURNAL
 BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN
 President
 Mgr. John S. Randall Managing Editor
 Rev. Richard Tomney Editor
 Anthony J. Costello Advertising Director
 Carmen J. Viglucci Associate Editor
 Arthur P. Farnen Associate Editor
 MAIN OFFICE: 25 So. St. — 664-7000 — Rochester, N. Y. 14604
 ELMIRA OFFICE: 317 Robinson Bldg., Lake St. — RE 2-5000 or RE 2-3421
 ALBANY OFFICE: 118 E. Genesee St. — AL 2-4446