

COURIER / Commentary

I gather there is some dissent from my early stated position that one does not reform the ecclesiastical structure by leaving it. Such dissent in itself does not cause me any undue chagrin - quite the contrary. If this column should stop stirring up dissent, I would quietly fold it up and steal off into the hills.

The substance of dissent on this particular issue is interesting. The basic argument, repeated a number of times, is that my strong commitment to the priesthood and to the institutional Church is obvious evidence that my commitment is in fact quite insecure.

The substance of the argument is obviously superficial pop Freudianism and deserves and will get no direct response. But two comments are in order: First of all, the argument does not address itself to my principle contention that the lessons of history and sociologynot to say theology - are that one does not reform an institution by leaving it. The second point is that I have no doubt my critics are sincere. They really do believe that the only reason I would have strong convictions and commitments about the priesthood is that I am trying to cover up subconscious or unconscious doubts. Why else would anyone have strong convictions?

If one tries to trace the reason for this rather peculiar intellectual and emotional approach to faith one is forced to conclude that we are going through a period of reaction. There was a time when Catholics were expected to believe a vast number of things with absolute certainty. It turns out that a considerable number of these things were not in fact so certain at all. And now many of us find it difficult really to believe anything.

scholars has drastically reduced, if not eliminated completely the value of Scripture as a Sacred Book. Scripture means just about what anybody wants it to mean.

 Mankind has "come of age." Many men, ' particularly those who are most advanced, no longer need religion or the sacred.

• What the world looks for from its churches is not faith but social relevance.

• Therefore, the principal function of the religious leader, indeed the only one that has any real validity anymore. is to engage in social action.

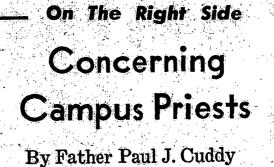
• The most-up-to-date philosophy teaches us that it is practically impossible to say anything meaningful about God.

·Eccleiastical structures, like all other structures, are going to be phased out in "institutionless" societies.

• In an ecumenical era, differences among religious de-nominations will no longer mean anything.

• There is, therefore, very little in the Christian and practically nothing in the Catholic tradition that is unique. It follows, then, that the tradition is practically worthless and must be abandoned. Those who really wish to be "with it" have to start over from scratch.

I do not think this description of the conventional wisdom is a caricature, though any largly implicit conventional wisdom does sound strange when it is stated explicitly. But I do think that the conventional wisdom is rooted in fear; a fear that everything from the past is obsolescent and that one, therefore, must divest oneself of it as quickly as possible in order not to be left behind.



There is a great monologue among ultra-liberals a bout polarization. The assumption seems to be that polarization is necessarily an evil thing. For people without convictions I suppose it would be. Yet I still like Chesterton's dictum: "People can be so broadminded they become flatheaded."

There is a great insistence among many that a continuing dialogue is the keynote to understanding and to progress. They seem blind to the fact that people DO understand quite thoroughly what another is saying, and understanding, they quite thoroughly disagree with them.

For example. I read about the Catholic chaplains of colleges in our diocese beating the drum to abandon the people of South Viet Nam to Communism. I have read nothing in their dialogue which refers to the killing of 6,000,000 Chinese and the enslavement of 700,000,000 Chinese people by the Chinese Communist Party. This was done at the time, the late '40s, when the party leaders were fobbed off by the New York Times, Life; Time,, Common-weal, et al as agrarian reformers! And I remember at the time, that our own Rochester Maryknoll Father Charles Hilbert made a remark which I

recommend to the "Abandon Viet Nam to the Viet Cong" chaplains. He was reading the morning paper at Sts. Peter and Paul Rectory in Rochester. The papers were full of the State Department's line: the Chinese agrarian reformers propaganda.

With a combination of indignation and exasperation, Father Hilbert said: "Sure! Of course! If you don't care what happens to other people, give them over to the Communists!"

This statement came from a man who had spent almost his entire priestly life serving the Chinese people. He spoke several dialects. He knew the psychology of the people and their history. He loved them. He lived under the pre-war regime of Chang Kai Shek; during the Japanese occupation; during the post-war days. He lived for a while during the Communist take over. He lived in China as priest, teacher, administrator; as a Catholic American who cared about the people, and cared for them.

His words: "Sure! If you don't care about other people", give added impact to the words in an article in the Courier-Journal of June 3. The article, entitled "The Middle Domino," reads: "With 13 seconds of air time for the interview left, the TODAY show's Barbara Walters asked a final question. It was directed to a tall good looking priest. In effect it was: Might it not be better for the U.S. and the people of Southeast Asia if this country withdrew from its commitments there and let the Communists take over? More seconds ticked by. The young priest said quietly: 'Miss Walters, have you ever lived under communism?' She shook her head. The priest then added: 'Well, I have.'"

In Father Mat Menger's book, The Valley of the Mekong, published by St. Anthony Guild Press, the Texan Oblate gives insights of "other people" about whom I wish our Catholic chaplains would be concerned.

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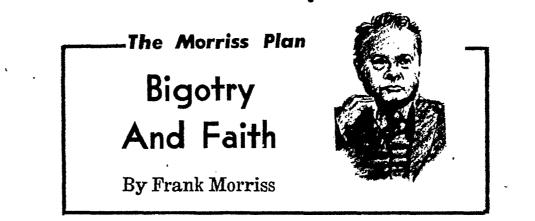
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Recently I asked the chaplain of a well known college campus why the Catholic chaplains are so voluble and visible about our Viet Nam commitment and were so silent and invisible when the abortion law regarding the killing of the unborn children was up for discussion and vote. He thought a bit. Then he replied: "I suppose because the Viet Nam-Cambodian affair is closer to them personally."

I did not press him about what he meant by that.



I hold no brief for bigotry Despite the classic and pa-Read who wishes to brush it but there is one thing to say thetic ignorance of it all, there aside like a bit of embarrassing is something refreshing about for it: bigotry holds to at least dust from times past. a tattered corner of belief, even an intransigent son of the Ref-I do not think the release of though it has surrendered raormation being openly anti-Papal, when so many professed the Vatican Secretariat's Directionality about that belief. And tory Part II gives any support I rather think it will be easier sons and daughters of the Cathto such a view of ecumenism, to restore rationality to a bigot olic Church are being indifferalthough most commentaries than faith to those who have ently or sub-consciously antiand press reports may tend to let go of the total fabric of be-Papal. deceive you in this regard. It lief altogether. We are far more likely to cites as the purpose of ecumen-St. Paul, whose hatred of make⁻followers of the Pope out ical programs "to increase of Mr. Paisley and Mr. Green among students a deeper (with God's help, of course) knowledge of the faith, the than we are out of some of our spirituality and the entire life own theologians who are willand doctrine of the Catholic ing to engage in the most subtle Church," toward the end of havsophistry in order to avoid acing wis and fruitful ecumenical cepting what the Pope teaches. dialogue: It calls for courses In the former case there is at in philosophy which do indeed least some recognition that the treat contemporary trends, but which first must provide "a Christian religion somehow centers on just how one feels solid and coherent understanding of man;" in commending studies of other religions, it about the Bishop of Rome. I am afraid that may not be specifies this be done by "prop-erly instructed Catholics," and the case with the more ecuthe bother of light from above. nemically oriented Presbyteriqualifies the matter further, "so an, Mr. Read, even though the These thoughts are prompted long as they firmly maintain burden of his article is that. ticles: a news story about a their Catholic heritage." both Catholics and Protestants are being more or less driven While stressing openness, together in a world that "is America magazine article on the guidelines also stress docthe ecumenical future by the rapidly discarding the most trine, truth and heritage. They basic beliefs we have in comrecognize the deposit of faith the text of the second part of mon." Mr. Read sees "Church and the need of faithfulness to a directory from the Vatican to Come" as one in which we it, while reminding that stulive "for one another" apparentdents should distinguish bely by not being overly contween those things essential to The news article about Mr. cerned about narrow dogmait and other things that may tisms, sectarian barriers, or be Catholic because of custom "tired concepts" such as "aposor mere theological theory. tolic succession." Needless to say, restored I am somewhat happier with unity must take precedence a bigoted Mr. Paisley who does over mere stubborness; but finot consider that concept tired, dellity to the Catholic truth is but rather extremely important, more important even than unity.

There is, I think, an ideology or conventional wisdom that lurks just beneath the surface of a good deal of contemporary Catholic controversy - in editorials, letters to the editor, articles about the development of the Church, resolutions and statements of priest groups, and the justifications of departing priests and religious. There are a number of elements in this implicit ideology:

• The research of Scripture

The trouble with the conventional wisdom is that it is based on half-truths accepted, one very much fears, by the halfeducated.

But if you do accept the conventional wisdom, then anyone who still has strong commitments to the Catholic religious tradition must be neurotic if not slightly psychotic. For if there is nothing left to believe in, then somebody who still does belive must really be hung up.

THINK

Christians can be blamed on nothing but blind, irrational bigotry, became the greatest of Christian missionaries. It took a supernatural flash of light to do it, and it will take something similar to bring about future acceptance of the Pope so that we may again have one Christian Church. But the point I would like to try to make in this column is that perhaps bigots like Saul are the only ones God may feel worth

by some most interesting arlieutenant of the violently anti-Catholic Rev. Ian Paisley; an Rev. Dr. David H. C. Read; and Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

Paisley's "man in London," the Rev. Brian Green, is headlined "profile of an anti-Papist". And that Mr. Green certainly is, as he proclaims on placards shouting "No Popery!" and in his crusade to save the souls of millions from "Romanism," which he calls the pit of hell.

Wednesday, June 17, 1970

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than with an ecumenical Mr.

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Courier-Journal

PROGRAMMED BY JOE RYAN Food prices have risen to the point where anyone can diet by sticking to his budget.