

CHURCH HUMOR



"Good! Let's run it up the steeple and see if it rings a bell... attendancewise, that is."

On the Line
Crazy War Gets crazier

By Bob Considine



What the Nixon Administration seems to be indicating in its forays into Laos is that members of the U.S. Air Force, and airmen assigned to the other services, don't count as human beings. Robots, perhaps. But not blokes named Willie and Joe.

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and other interpreters of Nixon's Law have pointed out, sometimes with pride and then again with righteous indignation, that "not one American foot soldier" will be used in what Sen. Frank Church calls the opening of a third front — the effort to throttle the major Ho Chi Minh trails in Laos.

But for the airman it's way as usual, perhaps a bit more dangerous because the landmarks are strange. If it continues for any length of time, there will be new faces among the haunted POWs the enemy shows us on his propaganda films.

This war continues to set new marks for gobbledegook. President Thieu went on the air, as 20,000 of his troops slogged into Laos, to state that his country had only the highest esteem for the integrity of Laos. The invasion, performed under a cloud of American bombers, fighter-bombers and gunships, was a "legitimate act of self defense," Thieu reasoned.

Looking back, so was Cambodia, but things are hotter there today than during the period which prompted the opening of that particular front. In this meandering war, limited objectives have a way of degenerating into unlimited objections.

The first determined censorship of the war has clouded the American view of just what is happening in and over Laos. The mission would appear to be to have the Americans batter the enemy supply lines

from the air, after which enough South Vietnamese troops could go in and take up positions athwart those lines. That, in turn, would cut off the supplies trickling down dozens of jungle roads, paths and streams.

The strategy conveniently ignores, as usual, the prime source of those supplies: The port of Haiphong in North Vietnam. It is the funnel through which flows a vast percentage of all of the enemy's military hardware, oil, gasoline and other needs of war. It is a target that could be knocked out by a tiny percentage of the planes now engaged in peppering the many slender tentacles that extend from it and reach as far south as the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam.

Three Presidents since Gen. Eisenhower have weighed the pros and cons of shooting off the head of the Haiphong octopus and letting its serpentine trails dry up. All have concluded that this move — which would have been a routine reaction in almost any other recorded war — might provoke the Soviet Union or Communist China to take much more active roles in behalf of their ideological allies. At the risk, of course, of World War III.

"It's a crazy war," a Navy jet pilot once told me over a meal aboard the U.S.S. Kitty Hawk, between missions against targets in North Vietnam. "We go in over Haiphong as a rule and usually there's a big fat Russian tanker unloading there. We're loaded with everything: bombs, napalm, cannon fire, rockets. We could knock out the tanker with a brick."

"But its crew waves to us and then we go in and knock down a wooden bridge they rebuilt overnight. And for days after that we chase single oil trucks down the Ho Chi Minh trails, and maybe lose a couple of crews and aircraft."

On The Right Side
The Rewards Of Punishment

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



Through January the daily Liturgy of the Word for Mass tooted the difficult letter to the Hebrews. On Jan. 3 the daily Scripture narrated: "... God's discipline is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness. Being punished is not enjoyable when it is happening. But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character to those who have been trained by it..." (Hebrews 12).

Isn't it disconcerting sometimes to hear practicing Catholics who, of all people should manifest a firm faith in time of crisis, rebel saying: "Why has God let this happen to me?" Recently I received a good letter from the wife of a soldier I knew in 1945.

Maximilian S. was a member of our A.F. Group stationed near the beautiful Bavarian village of Holzkirchen, about 30 miles south of Munich. The year was 1945. In September he stopped me. "Father, I'd like to take instruction to become a Catholic." "Why?" I asked him, noncommittally. "Well, I don't belong to any church. Most of my friends are Catholics and I admire them. They are good men and they have real convictions about their religion."

For many years I used a correspondence course called "Instructions in the Catholic Faith." It was sponsored by Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. Our own St. Bernard's Seminary gave a similar service then. The text was Bishop Noll's Father Smith Instructs

Jackson. The tests were six in number, with 100 questions in each test. The questions were threefold: true and false; multiple choice; and fill ins. The course had three virtues. 1) The doctrine was sound and clear. 2) The tests required the learner to do personal study, and those who took the course did well. 3) There was a psychological factor too. The tests were not difficult, so if a student got 80 per cent he felt like a minor theologian. If he got 95 per cent he considered Thomas Aquinas good, too! Every man needs encouragement.

Max did well in the course. He was soon to be rotated back to the States. I told him: "Max. You have sufficient knowledge of the Faith. You've been practicing it well: regular at Mass, saying your rosary; keeping your nose clean. However, I won't baptize you here. When you've been home in Buffalo awhile, if you still want to be a Catholic, go to your local parish and ask to be received into the Church."

So it was agreed.

I lost track of Max for many years. Unexpectedly a letter came a dozen years later. Max had gone on to college under the GI Bill of Rights. He had embraced the Faith. He married a fine girl. Today he is doing administrative work in education in the mid-west.

A beautiful post-Christmas letter came from his wife, with the usual P.S. from Max: Simplicity, faith and thanksgiving exclude from the letter. "With

the holidays behind us, if I don't write to you this month, I'm afraid it may slip to next summer. I suppose the best way to bring you up to date on our beautiful happy life is to start from last January.

"Our son was married last January to a dear girl. M. was the one who suffered the breakdown while in the Service, but his illness was just another means by which we came closer to God. He is completely well and has a lovely wife... and family! They had a darling baby girl on December 27, just one day after we celebrated our wedding anniversary... As Christmas season approached and our 25th wedding anniversary, our dear children and their wives insisted that we have a celebration. To be honest it didn't take much coaxing. Our pastor had said our wedding Mass 25 years ago, and celebrated our anniversary Mass. Very small, but lovely." The anniversary was described succinctly. It concluded with this comment which parallels the thought of Hebrews. "I can say the only regrets I have over the past twenty-five years is that I did not realize that all the hard things I was asked to accept by God were going to add so much to our happiness at this time..."

Co-relate this thought with Hebrews 12:11: "Discipline is not enjoyable while it is happening. It hurts. But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character."

Happy Lent! That time of self discipline without which we become spiritual softies!

The Church: 1971

'Education' By Destruction

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



There are two ways in which one might engage in the re-education which has become necessary in the Church in the wake of the Vatican Council. According to one position, it is necessary first of all to destroy the superstitious faith that many Catholics have.

According to the second position, any reeducation which makes sense will start with what people have and progress to deeper and richer understanding. The second position assumes that the old symbols do contain truth and that the pre-Vatican categories did manifest a faith that was authentic.

There can be no doubt at all that from the point of view of educational psychology the latter approach is the one that makes sense. However, rather little of what passes for religious education has followed the second path; the prophets have been eager to destroy and not very eager to build.

One of the worst examples of this phenomenon is the European writer Louis Evelyn. Once a writer of pious books, Evelyn recently resigned from the priesthood and launched an angry attack on the traditional teaching of the faith. Dutiful Catholic liberals are hailing his

books as "opening up extremely important questions" and a "turning point in post-Conciliar thinking." If they really are either of these we are in bad shape. His most recent work is an emotional, shoddy piece of work, calculated to shock rather than to inform.

Thus, in one excerpt (dutifully published by the National Catholic Reporter), Evelyn asserts that the "Our Father" teaches error, that for 2,000 years we have said it without understanding it and that not a single Catholic boy or girl says it with any joy. "The phraseology as it stands is mystifying and alienating; it teaches error about God and about us."

Too bad for Jesus, since most Scripture scholars today would argue that He was actually responsible for the prayer (though perhaps not for its exact wording). And how does Evelyn know that no one says it with joy and that for 2,000 years no one understood?

On the opening words he comments:

Does religion lead to infantilism? Aren't we Christians condemned, or authorized, to remain children all our lives

because we have a Father, and an almighty one at that? ... We can remain little, ignorant and passive because we trust in "him who knows better than we," "without whom we can do nothing." ... One becomes adult vis-a-vis one's father when one no longer expects anything from him (and) when one knows that he has already given us everything.

There is readily available a completely different explanation in the Fortress Press translation of the famous article by Professor Joachim Jeremias. Jeremias points out that the word "father" in the salutation contains the whole of the Gospel of Jesus and is unquestionably His word. "Abba" is a term of great affection and familiarity which no other person but Jesus ever dared to use for God. By using it, Jesus claimed the closest intimacy with the Father and by instructing us to use it he summarized his whole Gospel message of God's incredible love for us.

If Evelyn is unaware of this well known scholarly explanation, he ought not to be writing books on prayer. Why is he out to destroy when it would be so easy and so helpful to build?