

# Criminal Attacks on Clergymen No Longer Rare

**New York (RNS)** — The murder of Father John Conlon in the rectory of St. Bonaventura's Catholic Church here has brought expressions of shock and outrage from residents of the city, including New York's Mayor John Lindsay.

But unfortunately criminal attacks on clergymen are by no means rare, here or elsewhere in the U.S.

In March, a 56-year-old Catholic priest was found shot to death in a ditch near Ft. Myers, Fla. Father J. Normand Hardy, pastor of St. Raphael's Church, was apparently on his way home from visiting friends on his day off.

Another Catholic priest, Father C. Laumar Schoppe, 41, was found dead in his living room in

Channellview, Tex., in January. He had gunshot wounds in the chest and abdomen. The rectory had been set afire, and it was not certain whether he had been killed by the gunshot wounds or the fire.

Last November, Father Henri Tomei, a native of France who was serving at a Catholic church in Los Gatos, Calif., was stabbed to death in a confessional.

While the motives for some murders have been obscure, and in cases such as that of Father Conlon the motive apparently is robbery, in other cases mental illness seems to lead the murders to focus on the clergy.

In March, a 25-year-old Vietnam veteran who said he killed a priest so police would kill him; and that he could then rise

from the dead "a good person," was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Father John Wessel had counseled the veteran on several occasions, and the veteran said he shot the priest from his upstairs apartment while Father Wessel walked down the street after a counseling session.

Several instances of clergymen being murdered in other countries have also been reported in recent years. A leader of the Lutheran Church in Italy, the Rev. Friedrich Wabnitz, was murdered in Milan last October. Robbery appeared to be the motive.

Police in Buenos Aires could offer no explanation for the murder of a 72-year-old priest, Father Fermin Juan Ochoa, during a Mass in a crowded church there.

Another apparent mental case was the attacker who stabbed Father Robert Primeau in the back while the priest was celebrating Mass for 700 people in Beauharnois, Quebec.

When the American-born Episcopal Bishop Dillard H. Brown Jr., of Liberia was murdered in November 1969, the admitted slayer, biology professor Justin Obi, told the court that the shooting was a "spontaneous, uncontrollable, medically disoriented and subconscious reaction."

In September 1971 an unknown assailant stabbed a 72-year-old Italian priest in a town near Venice. Father Giovanni Ballarin was found dead in the courtyard of a building he had formerly used to care for abandoned children.

Many people believe they can see a changed attitude that has resulted in criminals no longer viewing the church as something off-limits.

After a rash of armed robberies at churches in Nashville, many congregations began to review security measures. One clergyman noted that until recently locked church doors were almost unknown in the South, but they are becoming a necessity.

After suffering purse-snatchings, armed robberies, night break-ins and attempted rapes, the Riverside Church in New York instituted a security program in 1971 that cost \$100,000 a year, maintaining round-the-clock security guards.

And apparently the problem is not going away. In February the district attorney in the New York Borough of Queens told a gathering of some 100 rabbis, priests and ministers that they should install better locks and alarm systems.

He said 371 break-ins were reported by Queens houses of worship in 1972 and that the actual number probably was still higher.

## PARISH COUNCIL

St. Lawrence Parish recently accepted a constitution and a set of by-laws for the operation of a parish council. Major features of the documents include a listing of the articles of faith from the Nicene Creed and an insistence that candidates for the council both believe them and reflect their meaning in their daily lives. Leading the steering committee which drew up the documents were Father John A. Murphy, pastor; Bert A. Jones, chairman; Norbert S. Jagodzinski, assistant chairman.



Father Conlon's body is carried from the church.



OUR PARISH COUNCIL  
Bernard Lyons.

A job description for a parish council might simply state: "To see that the works of mercy are done."

Of course, there is a great deal of community building, administration, and other things to do, too, but what's the point of it all if the works of mercy are not being? What is the judgment that Christ will give us, according to the 25th chapter of St. Matthew?

I'm reminded of this because of a letter from an Illinois reader. In several pages he tells how the parish went about organizing their council. Then, in effect, he asks, "Now that we're organized what do we do?"

The letter writer is from a small parish and the council now ably shares many of the administrative, financial and day-to-day duties that the priest formerly had to do alone.

The challenge of organizing is gone now. The council has settled into a routine. It might be said that they are doing good, but not good enough.

Some real praying, observing, and imagining are needed. What would Christ do with their energy, resources, and time? And quite frankly, that's the only way Christ is going to do it — through them.

Five parishes in the Evansville, Indiana, diocese created a Christian Life Center, with representatives of each parish serving on its layboard. The pastors and associate pastors are ex-officio members. The center provides many services in the way of family life programs and a community newsletter. The center was also responsible for organizing a successful county-wide community organization that secures homes for low-income wage-earners.

The parish council of the Albany Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception has been running a bus service since late 1970 to bring elderly people to the 9:30 and 11 a.m. Masses. The

BUS (Bring Us to Services) program began when it was called to the council's attention that many elderly people could not get to the inner-city church.

A lending "library" of toys in Washington, D.C. gives poor children a chance to play with toys their parents can't afford. Financed by the National Institute of Mental Health, the library's staff of four also helps parents learn to make simple toys the children can keep.

Volunteers for the Oak Park, Ill., public library operate a service to provide books, films and records to persons confined (for two months or more) at home, in a nursing home, or in a hospital.

A grandmother who wanted to help others opened a store in Latrobe, Pa., to sell hand-crafted articles. Many of the craftsmen whose articles are sold in the store are retired people who need the extra income to make ends meet.

## VATICAN POST FILLED

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope Paul VI has named Msgr. Alberto Bovone, an official in the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, to the post of undersecretary of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Holy Office). The Italian priest succeeds Msgr. Charles Moeller, a Belgian, who became secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity last February.

## THE CHURCH 1973 Fr. Andrew Greeley

The Time cover story on the Jesuits was one of the better pieces of religious journalism that has emerged in the popular press in the last decade — though since Mayo Mohs took over as religion editor of Time, that journal has been remarkably free of the stereotypical clichés about changing Catholicism, which have become part of the journalistic conventional wisdom.

One need only compare the Time article on the Jesuits with Gary Wills' notorious Playboy piece (which many say led to the closing of Woodstock College — one supposes that Mr. Wills is happy for at least having gotten his revenge on his novice master). In Time the complexity, the pluralism, the conflicts, the problems, the possibilities of contemporary Jesuit life were I thought treated in a sophisticated and balanced fashion. I'm an outsider, of course, and couldn't say for sure, but most of the Jesuits I know were satisfied and even pleased with the article.

I like Jesuits; I studied with them for seven years, and was never particularly tempted to become one of their number, yet I always had a profound respect for their spirit and their work. I have watched with dismay the crisis the Society has gone through in the past decade, and read with sinking heart the various articles by the "new Jesuits," describing what being a Jesuit meant to them, articles which were generally written just before the Jesuit in question announced his intention to leave the priesthood to get married.

I have always been shaken by the periodic stories in The New York Times about Jesuits becoming interior decorators, stage designers, directors of underground movies or political candidates. I don't mind particular priests or Jesuits engaging in that sort of activity; what troubled me was that many of the priests in question seemed glib and facile in writing off the work that had been done by their predecessors. It was not merely that no one wanted to be a high school teacher anymore. It seemed that no one respected the work that the high school teachers used to — and of course that some continue to do. Cavorting around town playing Harlequin was "with it." Being in a classroom all day with adolescents was passe. One would like to think there was room for both.

Then there are the younger Jesuit scholars at the so-called Center for Concern. That they are "concerned" is obvious enough; they certainly tell us that in every one of their press releases. It is much more difficult, as a Jesuit sociologist remarked to me somewhat cynically, "to tell what it is that concerns them." One thing that does not seem to be on their list of priorities, alas, is

concern for responsible, careful, and dispassionate scholarship. Gary Wills tells us that John Courtney Murray is passe — indeed, more than that, he was the "theologian of the cold war." No doubt about it, John Murray would have had no place at the Center for Concern.

But if younger Jesuit scholars wish to follow the academic fashions of a couple of years ago, they will not cease to be Jesuits or part of the Jesuit tradition simply for that reason. The real problem for the Society — or so it seems to an uninvited outsider — is whether it can become more pluralistic, more flexible, more sophisticated in meeting the challenges of the contemporary era without at the same time condemning, much less losing, traditions that have held it together and made such a glorious contribution to the Church and to humankind.

I didn't become a Jesuit mostly because I didn't want to become a high school or college teacher. But I had no doubt then and less now that the educational apostolate of the Jesuits in the United States was an extraordinarily generous, imaginative, creative, and successful enterprise. If that apostolate is to be modified to meet the needs of changing circumstances, I shall not complain; but if that apostolate is eliminated, and eliminated particularly on the grounds that it was worthless, then I am sorry, my Jesuit brothers, I shall be very angry at you.

What's more, if Jesuits move more into the fine and lively arts, I shall clap my hands with enthusiasm and mutter sotto voce, "I told you ten years ago that you should be doing just that." But if they forget that for several decades American Catholic intellectualism was virtually indistinguishable from the Society of Jesus, and if they abandon that element of their tradition that was so brilliantly represented by John Murray, Gustave Weigel, and Joseph Fichter, I for one will be hopping mad.

The Time article suggests that in the midst of all the fluidity and the friction, the spirit of St. Ignatius of Loyola is still alive and well. I certainly hope so. The Ignatian tradition is not mine, but it is one that I value and respect, and I think the Church would be poorer without it.

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