



THE OPEN WINDOW
Fr. Louis Hohman

Note: This week's Open Window is in response to Father Cuddy's article last week, July 11.

Dear Father Cuddy,

Inasmuch as your article was in the form of a letter to me, I will treat it as correspondence to the Open Window.

As you pointed out, the many people who did not see the Wyoma Best Show are at a disadvantage. You and I also are, since what was said is not recorded. What IS recorded is your impression of what I said and your impression of the frame of mind in which I said it.

Father Cuddy, I was not joking. I was stating a happy fact, though my choice of idiom either escaped you or you have already labeled me as a wild-eyed liberal radical. When we say, for example, that a young person thought he had all the answers and now knows he has all the questions, we mean that he has adopted a new attitude which replaces smugness, or triumphalism if you prefer, with humble openness.

When I declared that we no longer have all the answers, I was referring to the fact that we are no longer a Church which regards itself as finalized, set in concrete. The multiple changes of Vatican II proves that beyond question. When I said we have all the questions, I was speaking of a state of mind which led John Courtney Murray to question a long held position that error has no rights. The record is clear as to how long he struggled and under what difficulties. The documents of Vatican II reveal that a new position, freedom of conscience for the individual, was put forth loudly and clearly by that Council. [Declaration on Religious Freedom, 12/7/65].

Other theologians have questioned the age old position on the relation of Church and State and finally won recognition for the American system of separation of Church and State.

Others have questioned the restrictions of the Biblical Commission on Biblical interpretation, so that in this generation we have arrived at a new and freer approach to Biblical studies.

Girl Scout 'Woman' Badge:
The Subject Is Dropped

The proposed Girl Scout merit badge, "To Be a Woman," which dealt with sex-related subjects, has been dropped after strong Catholic protests.

In its place will be an "awareness program" under the same name. The requirements of the program have not been defined.

The badge study was begun in a pilot program in Philadelphia where the idea originated. It had not been approved by the national Girl Scout office. After receiving information about the proposed badge Catholics from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia formed a committee on Girl Scouting that later threatened to withdraw sponsorship because of "religious convictions."

Sharon Cross, public relations director of the local Girl Scout Council, said a major objection voiced by Catholics was that while the badge discussed abortion, it made no mention of Birtbright, an agency which offers alternatives to abortion. The badge also dealt with contraception, venereal disease, and rape.

By forming an international commission to investigate the status of the Church's position on contraception, the Pope himself was asking a question. He must have regarded change as possible or he wouldn't have formed the commission in the first place. Regardless of the fact that he decided against change, he WAS QUESTIONING.

Numerous other areas of questioning in the Church could be cited. The point I am making reflects a change in attitude from one of regarding important areas of teaching and discipline as finalized and incapable of change or development to an attitude which makes very desirable a questioning of various positions in the light of new knowledge or developments in the world.

Questioning is not the same as doubt (I am not a doubting Thomas). Interrogation is not the same as derogation. Apparently you and I have a basic difference and I humbly submit that it is not a difference of faith or loyalty. I believe that basic doctrine has not changed and never can. But many important attitudes, interpretations, approaches and practices have. One of these is the right to ask questions and permission (to be given) to experiment in various areas. I would not be so rash as to define your position. But I will ask a question: do you believe that the Church would be better off today if Vatican II had never happened?

Now I have a slight quarrel with you. In paragraph 2 of your column you quote me as saying, "Now we have all the questions." In your second last paragraph you change the quote to, "The Church has only questions." (Emphasis mine.) Either you are being grossly unfair (and I reject that) or you operate from a frame of mind which precludes questioning (not doubting) in the Church.

In conclusion, my response to Wyoma Best was simply a glad recognition of a new openness in our Church to possibilities which had been buried in a mausoleum of triumphalism. If you see fit to bemoan that, please make it very evident that it is your point of view and not an act of disloyalty or facetiousness on my part. Thank you.

According to Dr. Cecily C. Selby, executive director of the national office, the requirements for a badge cannot be approved until they "fully adhere to all national policies, are educationally sound and have been reviewed by our three religious consultants."

While there are objections to the specifics of the badge, many people, including Jews and Protestants, are also opposed to the general philosophy expressed in it, stated Mary Jean Hart, chairman of the Girl Scout committee established by the Department of Youth Activities of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Those who drew up the requirements for the badge did not see sex "as God-given, which we do," she said.

Mrs. Hart feels the emphasis of the badge was misplaced since stress was put on the "negative" subjects such as rape and abortion whose study might be "traumatic" for many young girls. The badge was designed for girls in the seventh and eighth and ninth grades. She added that not enough attention was given to the "positive aspects of love in the home."

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