

Catholics Told: Cherish Ethnic Traditions

New York [RNS] — James S. Rausch is German, Slovenian and a native of Minnesota. He is an "ethnic Catholic" a few times over.

James Rausch (Bishop Rausch, general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U.S. Catholic Conference) feels that Americans have lost their "ethnic past," that they have been too intent on becoming part of the "melting pot" long advocated in the U.S.

The bishop addressed a session of a second annual conference on "The Church, Ethnicity and the Bicentennial: Towards A Rediscovery Of Values in America." His speech was made before the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs and the Catholic Conference on Ethnic and Neighborhood Affairs.

His theme: Do we really want a melting pot of American Catholics? His response: No, for the good of the country and for all those whose heritage is outside the 50 states of the Union.

"We in this country would do well in this 200th year to recall the facts surrounding the birth of our republic," he told the large throng of church theologians, sociologists, and educators.

"Catholics," he said, "like to remember Lafayette and Catholic signers of the Declaration of Independence, but we are not, except in spirit, the heirs of the

Carrolls and the Pulaskis in the strictest sense. In the years since 1776 there has been exploitation, poverty; the noble experiment of 1776 broke down many times.

"We ourselves, in our (Catholic) Church in America have not been without guilt. We have stood apart from each other because our cultural traditions have been different."

But, Bishop Rausch asked, "Do we really want a melting pot of American Catholicism? We like to think of Junipero Serra of California, of Mother Cabrini, of Newman, of Gibbons. . . . But let us acknowledge that, if we have lost the heritage of our fathers, it is because of neglect on our part."

Here he called upon U.S. Catholics, and in effect all Americans, to retain and cherish their ethnic traditions. "If we have lost the heritage of our fathers," he said, "it is because of neglect on our part."

"True values of American society are not conformity," Bishop Rausch stressed. "Conformity is urged on TV, in textbooks and even in church. Our effort must be a real one. Tragedy is that people grow up without a sense of history — except for WASP history. It is no denigration of the land we love to know the history of other countries. . . . (to be) conscious of ourselves as an immigrant people, a diverse people.

Michael Novak, a lay and often controversial Catholic scholar, noted that "even in the Trinity (there is) an emphasis on distinctness and on unity." In his speech, Novak said that "the theology of pluralism is essentially the theology of the Incarnation. Jesus was the first Catholic ethnic. . . . The theology of the Incarnation means roots, the land, the finiteness of our existence; the theology of the Incarnation is the root, the base of a theology of ethnicity, of pluralism."

Said Novak: "If you want to study the meaning of Christianity you have to become ethnic, you have to study the Passover, you have to know why Jesus prayed

the Psalms. . . . you have to enter into that particular culture just to know what He meant when He said 'Abba'."

"We need a theology in the U.S. which is much more adequate in expressing the way the Spanish hear the word of God. . . . Theology takes root in different ways in different cultures."

Msgr. Basil Shereghy, another speaker, spoke of pluralism, East and West, and the differences

between Eastern and Western Churches.

"Pluralism," he said, "is richness. . . . if we were more cognizant of pluralism in the Catholic Church we would be better Christians. In a Church there is unity but not necessarily uniformity. . . . the genius of many nationalities renders the Church richer and assures more freedom to individual members. So-called pluralism has always been present in the Eastern Church."

Hospital Cites 18 Employees

Elmira — Administrators of St. Joseph's Hospital saluted 18 long-term employees at a dinner Nov. 11. A 20-year award was presented to Judith Andrews, who works in linen distribution. Rosalie Ashley, recently retired, received a certificate of service for her 19 years on the housekeeping staff.

Lois Goostrey and Virginia Treat, both of nursing service, received 15-year awards. Three ten-year awards and eight five-year awards also were presented by John J. Reed, associate administrator.

Poetry Readings

Author and poet Joseph Bruchac will be in Rochester to give two readings which will be open to the public.

Sponsored by Poetry Central, Bruchac will read a selection of his poetry at the Genesee Co-Op on Friday, Nov. 21, at 9 p.m.

The following day, Saturday, Nov. 22, at 3 p.m., Bruchac will read from his new book of Iroquois stories, *Turkey Brother and Other Tales*, at Light Impressions Books & Frames, Inc. This will be part of the ongoing series of children's readings at Light Impressions in Midtown Plaza.

COLLECTING

Penn Yan — Students at St. Michael's are collecting soup labels to obtain audio-visual and athletic equipment. The project will continue until Jan. 9.

PANCAKES

Penn Yan — Cub Scout Pack 41, sponsored by St. Michael's, will have a pancake supper and breakfast on Saturday, Nov. 29 from 5 to 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 30 from 7:30 to noon.

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The Church 1974



Fr. Andrew Greeley

Jews are funny; they have all kinds of strange ideas. Like they think that their elderly immigrants are important people, and that it is essential to get their stories while they are still alive. So the American Jewish Committee has an elaborate project to interview the "survivors" — those Jews who escaped the Holocaust by fleeing to the United States (or other countries and then to the United States) before the Nazi murders began in 1939.

A substantial amount of resources are being invested in this task of historical documentation; long survey questionnaires are being administered and extensive tape-recorded oral histories are being collected. One of my colleagues who escaped from Holland one step ahead of the Wehrmacht has facetiously commented that she seems to be spending all her time lately answering interview questions. But the AJC thinks that the history of the "survivors" is important and that the investment of time and money in the project is justified.

Like I say, Jews are funny.

Can you imagine any Catholic agency investing money in interviewing the surviving Catholic immigrants from southern and eastern Europe — either those who came before the nativist immigration laws of 1920 or those who came in the DP wave of the late 1940s? Why should we waste our resources on such unimportant people? The old mamas and babushkas are tucked away in back bedrooms or old people's homes and we do our best to pretend that they are not there and perhaps that they never even existed. They don't speak good English and we are kind of ashamed of them. Hell, they don't know anything about liberation theology.

Who cares about their story?

Never mind that these were once strong, vigorous, brave young men and women. Never mind that with little education and few skills they left behind their farms and villages to set out on a terrifying adventure into a world which was totally unknown to them. Never mind that they came with little more than their ambition, their courage and their dream.

Never mind that in a few short decades their children and grandchildren have become more successful than the people who had been here for two centuries. Never mind that most of us American Catholics owe all that we have and all that we are to their vision, their heroism, their nerve.

Let's forget about them as quickly as we can; let's heave a sigh of relief as they die off one by one; let's pretend that we have no obligation at all to them, their work, their memory.

After all, the Jews who escaped the Holocaust were, as Daniel P. Moynihan put it, the most brilliant immigrants in history. You can be proud of surgeons, psychiatrists, musicians and artists. But who ever was proud of a babushka? It's not the courage that counts, it's not leaving behind everything that you had ever known — for in these respects the Jewish psychiatrist and the babushka were very similar. What counts is how well you speak English and how many letters you can put after your name. If a babushka had a Ph.D., then maybe her story would be interesting.

The American hierarchy has put a fat chunk of money into a bicentennial program which in multicolors tell us how bad America is. They have paid an incompetent Mexican sociologist to decry the presence of large Catholic schools in the inner city. These are important activities. Who could expect a bishop to think that oral history from the surviving immigrants would be worth a damn? You want to remind them that for all their power, they, too, are the descendants of poor, illiterate but very brave people? Don't be silly.

As the fellow said in "The Man Who Came to Dinner," I may vomit.

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