

The Church 1979

By Father Andrew Greeley

A Brief, Remarkable Papacy

I want to speak out in defense of Pope John Paul I as pope and as a man.



For some curious reason, there is the tendency to minimize Papa Luciani, to ridicule his "Illustrissimi," and to dismiss his September papacy as irrelevant. Commonweal magazine, with its usual sensitivity in such matters, was one of the first to jump on him and wrote him off as the pope that no one knew. Since then there have been many uniformed and occasionally stupid efforts to downgrade the "pope with a smile." I can't quite understand why.

His one defect as a pope was that he had bad health. Indeed it would appear that at least some of the cardinals who voted for him were aware of his bad health. The papacy is clearly a devastating job physically. The younger and more vigorous Papa Wojtyla lost five pounds during his first two months on the job. One can therefore say that Gianpaolo was not strong enough to be pope. This statement is self-evidently true.

But the other things said about him are simply not true. In the days immediately after his death,

the torrent of abuse came pouring out of the Roman Curia, a result apparently of the release of the pent-up anger that the Curia reactionaries felt toward Luciani and also part of subtly orchestrated efforts to elect Giuseppe Siri as his successor; an effort which, by the way, came much closer to being successful than most people realize.

He was indecisive. He could not get control of the job. He lacked intelligence. He did not have the breadth or the depth or the sophistication necessary to be pope. He was a nice, simple priest of the land who gave pious little homilies but nothing more than that. He spent far too much time on preparing the pious little homilies — more than he did working at the major administrative burdens of the papacy.

These stories have been repeated so often by people who ought to know better that they have come to be accepted as the truth. In fact, the truth is much more complex and much more interesting. Luciani was indeed a "priest of the land," a "sogarth aroon" as the Irish would say. But anyone who knows a priest of the land, be they Irish or Italian or Polish or any ethnic group, knows that they are vigorous, forceful, shrewd, and when they make up their minds, strong-willed and effective men. Luciani was all of these things. His reference to himself as a bambino papa was charming and self-effacing but it was anything but naive.

When asked once why he told so many jokes and

stories in his talks, Luciani replied that he did so because he had a squeaky voice and the stories distracted the listeners so they didn't notice his voice. In his last audience when he was quizzing Danieli Bravo, the pope carefully and gently pushed the boy's mouth to the microphone so that he might be heard by everyone in the audience. I saw the text of that final talk and what appeared to be a simple, spontaneous homily from the heart was in fact a carefully prepared talk, even with the jokes handwritten in the margin. The pope did not, however, speak from the manuscript. He rather gave the talk from memory.

Now all of these things suggest a remarkably skillful and professional teacher and public speaker. Luciani's stock-in-trade as a teacher was simplicity, but it was anything but unprepared or unsophisticated simplicity. Like all good professionals, Papa Luciani worked hard at being simple.

Nor was he indecisive. Those who worked with him in the Curia and are interested in reporting the truth will say he made decisions more quickly than Paul VI and that they were solid and shrewd decisions. He had more than enough courage.

We have been assured by Commonweal and by others that given time, he would have turned into a conservative if not reactionary pope. The argument is irrefutable. Nobody knows what kind of Pope John Paul I would have been if he had lived. All one knows is what kind of pope he was while he was alive.

Deaths

Father Grewen, 72; Former Rector

Father Robert F. Grewen, SJ, a former rector of McQuaid Jesuit High School, died Jan. 28, 1979, at Le Moyne College in Syracuse. He was 72 years old.

Father Grewen was one of the founders of the college and its third president, 1954-1961. He was here from 1963 until 1967.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated last Wednesday morning in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Syracuse, with burial at the Jesuits' Auriesville Shrine of the North American Martyrs.

The college announcement of Father Grewen's death said that he was the first Jesuit to be assigned to Syracuse since Father Simon Le Moyne's peace mission to the Iroquois 300 years earlier.

Father Grewen entered the Society of Jesus in 1924 at St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson and was ordained in 1936 at Woodstock. He held degrees from Boston College and a Ph.D. from Gregorian University in Rome.

He was the founder of Christ the King Retreat House in Syracuse, and when he left Rochester, he became



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its director. Since 1972 he had been executive director of the William J. Kirby Foundation, a private philanthropic organization.

Survivors are three sisters, Miss Gertrude Grewen, Sister Margaret Mary of Our Lady of Solace Parish, Syracuse, and Sister Rosaire, of the College of St. Rose in Albany.

Nellie Mason

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Saturday, Jan. 27, for Nellie Barry Mason who died on Wednesday, Jan. 24, 1979. The rites were concelebrated at St. Monica's Church by Father Joseph Reinhart, diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith, and Father Robert Schrader, associate at St. Monica's.

Mrs. Mason, a life-long member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and of St. Monica's Church, is survived by two daughters, Mrs. Elmer (Helen) Reichart and Mrs. Adelbert (Rita) Boss; one son, Edward Mason; two grandchildren, Mary Lou Miller and John Boss; two great-grandchildren, Karen and Kevin Miller; and several nieces and nephews.



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NFP Conference Set For Priests, Religious

A Conference on Fertility Awareness and Natural Family Planning has been scheduled by Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester for clergy and religious of the diocese. The conference is designed to offer guidance, support and information.

Scheduled from 10 a.m. to Noon, Tuesday, Feb. 27, in Room 309 of the Pastoral Center on Buffalo Road, the conference is free but NFP requests pre-registration by calling 716-464-8705.

The format will include a presentation by a panel composed of Bill and Casey Bennett; Dr. Frank Foley, NFP medical director; Father James Hewes; Therese M.

Petracca, NFP director, and Frank and Sue Staropoli, NFP board members.

In announcing the conference, Mrs. Petracca said that "many couples are looking for a natural, safe, and acceptable way to plan their families. NFP is an educational process which enables a couple to plan responsibly or to postpone

pregnancy through the freedom of fertility awareness."

Information will be provided on fertility, the Sympto-Thermal Method, history and effectiveness, spirituality, periodic abstinence, local program and services. A slide presentation will be used. Questions and answers and discussion will conclude the presentation.

Bishop Resigns

Washington (RNS) -- Bishop Romeo R. Blanchette, 66, has resigned as bishop of the diocese of Joliet, Ill., for reasons of poor health.

Pope John Paul II accepted

the resignation and named Auxiliary Bishop Daniel W. Kucera apostolic administrator of the Joliet diocese until Bishop Blanchette's successor is named.

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