

People and Events Of the World and Nation

Gun Control Idea Whose Time Has Come, Bishop Says

St. Paul, Minn. (RNS) — The president of the American Catholic bishops conference said here he thought the time had come for the bishops to lobby for gun control legislation.

Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis spoke at a press conference following celebration of a special Mass for the recovery of Pope John Paul II, seriously wounded in a handgun attack at the Vatican on May 13.

In a homily at the Mass, Archbishop Roach prayed for "those disturbed enough to do violence — that God may heal them and give them peace."

Queried at the press conference, Archbishop Roach said he had long supported legislation on handguns. He pointed out that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops had come out in favor of such legislation.

He emphasized, however, that he thought the time has come for stronger action by the bishops, including a concerted lobbying effort on behalf of gun control laws.

Iranian Scholar Takes Position as Envoy to Vatican

Vatican City (RNS) — The first ambassador to the Vatican appointed by the Iranian Islamic republic of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini arrived to take up his post several days after the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II.

Hojatolesiam Seyed Hadi Khosroshani, an Islamic scholar, brought a message from the ayatollah to the pope, but did not disclose its contents.

During the American hostage crisis, the ayatollah, as the de facto ruler of the Islamic republic, bluntly rejected an appeal from the pope for the release of the hostages.

Ayatollah Khomeini castigated the Vatican for not protesting "50 years of massacres and imprisonment under the most inhuman conditions" during the reign of the late shah.

The Iranian later charged that Catholic schools in his country were "not real schools but spies nests."

Khosroshani served as the ayatollah's representative to the Ministry of Islamic Orientation in Iran until his appointment to the Holy See.

Italian Voters Nay Church Bid on Abortion Law

Rome (RNS) — Despite a strong campaign by Catholic Church leaders and repeated pleas by Pope John Paul II, voters overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to limit the scope of Italy's liberal abortion law.

The proposal to outlaw abortion except in cases where the mother's life is directly at stake was defeated by a margin of between 69 to 70 percent.

Italy's three-year-old abortion law allows women, 18 and over, to ask for an abortion within the first 90 days of pregnancy, if there is a threat to her physical or psychological health. An abortion may also be justified for socio-economic reasons, in cases of rape, and if there is a danger that the child may be born deformed.

Bishops Urge Rejection of Death Penalty

Washington (RNS) — The United States Catholic Conference (USCC) has urged the Senate Judiciary Committee to reject death penalty legislation and instead seek "humane alternatives."

"The question before us should be this: How do we best preserve the human life and dignity of all persons, while at the same time ensuring respect for law and protection of society?" asked Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler of Charleston, S.C., in testimony for the USCC.

He said that "while the prevalence of violent crime in our society underscores the need for effective measures to prevent crime and to assure a swift and certain response to criminal acts, we believe that effective and humane alternatives can be developed without resorting to such simplistic and atavistic practices as capital punishment."

Bishop Roach Calls Sands' Death 'Useless Sacrifice'

Washington (RNS) — Calling the death of Bobby Sands in an Ulster prison a "useless sacrifice," the leader of America's Catholic bishops said he hoped it would make both sides realize "the inescapable need to avoid violence and to seek resolution of differences through peaceful negotiations."

The comment by Archbishop John Roach, president of the National Catholic Conference of Bishops, was a view expressed by other religious leaders. Archbishop Robert Runcie of Canterbury, interviewed in Los Angeles, said the "self-inflicted" nature of Mr. Sands' death contributed another painful dimension to the tragedy — "particularly for Christians."

He urged the people of Northern Ireland "not to allow themselves to be exploited for purposes of retaliation."

In New York, the National Council of Churches quoted Pope John Paul II during his 1979 visit to Ireland: "Do not listen to voices which speak the language of hatred, revenge and retaliation."

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York asked God "to enlighten our minds with the realization that peace cannot be established by violence, even by the violent taking of one's own life."

American Comedian Detained by Vatican Police

Vatican City (RNS) — Comedian Don Novello, who plays "Father Guido Sarducci" in NBC-TV's Saturday Night Live, was detained and questioned by Vatican police for impersonating a priest.

Novello, decked out in pink sunglasses, cowboy boots, a black velvet cape with red satin lining and sequined buttons — and a Roman collar — was enroute to the offices of the Vatican daily newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, to have his picture taken when he was nabbed. Novello's routine is that he is gossip correspondent for the paper. It is illegal to impersonate a priest within the walls of the Vatican.

Novello, without the Guido Sarducci persona, actually travelled as a member of the press corps during the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States. "He was very humble and reserved, a real gentleman. Not at all like you'd imagine," a press aide for the United States Catholic Conference said.

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Looking for the Lord

Playing The Game By the Rules

Protests have been directed against President Reagan's appearance as Notre Dame's commencement speaker.

One group is delighted that the President chose to accept this invitation from the many he has received. These people see the invitation as appropriate, the acceptance as an honor to the institution — simply because this is the President of the United States.

These people don't see the invitation as an endorsement of all of Mr. Reagan's policies and programs. They argue that no such endorsement was implied or perceived when similar invitations were extended to and accepted by other recent presidents. Why should it be different for Mr. Reagan?

Opponents argue that the honorary degree will, in fact, be perceived as Notre Dame's endorsement of the President's policies. They claim that even the appearance of such approval is grotesque when you contrast the values espoused by the university with the Reagan policies on budget cuts which will hurt the poor and on military aid to the ruling junta in El Salvador.

It is significant, I believe, that the contrast drawn is between values of the university and specific actions of the President. I suspect that Mr. Reagan and many of those close to him would maintain that they are committed to the same values of respect for human dignity, justice, compassion, etc., which are proclaimed by his critics.

They would say they differ in their judgments about how these values are best pursued in light of the circumstances which face the nation, the choices available to the President.

I disagree with the administration's decision to send guns and military advisers to El Salvador, though I realize I have little knowledge of the tragic and complex situation which faces the people there.

I also disagree with many of the administration's proposals which will hurt those who are living in or on the edge of poverty. I think the talk of the "safety net" to protect the truly needy is a political smokescreen.

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designed to obscure the very real suffering which will occur.

But I don't have any idea how I would deal with the actual needs facing the President — the need to do something to improve the economy, the need to avoid disastrous suffering for any group of citizens, the need to steer national leadership through the swamp of political interests and obstacles.

As one marginally involved in the service offered by Notre Dame, I do not feel that my values or those of the institution are compromised by the President's participation in the commencement.

At the same time, I don't regard this as the equivalent of inviting a guest to your home. Clearly, this address will have a political dimension, and I see nothing objectionable or offensive about non-disruptive expressions of disagreement with the administration policies.

I listened to President Carter address another group of graduates. He wasn't talking to them, he was talking to the press corps which accompanied him and through it to the nation and to the leaders of other nations.

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