

Red Mass Homily:

Rise above the Law to Find The Law

By Father William J. O'Malley, S.J.

Following is the text of the homily delivered at the Lawyers' Red Mass on Friday, Sept. 9.

In "A Man for All Seasons," Sir Thomas More — who had no idea he was a saint — said to his daughter, Meg: "God made the angels to show him splendor, as he made animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity. But Man he made to serve him wittily, in the tangle of his mind."

I was a boy so long ago that I look at pictures in old albums and say, "And whose little boy are you?" But I do remember a few things that little boy "knew." I knew from the catechism that my soul looked like a dirty milk bottle; and I knew that, if non-Catholics ever got to heaven, they'd have to live in less desirable rental districts; and I knew that greatest lesson of all: "You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout, I'm tellin you why: Santa Claus is...really God in disguise, and he's gonna toast your wicked buns in hell, baby, if you take one step outta the ol' samba line."

I was wrong, of course, but, ironically, that was precisely what made me a good little boy. It was the adults' game; they had the food, they had the stick, they called the shots. Okay, by me. I couldn't even figure out by myself what to do on a rainy Saturday afternoon. In my knee-pants cosmology, the Pope sat in Rome all day, and legislators sat in Washington all day, and God sat up in heaven all day, dreaming up arbitrary laws, making statistical studies of what people really liked and then red-flagging them. That was their job: to safeguard the candy stores and keep all the lepers and magdalenes of the village on the other side of the Lackawanna Railroad tracks.

When I was an adolescent, I gradually learned to respect the law for other reasons than the fear of punishment — although my blood still turned to raspberry sherbet every time a policeman walked by. But I began to be motivated by "What would happen if we all did that?" I was becoming a loyal citizen. During the years from 1941 to 1950, I was as blissfully certain that those who ate meat on Friday went to hell, as I was that every Oriental was a grinning rapist and every German enjoyed torturing people. Everybody knew that. I had no reason to doubt — because I had no reason to think. It had all been settled, boxed in, codified in unchallengeable rules — in the catechism, the Boy Scout Handbook, the Code of Canon Law, and the Congressional Record.

For me, the law had become what the tribe's totem is to a brash young warrior — no longer what the ancients had known was an inadequate attempt to focus an unfocusable god. The customs and totems of the tribe had become the god himself.

But then I fell in with questionable companions,

gentlemen of the Society of Jesus, blackrobed adepts reputed to skulk up the backstairs of monarchs with mysterious powders — and skulk down without them. It was these Merlins who taught me to smell rats, have hunches, be discontent with what "everybody knows." They freed me to bind myself never again to start an essay, "Webster tells us that 'peace' is..." From now on, I was vowed to wrestle for meaning myself. It was what I was created to do.

Sometimes, I suspect, my superiors now regret ever opening up that Pandora's box in the inner caves of my mind. But it's one of those bittersweet treasures that, once opened, can never be locked again.

I began to wonder why a Hatfield was a saint on the north side of the river, and a criminal on the south side of the river. I began to wonder how a law could ever make it an evil act to save an innocent Jew from annihilation. Finally, I began to wonder why it is a sin for Cain to slay his brother, when the Ten Commandments had not yet even been incised.

At last I'd probed down to the roots of the law. I had no less respect for the law or for authority, but I began to discern a difference between authority bestowed, by election or appointment or ordination or divine right, and authority achieved, by open-minded and painful research, an authority far more precarious and uncertain, but one, as a man, I found far closer to the truth: that is, to the way things are. The way things are is the will of God, not a divine command, but an invitation; not a threat but a challenge: to accept the things that can't be changed, to change the things which can be changed, and to spend one's life finding which was which.

I began, slowly, to grasp the fact that God gave us intelligence before he was constrained to summarize the human truths in the Decalogue. I began to realize that the law doesn't make an evil act, that the law is made by men and women, and men and women can make mistakes. I saw that, as soon as God had decided to make a universe — and human beings — the way he did, he had already written The Law. Before any commandment or statute or precept had ever been scratched on parchment or chiseled in stone, The Law had been written in the fibers of Adam and Eve and in the world they found around them. And God had given us that gift which replicates his image: intelligence, so that we might find that Law hidden deep down in the nature of things. There is where the ultimate Law lies, there is where the truth is, there is where the will of God for humankind is found: in the natures of things.

By the natures of things, we can't treat gin like gingerale or make a house pet of a scorpion. We don't tell gm or scorpions what they are and what they can legitimately do; they tell us. The same is true of a fetus: no law or assertion that it's no more than a piece of tissue, can change what the

fetus is — any more than the universal belief that the earth was flat forced the earth to conform to our necessarily inadequate perceptions and assertions about it.

Every human search — whether it's biology or theology or jurisprudence — is questing for the same elusive quarry, a more insightful answer to the question: what were human beings made for? But our schools are too segmented, methinks, too fenced off into specialized and mutually exclusive disciplines, as if the truth were segmented. All studies are spokes of the same wheel, pointing to the same truth, each from its own angle: how has God expressed his desires for humankind in the natures of things?

But what does all this have to do with that paradox-riddled gospel, about how fortunate the poor are? In a way, everything, because God has seeded paradox into the natures of everything. And in a way, nothing, because — as Job and Oedipus and Hamlet discovered — God is God, not answerable to us, not even to our intelligence.

The Old Covenant was a Law the human mind alone could have evolved, if it ever large-mindedly looked at the way things are, at the natures of God and human beings. It was a law of justice, of the "rightness" of things: if your debtor makes amends, you must forgive him. But the New Covenant, which has its roots in the Old, no human mind could have evolved, because it flies in the face of all that's still non-intelligent and ungodlike in us, in the face of all those urges we still share with our brutal simian cousins. The New Law is a law of love; it presumes justice, but it goes far beyond: even before your debtor amends, you must forgive him. We say that, so incautiously, every day of our lives: "Father, forgive me my debts to you only to the extent I forgive my neighbors' debts to me."

The New Law upends all our intellectual systems and Weltanschauungen and applecarts. The New Law says the poor are a blessing to the rich, because the tug of their need on our hearts — not our minds — invites us to forget ourselves, to get out of our own way in the search for the true natures and values of things, to find what we were put here for. The New Law seals all the loopholes. We must not steal or kill or bear false witness, but our purpose is not just to have a clean slate before the judgment seat of God. Far more: we must surrender ourselves to be used. We have it on the most trustworthy testimony that the touchstone of human fulfillment will not be whether we died with no claims on us, but whether we died letting every man woman and child in the Global Village lay claim on us. "I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was a 'freak.' Did you even notice?"

That nice little boy in the albums thought it had all been figured-out. Now he realizes that the reason he was put on earth was to figure it out all over again, for himself, and then to re-examine his fumbling answers with anyone who will listen.

Father William J. O'Malley, S.J., is a teacher at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

U.S. Third District Court:

USCC Not Required To Fund Refugees

Pittsburgh (NC) — The Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld a district court judgment that the U.S. Catholic Conference is not required to pay individual refugees \$500.

Six Indochinese refugees who were sponsored in the United States by the USCC brought a class action suit alleging that the USCC, its Pittsburgh office and Pittsburgh director Frank Chinh Nguyen had deprived them of

the equal protection and due process afforded them under the Fifth Amendment.

Don Hohl, associate director of the USCC Migration and Refugee Services, said the appeals court ruling shows that "refugees are not entitled to any specific dollar figure from the resettlement agency."

The USCC receives \$500 per refugee from the U.S. government to provide services to refugees, Hohl said. The refugees claimed they were each entitled to receive \$500.

The district court had dismissed the refugees' claim, saying nothing the USCC had done constituted governmental action.

In upholding the district court's decision, the appeals court stated that "our decision today in no way reflects a diminished concern for the plight of refugees. Rather, we hold only that nothing in the Fifth Amendment, the Refugees Act or the relevant grant agreement suggests that we should circumscribe the discretion of an organization that has worked long and hard to reduce the pains of resettlement for thousands of members of our diverse American community." The district court found

that plaintiff Liem Duc Nguyen received \$288 for rent and security deposit and found three jobs with USCC help; plaintiff Minh Cong Ha was refused reimbursement for a \$429 television set; plaintiff Kim Chi Thi Lam received \$790 for herself and three siblings; plaintiffs Tan Huy Nguyen and Dzu Thuy Do received no assistance from the Pittsburgh USCC office; plaintiff Vul Van Le was refused reimbursement for a \$210 radio cassette and a \$75 watch and received no assistance from the Pittsburgh office.

Novels Debated

"The female Image in Post World War II Polish Literature" is the title of the lecture to be given by Anna Dadlez, Ph.D. director for the Institute of Polish Studies at Saginaw Valley State College, University Center, Michigan, at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 12, Basil Hall, rm. 135, St. John Fisher College.

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Tax Credit Legislation Nears Vote in Congress

Albany -- Parents and supporters of tuition tax credits should write to Congress immediately because the issue will likely be on the floor of both houses this month, according to Msgr. Vincent Breen, chairman of the state Coordinating Committee for Educational Assistance (COCEA).

President Reagan called national supporters of tu-

ition tax credits to Washington on Sept. 16 to assure them the issue was the top domestic priority legislation. He told coalition representatives he expected the measure to move before the end of the 1983 session.

"This is the latest instance of Presidential interest," Msgr. Breen said, "and the most promising. The important thing now is to get those letters,

mailgrams and calls to members of Congress."

William P. Gallagher, executive director of the State Federation of Catholic School Parents, was among some 25 representatives of various schools across the nation to hear President Reagan assure them that tuition tax credits are an important part of his domestic legislative package.

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Two Elected To Nazareth College Board

Sister Elizabeth Ann LeValley, superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and Mary Elizabeth Brennan Weidenborner, former director of development of Nazareth College, have been appointed to the college's Board of Trustees.

Sister LeValley was elected to a three-year term and succeeds Sister Jamesine Riley, SSJ, former superior general of the order.

Mrs. Weidenborner, past president of the college's alumni association, was elected to a two-year term, succeeding Eileen Thane Morton-Cubitt.

Right to Life to Olivia C. Abortion. This is a pro-life



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