

Pope Strongly Defends Catholic Education

Vatican City (NC) -- Pope John Paul II strongly defended religious education June 28, urging all church members to maintain Catholic schools and asking bishops in Europe to stand firm against current "difficult situations."

The pope did not name particular difficulties, but the church has most recently been engaged in disputes over Catholic education in France, Malta and Spain.

Pope John Paul described religious education as a fundamental right, even in state schools. He added that families should not be forced by government policy to bear a financial burden to send their children to Catholic schools.

The pope spoke during a twice-yearly meeting of prayer and reflection with cardinals and Vatican officials in St. Peter's Basilica. He devoted most of his lengthy talk to the theme of Catholic education of youth,

which he said was "experiencing a delicate moment."

Catholic education today faces "multiple difficulties that have presented themselves here and there, and to which it is no longer possible to close our eyes and keep silent," the pope said.

Religious instruction, either in state-run or Catholic schools, is a right that "belongs to the concept of religious freedom and the truly democratic state," he said. Families with children in public schools, he said, should be guaranteed that the faith of their children will be safeguarded, and that their children's formation be completed with religious teaching.

"A school that deserves to be called a school must give space and be open to the requests of citizens, with the understanding and collaboration of the interested religions," the pope said.

Catholic schools, the pope

said, are essential for the full development of young Catholics in individual countries and therefore "must not be obstructed or reduced."

"The church has the right to have its schools, but it also has the duty to have them," the pope said, because such schools help promote human values and the progress of peoples.

Families must have the right, he added, "without any discrimination on the part of civil authorities" and without "being obstructed by heavy economic burdens" to freely select schools for their children.

"The church will never tire of supporting these principles, which are of crystalline logic and clarity," the pope said. He called on all Catholics to "make every effort to maintain the structures of the Catholic school."

"I address in particular all

my fellow bishops who, in various nations of Europe and the world, find themselves in particular situations of difficulty, which must be confronted with calm and firmness," the pope said. "I take an active, personal part in their concerns, their efforts and their activity in this area."

On June 24, there was a massive demonstration in France against an educational reform measure that would

tie state funding of the nation's private schools to the incorporation of private school teachers into the civil service. Both Pope John Paul and the French bishops have criticized the planned reforms.

In Malta, the church and government have fought a bitter battle for several years over Malta's efforts to secularize Catholic schools and confiscate church property. The Socialist government

there has threatened to take over Catholic schools in the fall, unless they offer free secondary education to students.

Spanish church leaders have complained about a series of school reform measures proposed by the Socialist government there, including the limiting of financial aid to private religious schools. Critics say the measures would force some schools to close.



American Visitor

Pope John Paul II and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger meet during a private Vatican audience. (NC photo)

BOOKS

"Gideon's House," by Jean Brody. Putnam's (New York, 1984). 206 pp., \$13.95.

Reviewed by Bett Lallo
NC News Service

Two sisters who have never been close are reunited when their mother dies, in this novel by Jean Brody.

Susannah, the young rebel and career-minded sister, left home at age 19. Now 33, a successful journalist and television personality, she returns to the family homestead for the funeral.

Kate, the older sister, now 35, has always loved the land and remained in the small town of Robina (population 1,245) in Oklahoma. She had inherited the family homestead — the house that was built by their paternal grandfather, Gideon Warrick. Warrick was a strong personality, a man of vision, courage and principles. He became a wealthy man and a pillar of the community.

Kate married the boyfriend Susannah left behind — Jason Garrity, a wealthy rancher. They have four children.

The sisters' meeting is far from a happy one. Neither is satisfied with her life, and each resents the other. Through flashbacks we learn more about Susannah and Kate and their rivalry.

The heart of the matter was the early death of their father when the girls were about 4 and 2 years old. Their mother, who couldn't cope, left the two sisters in the care of Gideon and his wife, Evelina, and visited from time to time.

The novel is written exceptionally well and has familiar and realistic situations along with good descriptions. A good story, certainly easy to read — I enjoyed it although I didn't care for some of the frank dialogue containing four-letter words which many authors seem to feel necessary.

The author is a talented writer, and "Gideon's House" is her first novel.

Ms. Lallo is a free-lance writer who lives in Arlington, Va.

"A Freedom Within... The Prison Notes of Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski," translated by Barbara Krzywicki-Herbert and Father Walter J. Ziemia. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (New York, 1984). 345 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by James C. O'Neill
NC News Service

A key to what is happening in Poland today — to the Church and the nation — can be found in these prison notes written 30 years ago. Nine months after he was named a cardinal in 1953, Stefan Wyszynski was forced by the Polish Communist regime to become an unwilling and unwelcome prisoner of the state for three years.

Taken from his Warsaw archbishop's residence in the dead of night, Cardinal Wyszynski, the primate of Catholic Poland, was literally hidden from his people for 36 months. During that period he kept notes about his life in captivity. Unintended originally for publication, these notes from the years 1953-1956 reveal some of the qualities of mind and soul of a most unusual man.

In the early entries, the cardinal is keenly

aware of the drama of his situation. He recalls his attempts to establish some kind of truce, uneasy and unlikely as it might be, between the Church in Poland and the Communist regime. "Poland, like the Church, had lost too much blood during the German occupation to be able to afford to shed any more," the cardinal wrote.

"I did not play politics, I did not play merely to survive," he stated. "I believed that a compromise in the relationship was absolutely necessary, just as it was inevitable that this country with a Catholic viewpoint must coexist with its official materialism."

In the 1950s, that was a shocking statement. It certainly was not a point of view easily accepted by the Communist Party or the Vatican. Cardinal Wyszynski believed that the war against religion in Poland might be different from the head-on confrontation experienced in the Soviet Union, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. This belief was based on Poland's 1,000-year history of Catholicism.

Fascinating as the political notes are, this book offers a great deal more. As the seasons change and life took on a routine, the cardinal revealed his thoughts and meditations. He saw prison as "a vocation" which God has often used to call witness to his Church. His prayers to Our Lady and to Christ were almost lyrical and so rich in imagery that they sound Oriental rather than Western.

He does not hesitate to grumble about his living conditions, the lack of heat, the piercing cold of a Polish winter along the Baltic or the news blackout and ban on visitors and family. He speaks longingly of his flock; he misses community Masses with the faithful. His health is a fairly constant concern.

Most keenly he defends the rights of the Church and he protests his imprisonment by the government. He frames his protests to the authorities both as a citizen and as a Churchman appointed to office by the pope. In his dealings with the authorities he bases his arguments on the Constitution which was set aside in his case. After two years with still no results, the cardinal is able to write, "If I had the hope of regaining my freedom at the cost of the slightest humiliation of the Church, I would choose a life of endless slavery."

Near the end of his exile and after living in three detention convents, the cardinal finally learned of the accusations brought against him in 1953. He laments that the Polish bishops failed to use his arrest as a means of challenging the government and seemed to agree to his removal from office. He also finds it in himself to pinpoint reasons for their actions and to forgive. Yet, while acknowledging the pressure and haste they were under, the cardinal cannot help wondering, "This (the Catholic population) was the bishops' chief source of strength. Were they aware of that strength?"

In the years that have passed since those words were first written, the Church's power in helping to preserve human rights in Poland has been acknowledged time and again. This is the political and spiritual legacy of Stefan Wyszynski.

O'Neill, a writer and publicist in New York, is a former head of NC News' Rome bureau.

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