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Bishop Opens 'Dialogue' with Reagan, Mondale



Bishop Matthew H. Clark, right, and Marcus Merriman, chairman of the board of St. Bernard's Institute, flank Edward Weston as he signs the contracts to syndicate the television show of the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

Bishop Matthew H. Clark last week released the text of a letter he has written to the two major presidential candidates, President Reagan and Walter Mondale.

The bishop's action, he said, was to encourage dialogue between religious leaders and political figures, deepening the discussions of issues beyond "just another appeal to voters."

The text of Bishop Clark's letter follows:

Early in the summer it became apparent that the issue of appeals to voters based on religion would permeate this 1984 election campaign. In the last month the relationship between religion and politics has been the subject of intense public discussion. As many of this year's issues possess a profoundly moral dimension, such appeals are appropriate, and such a discussion is necessary. For it is at the point where moral concerns are manifest in political debate that politics and religion inevitably intersect. Therefore, it is proper for political candidates to focus on these concerns.

If concern for these moral and political issues is to be deeper than just another appeal to voters, however, it is essential that a dialogue be conducted with religious leaders. It is to encourage this dialogue that I address you through this letter, and that I share with you my views on several critical issues.

I write to you as a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. As a religious leader, I have the responsibility to offer moral guidance that is derived from religious conviction. Too often morality is simply regarded as another form of opinion — to each his or her own view. In reality, however, moral conviction is the very ground which makes political discussion and debate both possible and significant.

To exemplify this, let me share with you four convictions that I believe are essential to rational public discussion and debate, and that are basic to the establishment and maintenance of community.

1. I share with you a profound respect for the dignity and significance of every person.

2. I share with you a conviction that there is a deep brotherhood and sisterhood of individuals and families across the earth.

3. I share with you the conviction that at the base of all civilization lies a recognition that respect for the human person, especially when vulnerable and defenseless, is essential.

4. I share with you a conviction that adequate food, shelter, health care and employment are basic human rights essential for the well being of our people and our nation.

Each of these general moral principles has a cutting edge in regard to our public policy. Each of them needs solid expression in our laws, and each should be fundamental in the debate on current issues.

I would like to highlight the application of these principles to three specific issue areas: abortion, the arms race and poverty. In prefacing my remarks on these issues, let me state that while my positions coincide with Catholic social teaching, I reject any suggestion that to enact laws that support these positions is to impose personal beliefs on the larger public. My approach to these three areas does not originate in doctrinal teaching such as the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, or the forgiveness of sin accomplished by God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead, my positions are based on the conviction that profound respect for all human life ought

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St. Bernard's Signs Contract To Syndicate Sheen TV Series

St. Bernard's Institute signed a contract last week with arts promoter and television pioneer Edward Weston to prepare for broadcast and to syndicate Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's "Life is Worth Living" television series.

The institute is the official repository of the Sheen archives, which includes both video and audio materials as well as books and papers.

In ceremonies last week marking the contract signing, Bishop Matthew H. Clark hailed "the true and lasting values" which "the face and voice of Fulton J. Sheen" will bring back to the television screen.

The series was the most successful of Bishop Sheen's ventures into television. It ran from 1951 to 1957; and, at its peak 127 stations carried it, reaching an estimated 30 million viewers. In addition, some 300 radio stations carried the audio portion.

Audience response was so enthusiastic that a single delivery of viewer mail brought in 30,000 letters, most segments averaging 8,000 to 10,000 units of correspondence.

The 10-year contract is primarily targeted at national and international cable television.

"My assessment of potential viewership," said

Weston, "indicates an ongoing, lively interest in Bishop Sheen. I welcome the opportunity to bring to cable TV a dynamic personality with a powerful message.

At signing ceremonies last week at the South Goodman Street Divinity Schools where St. Bernard's is located, Weston said that he was forming a new corporation, Fulton Sheen Communications, which will prepare the archive materials for television broadcast and which will market the series, as well as preparing and marketing audio cassettes by Bishop Sheen.

Bishop Sheen was Bishop

of Rochester from 1966 to 1969. Prior to that time his persona was legendary in broadcasting. He had won an Emmy in 1952, and from 1952-1977, he had garnered 14 media-related awards.

Bishop Sheen died five years ago.

Father Sebastian Falcone, president and dean of St. Bernard's, said the Sheen revival means that "neither the genius nor the message of Fulton J. Sheen has run its course." This is the meaning of this syndication agreement "five years after the death of this extraordinarily gifted and incredibly productive man," Father Falcone said.

Cuomo Speech Criticized and Praised

By NC News Service

Adding new fuel to the continuing debate over the role of religion and politics, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo's Sept. 13 speech at the University of Notre Dame was criticized as misrepresenting the teachings of the church but also was praised as a milestone in the church's history.

In the speech, Cuomo said that trying to legislate abortion policy might result in a loss of religious freedom and said that public policy depends on a consensus view of right and wrong.

"The price of seeking to force our beliefs on others is that they might someday force theirs on us," he said.

"To assure our freedom we must allow others the same freedom, even if occasionally it produces conduct by them which we hold to be sinful."

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., whose See city is also the New York state capitol, while calling Cuomo's speech "a significant contribution to the debate" took issue with Cuomo's assertion that a pro-life consensus must exist before anti-abortion legislation can be passed.

Using Cuomo's opposition to the death penalty and support of New York's new mandatory seat belt law as examples where no consensus yet exists Bishop Hubbard asked, "Why capital

punishment and not abortion?"

Referring to the new seat belt law Bishop Hubbard added, "The governor supports such legislation because it would save several thousand lives a year.... Why not a similar concern about saving the thousands of lives which are terminated annually through abortion on demand?"

Msgr. James T. McHugh, an expert on pro-life and family matters for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Vatican, challenged Cuomo's contention that Catholics collectively have views on abortion that are little different from others.

"There is no data specific enough for him to assert this," said Msgr. McHugh.

Msgr. McHugh also said Cuomo "badly misrepresented" church teachings.

"I'm criticizing (Cuomo) not simply because he was wrong, or because he did so much harm, but because he did it while attesting to be a loyal, committed, dedicated Catholic politician, and ended up being the antithesis of what any of us who studied the question of religion and politics would expect," he said.

He said Cuomo "introduced more confusion and more chaos into an ongoing debate about the relationship of religion and politics than

one could think possible in an hour's speech."

But Cuomo's speech also was praised by the chairman of Notre Dame's theology department, who had invited Cuomo to deliver the lecture, and by a Jesuit specialist on church-state relations.

The Jesuit, Father Charles M. Whelan, in an article to be published Sept. 29 in the Jesuit weekly America, called Cuomo's speech "an American classic" and a "milestone in the history of the American church."

Father Whelan, who teaches at Fordham University School of Law, said that while Cuomo did not answer all questions on the issue, he answered some of them,

particularly ones about his loyalty to Catholicism.

"His faith and convictions have a great deal to do with his public policy," Father Whelan said. "The bishops and the governor differ only in their practical political judgments."

The Notre Dame theology head, Father Richard McBrien, called Cuomo's speech "the most sophisticated by any politician to address the issue." He added, "It invites dialogue. He's not saying the last word."

The Rev. Jerry Falwell, president of the Moral Majority, speaking at

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