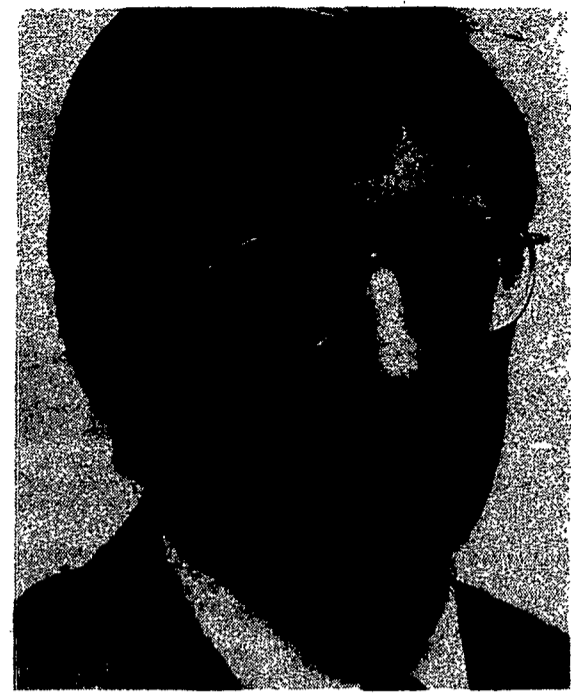




WILLIAM BUCKLEY

The Bishops And a Pair Of Pundits



GEORGE WILL

Or, Will the Christian Message Ever Occur to Buckley and Will?

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First in a two-part series
By Clarence A. Amann

Before me are three recently written newspaper columns. All comment disapprovingly on the bishops' letter on Catholic social teaching and the American economy. Two are by William Buckley Jr., one is by George Will. These are two of the most published archconservatives in America. It is to be hoped that soon some gifted economist-scripture scholar or clerical political-scientist will come forward to refute the pompous sophisms of these scribes.

Both demand of the bishops an expertise in dual disciplines of econometrics and ecclesiology, neither of which competencies either possesses himself. That deficiency in themselves does not keep them from pontificating in rebuttal of the bishops. Both have long suffered a chronic and chauvinistic American myopia, never corrected to give them a clear longer vision into which to fix logically a shortsighted American hubris.

When one has penetrated the meandering convolutions of the Buckley rhetoric, and absorbed the razor-sharp thrusts of the deft Will dissection, the intimidated reader is likely to be awed into either irritation or anger at the bishops' temerity in speaking so "authoritatively" on so complex a secular subject. After all, as the crystal-penned George puts it, these problems "have proven intractable in the face of the strenuous efforts by persons of intelligence and dedication." He is referring to the country's eminent braintrust in economics.

It never occurs to George that perhaps the very reason the problems have remained "intractable" is that the conventional wisdom is effete in the face of challenges that drive to the spiritual heart of mankind and will not provide the sacrificial altruism that alone will save us all from a sort of apocalyptic holocaust.

Is there a simple way for the less-lettered lay observer to respond to these cloned giants of the press? One could start by granting to these commentators a monopoly of the nation's pragmatic logic. They are the rationalists preeminent, the pragmatians supreme. Christ, "person of intelligence," in whom the bishops ground their humbler if no less "strenuous efforts," was neither consistently rational nor pragmatic. He came to a world already so skewed that justice could never be restored with the simplistic reasoning of human beings only rational and pragmatic, as the world measures both.

There is no way a world of individuals and societies, largely ego- and ethnocentric, will ever achieve a consensus large and effective enough to establish universal justice. Even if such were accomplished, it would at best install a perpetuation of the presently skewed status quo . . . it would not undo the imbalance . . . the scales would not come even.

The previous wrenching must obviously be compensated. And to compensate for a long inured skewing -- a truancy as old as Adam -- a measure of heroically impractical, non-rational, unreasonable overbalancing was needed, to be summoned from informed, conscience-possessed individuals and societies, a new consensus of the sacrificially altruistic. THIS WAS CHRISTIANITY, the community of the few, whose numbers and powers was to grow, till their overbalancing virtue would predominate and prevail against the skewing of the majority. Romantics they were, but from heaven; not from man, but from God-man.

So Christ came, not to call for justice and equity restored by good reasoning alone. It was too late for that. He came to bring a method new and impractical and non-rational as man-measured reason. A method maybe even absurd. How "reasonable" was it, after all, for a supremely innocent individual to yield up his life in the place of a supremely guilty society? Yet this was the

ultimate example Christ gave, so that his summons to impracticalities in lesser things might be taken literally.

These are the impracticalities to which the bishops summon our American social agenda. It is to be imagined that when they repair to their respective closets each morning to vest, pundits Buckley and Will find there more than a single pair of trousers or a single coat. A summons to a more perfect response to the Baptist's insistence: "Let the man with two coats give to him who has none" would likely evoke knowing smiles from these realists, patronizing and practiced. And the same response would find easy voice in the rationalizations they'd assign to Christ's own impractical challenge: "There is one thing more you must do. Sell all you have and give it to the poor." Hardly Kenesian or Kempian economics. Literal acceptance of the Gospel message, we are told would be impractical and would demean the donee . . . and the same rationalizing lets the conventionally wise insinuate the bishops'

immature ingenuousness-run-to-folly when "all reasonable men" know that observing the Christian structures would "upset the economy." Where in the scriptures does Christ blunt the edge of his urgings with suggestions they are but "a manner of speaking?"

In another century, G. K. Chesterton explained the seeming failure of Christianity thus: "The Christian method has not been tried and found a failure; it has been found difficult and has not really been tried." Even as I write, I hear economics commentator Michael Harrington (on the Buckley Firing Line show) remind the audience that the country's econometric braintrust has been sorely confused and ineffective in the face of recent problems; few of the conflicting predictions forthcoming have warranted trust in the collective expertise of the "persons of intelligence and dedication" Will tells us inhabit the profession.

NEXT WEEK: Suggested reading for Messrs. Buckley and Will.

Bishop to Celebrate Mass of Hope Jan. 27

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

COURIER-JOURNAL

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Vol. 96, No. 17 January 23, 1985

Courier-Journal (USPS 135-580)
Published weekly except week after July 4 and Christmas, by the Rochester Catholic Press Association. Subscription rates: Single copy 35¢. 1 year subscription in U.S. \$15. Canada and Foreign \$20. Offices: 114 South Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607, (716) 454-7050. Second Class Postage paid at Rochester, N.Y. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Courier-Journal, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

will celebrate a Mass of Hope for all diocesans at 3 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 27, at St. Thomas More Church, 2617 East Ave.

According to a diocesan press release, the purpose of the Mass is "to pray for all life, especially suffering life."

The Mass is sponsored by the diocesan Human Life Commission, along with the International Justice and Peace Commission, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the diocesan Sisters' Council.

Assisting Bishop Clark will be Fathers Anthony Mugavero and David Mura, and Deacon Patrick Greybill of NTID. A reception in the school will follow.

Transportation arrangements may be made through parish contacts or by calling the Human Life Commission at (716) 328-6400; Finger Lakes area: (315) 789-2686; Southern Tier area: (607) 734-9784; or Livingston area: (716) 226-8957.

Mother Teresa Plans Visit To Peking

Peking (NC) -- Mother Teresa of Calcutta will visit Peking Jan. 20-22 as a guest of the National Association of Patriotic Churches, the only government-recognized organization for Chinese Catholics.

The official Chinese news agency Xinhua confirmed an Indian news report of the visit.

Mother Teresa, winner of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Missionaries of Charity, said her mission will be to "provide succor to the poor" in China.

Since the communist takeover in 1949, the Chinese government has refused to accept any ties to the Vatican. The National Association of Patriotic Churches rejects Vatican ties and has illicitly ordained its own bishops and priests.



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Sister Joanne Marie Andiorio, R.S.M.
President & Chief Executive Officer
The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-5166

