

Editorial

Abortion Signers Should Drop It

Ever since the Revolutionary War, Americans have displayed a penchant for challenging authority. Good or bad, it is a national personality trait the Vatican should try to understand.

This national mentality may have contributed somewhat to the statement signed by Catholics challenging the Church's position on abortion which appeared Oct. 7 in the New York Times. Perhaps if the Vatican had taken a different tack in reacting to this advertisement, the issue would not be receiving such public notice at this time.

The ad appeared in conjunction with the presidential campaign. After the election, the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes ordered all Religious who signed to retract publicly or face expulsion from their orders. Of 24 nuns and 3 male Religious who signed, only a priest and a Christian Brother have retracted.

Now, according to National Catholic News Service, more than 30 who signed the statement have met in Chicago and said they would launch a public counteroffensive to the Vatican's action. The 30 reportedly were equally divided between nuns and laypersons.

The statement signers seemingly are taking the tack that abortion doctrine is not so much at issue here as are freedom of speech, right of dissent and rights of women in the church.

A quaint Americanism may be apropos. Hogwash! First of all, the original statement which claimed that there is more than one "legitimate Catholic position" on the morality of direct abortion is patently faulty. That is obvious to just about everybody, from the leading theologians to the simplest person in the pew to the magisterium and back again. That abortion is wrong is, and has been, a clear and immutable teaching of the Catholic Church, regardless of positions taken by politicians on one side or the other.

Still in the interest of the American way, let's say those who signed the petition merely wanted to flex some American political muscles and see how far they could get with the Church. Obviously their balloon didn't fly and they should accept that, despite the Vatican's heavy-handed way of dealing with a delicate situation. After all, the signers got the attention expected of the expense of a full-page ad in the New York Times.

And for raising the time-honored American cry of freedom of speech, no one has been denied such. The Vatican simply has stated that those who stand behind the statement cannot remain members of the church's religious orders. Except for that they can sign as many ads in the New York Times as they can afford.

One of the saddest aspects of this dreary affair is that the statement signers decided to choose the abortion issue as a purported battleground over freedom of speech, the right to dissent and women's rights.

Sad because there are many in this country who will welcome such a seeming crack in the wall of perseverance necessary to reverse the killing of 1.5 million babies annually in this country.

Sad because it misleads thousands of women caught in the heart-rending despair of problem pregnancies.

Sad because by raising women's rights in this issue, it will tend to hurt their cause in other areas such as the effort to gain more effective position in the Church.

Sad because the controversy will provide ammunition to continuing anti-Catholic sentiment, also part of this nation's complicated and often bigoted psyche. It is to be noted that while some Vatican officials do not understand Americans, there are also many Americans who do not, or do not want to, appreciate the Catholic Church, the necessity for its moral pronouncements and the machinery established for its teachings.

Sad because the action, directed by Catholics for a Free Choice, took its lead from political Catholics, such as Gov. Mario Cuomo and vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro who during a political

campaign contributed to a distortion of the Church's position on abortion.

Saddest of all because the continued denial of the most basic right of all to this nation's unborn is being forgotten as some resort to peevish displays of casuistry over their own lesser causes. Consider, since last October, while some have been free to sign fullpage ads in newspapers, free to vote for the presidential candidate of their choice, free to meet in Chicago to do verbal battle with the Church, free to draft petitions to secure their own perceived rights, free to ignore the basic issue of abortion, some 500,000 babies have lost the freedom even to live.

Guess Who's Upset

When the Vatican, figuratively speaking, dragged out the Tridentine Mass, dusted it off and made it available again under certain conditions, it must have realized that it was opening itself to criticism.

But it is to be wondered if it could have foreseen such rebuke coming from Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his cohorts.

Far from being relieved at the Vatican action, the followers of the dissident French prelate have charged discrimination to the conditions set for celebration of the Tridentine rite.

In restoring the option, the Vatican said it is to be available only on request with permission of the local bishop who should allow its use only by priests and faithful who accept the liturgical changes in the new Roman missal.

However, a spokesperson for Archbishop Lefebvre said the Fraternity of St. Pius X would not be satisfied until it underwent "strong revision."

On top of that, the Lefebvre minions who have been largely silent since Pope John Paul II read the riot act to Lefebvre have seized on this perceived opening by the Vatican to begin again demands that the archbishop be reinstated from the suspension imposed by Pope Paul VI.

The leaders of the Church should remember that nobody ever said that running a religion would be easy.

and Opinions

A Sign Of Support

EDITOR:

In retrospect the rise of a Hitler and his demonic manipulation of nationalistic sentiment in a 20th century Christian nation seems unconceivable. Why were there so few who objected, particularly from within the Church?

We need not wonder nor judge German Catholics of the 1930s without looking at our own tepid resistance to the ultimate in Gas Ovens which our own nation continues to produce in the form of nuclear weapons. One can, after all, say no, I'll not participate in their construction, just as Austrian farmer Franz Jaegestatter said no, I'll not carry a gun in Hitler's army, or as theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "I'll not bless the Third Reich even if the majority of churchmen do justify it by their silence."

To think that at this moment there are only some 4,000 U.S. citizens willing to say no, by refusing to pay their federal war tax to feed a growing military machine that could turn against U.S. citizens in a blink of an eye and which is already exterminating poor people of the world as it siphons off scarce world resources to produce more arms.

Charity and morality begin at home. Saying no to unwise, if not abusive authority, sometimes has to be done within the Church itself. That is to say, one can be a conscientious objector to the exercise of authority within the Church as surely as in the civic order.

It's probably harder to say no to Mother Church than to the impersonal State. Even

though Mother does not execute its supposedly wayward sons or daughters, a mother's rejection can be more painful than death itself.

The decision of the Holy See to push Father Fernando Cardenal of Nicaragua out of the Jesuits is painful for those who run the same risk, if not at the same level as Father Cardenal. History so often vindicates people of his lucid convictions. For example, even a Martin Luther who raised havoc with church discipline has higher historical standing than some of the popes who were his contemporaries.

It seems to me the Church should honor rather than chastise the pure of heart, whether it be in the person who goes to jail peacefully opposing abortion, opposing nuclear war, or standing by a poor Central American nation which militaristic capitalism is "inviting" at gunpoint to return to the fold.

For my part, I'm on record in solidarity with Father Cardenal and I've invited my parishioners to do the same.

Father Bernard A. Survil
Casa Cural
Esquipulas de Matagalpa
Nicaragua

Latin Mass Served Unity

EDITOR:

Celebrating the Mass in Latin was the biggest bind between Catholics in the world in my opinion. It also gave a big spiritual uplift for those who willingly, or unwillingly, landed in a foreign country, not speaking the language, but had the opportunity to attend a Tridentine Mass.

The most memorable Easter in my life was in 1943

during WWII, when with the Hungarian army I was in Russia. Shortly before Easter our unit was placed in a few small hamlets of an enormous forest. Our chaplain celebrated Mass on Sundays and this news went around quickly among the Russian civilians, mostly women, children and very old men. On Palm Sunday, an old Russian man came to our Mass. After, he talked to our chaplain (through an interpreter) and told him that the KGB took their priest away in 1919 and since, he had been teaching the young people secretly in our religion.

He saw at the Mass that we were Roman Catholics and asked permission to bring his "parish" next Sunday, Easter, to our Mass. He asked if our chaplain could hear confession, baptize, and could they receive Holy Communion.

On Easter Sunday, more than 200 (as I recall it) Russians came over from several hamlets, walking miles and miles. During the Mass, one song was in Russian, one in Hungarian. The differences between us disappeared and we became one big family, God's children, Roman Catholics. Eyes were filled with happy tears, Russians and Hungarians alike. It was a miracle and the tool to this miracle was the Tridentine Mass.

When we fled Hungary from Communist Russian occupation and persecution and landed in Austria, we had to face strange surroundings and hardships, day after day over four years. It was the Holy Mass, celebrated in Latin, which eased our hopelessness. We felt at home again and it gave us new strength for the next week's struggle.

It was the same when we arrived in the U.S.A., a strange land (at that time),

Not speaking the language made it more difficult. But attending a Mass celebrated in Latin made us feel at home. It gave us strength and hope again, that we were not alone.

I am not revolting against the liturgical changes made in 1970 at all. However, sometime I wonder, that the present age when hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Catholics are traveling and/or relocating from their homeland yearly, willingly or unwillingly, for pleasure or business, or just to save their lives, going to countries whose languages they do not speak, how many Masses are they missing and the blessings of these services, due to the new liturgical changes?

Dr. Andrew N. Juhasz
305 Fifth St.
Watkins Glen, N.Y. 14891

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Dr. Juhasz for sharing his unusual and difficult experiences with our readers. It should be pointed out, however, that Masses in Latin have always been available under the new order of the Mass. The Church difficulties with the Tridentine Mass involve more than language.

Opinion Appreciated

EDITOR:

It was fair-minded of you people to print the "Renovation Opposed" opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Dugan concerning Mother of Sorrows. Nice to know you.

Leo J. Reger Sr.
1121 Britton Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14616

Seeks Other Sufferers

EDITOR:

As a scleroderma patient who has suffered alone for



too many years with a disease that few people have ever even heard of, I am attempting to locate others who suffer from scleroderma (systemic sclerosis).

My New Year's resolution is to correspond with as many scleroderma patients as possible. Doctors tell me there are 300,000 of us. Perhaps your readers can assist me in locating others like myself.

Diane Williams
21 Brennan St. No. 21
Watsonville, Calif. 95076

Too Much \$ For Building?

EDITOR:

Two contrasting news items in your Jan. 16 issue must have many Christians shaking their heads. Mother Teresa gave praise to the Ethiopian government for its help in relocating famine victims in that devastated country.

The adjacent article illustrates a sketch for a \$20 million Washington headquarters for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. It might be interesting to your readers to know just how our bishops intend to raise this money. How they, in good conscience, can consider such an edifice is incongruous!

Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Eberhardt
150 Sylvania Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14618

EDITOR:

How can the National Conference of Catholic Bishops justify the expenditure of \$20 million for such a palatial center in Washington in light of their commitment to economic justice for the poor? Can't they meet at the Catholic University or Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and use the \$20 million to help the disadvantaged instead?

Mrs. Grace B. Carnes
161 Eagle Ridge Circle
Rochester, N.Y. 14617