



Little Revellers

Kindergartners at St. Mary Our Mother School in Horseheads stage a circus celebrating the completion of their first letter book. In attendance are faculty, pupils and parents. The children were led by their teacher, Mrs. White, dressed as "Bouncer the Clown." The children also sold balloons, popcorn and peanuts, and donated the proceeds to Father Bruce Ritter's New York City Covenant House.

Abortion Dissenters Plan Public Campaign

Chicago (NC) -- More than 30 Catholics who signed a statement last fall questioning church teaching on abortion have said they would launch a public counteroffensive to the Vatican's action against the Religious who were among the signers. The Vatican and a committee of the U.S. bishops have characterized the statement, which appeared Oct. 7 as an ad in The New York Times, as a direct attack on the church's teaching on abortion. Signers have pressed freedom of speech,

rights of dissent, and rights of women in the church, rather than church doctrine, as the issues at stake in the controversy. At a meeting in Chicago Jan. 19-20 the group of signers agreed to draw up a new statement, seek signatures from Catholics across the country, and publish it, possibly through newspaper ads such as the one which started the controversy. Among 97 signers of the original ad, 24 were nuns and

three were men Religious. Last November the Vatican's Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes ordered all Religious who signed to retract publicly or face expulsion from their respective religious orders. Since then two of the men Religious -- a Franciscan priest in Ohio and a Christian Brother in Illinois -- have made public retractions. The Vatican congregation's complaint about the ad focused on its claim that there is more than one "legitimate Catholic position" on the morality of direct abortion.

For a consecrated Religious to uphold that view publicly "in contradiction to the teaching of the church," the congregation said, "is a flagrant scandal and is sufficient cause for...dismissal." More than half of the nuns who face possible disciplinary action for the ad were at the Chicago meeting, according to Frances Kissling, head of Catholics for a Free Choice, the organization which sponsored the Times ad.

Ms. Kissling said she did not have precise numbers, but about "30 to 40" signers of the ad attended the Chicago meeting, and participants were "pretty evenly divided" between nuns and laypersons. That would mean about 15 to 20 of the 24 nuns involved were at the meeting. Entry to the meeting was restricted to the 97 signers of the Times ad, Ms. Kissling said.

Regarding the campaign the group decided to launch, she said, "It was felt that this campaign would protect the right to dissent and affirm a participatory model of church." It should also "work for recognition of the role of women as ecclesial subjects, not objects in the church, and seek to conscientize and mobilize church members on these matters," she said.

The group also plans to hold open "hearings" on those issues March 4-5, she said. Ms. Kissling said a committee was formed by the group to coordinate the activities. Nuns on it are Sister of Loretto Maureen Fiedler and Dominican Sister Marjorie Tuite, and the rest of the members are non-Religious, including herself, she said. Asked who heads the committee, she said, "There is no head. We're trying to build a participatory model of the church."

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Fictional Revelation

Last week, Sydney J. Harris, one of my favorite columnists, wrote the following: "You may have heard the story of the little boy in art class who was busy at work when the teacher came up behind him and asked, 'What are you doing?' 'I'm drawing a picture of God,' the little boy replied. 'But nobody knows what God looks like,' protested the teacher. 'Well,' said the little boy, 'they will when I get through.' "Most of those fervent preachers we hear on the Sunday morning television programs remind me of this little boy -- but whereas he didn't know any better, they should. "For a combination of ignorance and arrogance (which they mistakenly interpret as faith) it is hard to beat these clergymen. St. Thomas, the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, admitted that we cannot know what God is, only what he is not -- but these spell binders insist that they know how He wants us to vote. "To me, at least, the greatest blasphemy in the world is not the denial of God's existence, but the claim that we have a pipeline to him, and that all other claimants are wrong." Harris presents some very interesting thoughts.

I don't know how he would define "pipeline" to God but we as Christians believe in a specific divine revelation. If he is denying that (and I don't know he is) we would have a problem with what he says. We believe that in the Bible and particularly in Jesus Christ, God has revealed Himself to us in a way that we can grow in knowledge of Him -- not just intellectual knowledge, but knowledge in the biblical sense, i.e., closeness in relationship. With Harris, I reject the kinds of revelation he deplores on the part of those preachers, the kind which is private to them but meant for everyone and dealing with things like for whom we should vote. In Catholic doctrine, even if one of them was given such a revelation (and we cannot limit the possibilities for God) we would have no obligation to accept it as a revelation from God. One of these revelations which bugs me most is the one whereby certain preachers can take the Bible and declare that there are passages which directly refer to the Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon or state categorically that certain passages refer to the conflict in our century between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and give specific answers to our government. That kind of thing is the shearest fiction and not worthy of the consideration of those who are serious about religion and the knowledge of God.

St. Bridget

The Feminist St. Patrick

Move over, St. Patrick. It's time for St. Bridget to have her Day. Wearers of the green should honor St. Bridget on Feb. 1, her feast day; says Robert Meyer, professor emeritus of Celtic languages at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. "Enough of St. Patrick and all the malarkey about his driving the snakes out of Ireland and the penitents to Lough Derg," maintains Meyer. "That retreat center didn't even exist until some six centuries after his death." Many people today overlook St. Bridget, who was born in the fifth century at Faughart in County Louth near Dundalk. For many centuries she has been considered one of Ireland's trinity of saints, along with St. Patrick and St. Columkille, says Meyer. "Bridget worked many miracles, most of them modeled after those of Christ -- she could change water into beer, heal lepers, cure the insane, drive out demons, heal the sick and give sight to the blind," recounts Meyer. Bridget, also known as St. Bride or Brida, is sometimes depicted milking a cow or standing near a barn, but she was no simple country girl, says Meyer. "She was the Irish patroness of poets and learning and is frequently pictured with a pastoral staff in her right hand and a book in her left. Sometimes Bridget is shown hanging her mantle on a sunbeam. She was the founder and abbess of a community of nuns at Kildare."

One of the earliest hymns in the Irish language eulogizes Bridget as "one of the columns of the realm with Patrick the pre-eminent" and as a "golden sparkling flame," a "dazzling resplendent sun," a "branch with blossoms," and even "the mother of Jesus." Bridget inspired many intriguing stories, says Meyer. "One legend claims she was consecrated a bishop by a Bishop 'Mel,' which means 'honey.' He gave Bridget the pallium, the veil. Nowadays only a bishop of an archdiocese wears the pallium, given by the reigning Pope." According to another legend, Bridget fell asleep while St. Patrick was preaching a sermon. Later, he analyzed her dream. Also of interest is a poem attributed to Bridget, beginning, "I should like a great lake of ale for the King of Kings." Scholars consider the poem to have mystical significance and to be the possible origin of the reference to her beer miracles. Scholars also trace her legends to an earlier Bridget who was a Celtic deity and woman of learning who tended a perpetual fire. She converted this fire, a site of pagan ritual, into a Christian religious sanctuary. "St. Bridget was no mere magician or show-off," asserts Meyer. "She performed her miracles for the glory of God and the alleviation of human suffering. "So great was her awe of St. Patrick, however, that she never dared work a miracle in his presence. Today, the story might well have been different."

Skate-a-Thon To Benefit Children

The second annual Strong Kids Skate-a-Thon is scheduled from 1-4 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Omni Skateway, 755 Ridge Road, Webster. Proceeds will be donated to the Strong Children's Medical Center. Co-sponsor of the event is WMJQ-92 Radio. Participants will receive free pizza, food and drink coupons, and free admission and skate rental. There will also be grand prizes for the top six participants collecting the most pledges. Pledge envelopes are available at Omni Skateway and Old West stores at Eastway Plaza, East Ridge Road, and Long Ridge Mall. For further information, contact the Strong Children's office at 275-8261.

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