

Father Richard P. McBrien

Essays in Theology



The siege of Port Marly

Some of you may have read about the trouble they're having over in France with the takeover of a parish church by a group of Catholic traditionalists, under the leadership of a "dissident Benedictine monk?"

For the past six months, the Church of St. Louis in Port Marly has been a battleground, involving a divided laity, the bishop, the mayor, the local police and a national political party. The fight started with the appointment of a new pastor last year. Before then, the parish had been a Mecca for extremely conservative French Catholics.

Under the previous pastor, St. Louis was the only parish in the region that continued to celebrate Mass in Latin. When the Bishop of Versailles appointed a new pastor, he gave him instructions to celebrate Mass in French, according to Vatican II norms.

The new pastor's arrival provoked an outburst of protest and resistance. The traditionalists enlisted a Benedictine monk, ordained by the schismatic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, to act as their pastor.

Last November, the traditionalists occupied the church and barred the priest whom the bishop had appointed. Early in April, however, the church was taken back by 50 police officers wielding night sticks. According to press reports, they dragged people from the building just as Mass was about to begin. Then the police barricaded the entrances with cinder-block, buttressed by heavy wooden beams.

A week later, about 3,000 traditionalists, most of them not from Port Marly, held an Easter Mass outside the church. In an unguarded moment, a dozen or so attacked the barricade with a battering ram. The traditionalists re-entered the church and, at this writing, retain control — in spite of the objections of the bishop and the local authorities.

Since this case is not peculiar to France, nor even to Catholicism (U.S. Episcopalians and Lutherans have endured similar crises in recent years), it merits a fuller theological analysis. Such an analysis can't be done in a single column, but a few questions can be posed.

1) Was there any consultation between the bishop and the parishioners before the appointment of the new pastor? Was the matter of the liturgy discussed?

Even in dealing with difficult, truculent people, due process has to be observed. They belong to the People of God until such time as they freely withdraw or are justly expelled.

2) Why was the power of the civil

authority invoked? Was there any prior effort to deal with the matter at ecclesiastical and spiritual levels?

In general, it is not a good idea for the Church to appeal to the state to enforce ecclesiastical or spiritual discipline. On the other hand, some issues, such as those affecting property rights, may inevitably involve the civil authority.

3) To what theological arguments did the parishioners appeal in defying the ecclesiastical authority of their bishop?

One of the hallmarks of the pre-Vatican II Church that the traditionalist Catholic so reveres was unquestioning obedience to the hierarchy. Indeed, traditionalists deplore dissent when it is practiced by the Kuengs, the Currans and others. What exempts their own dissent from criticism?

4) Knowing that priests ordained by Archbishop Lefebvre are considered by the Vatican to be illicitly ordained (in other words, it was a serious sin for the Archbishop to have ordained them and a serious sin for them to have accepted ordination at his hands), why did these "more-Catholic-than-the-Church" Catholics seek out such a priest for their pastor?

5) What is the connection between the disobedient parishioners of Port Marly and France's far-right National Front party?

According to press reports, members of that party have been "conspicuously involved" in the campaign against the bishop. Critics of the traditionalists (including a priest-spokesman for the Diocese of Versailles) allege that the traditionalists' liturgical program is inextricably linked with their political program.

Why are traditionalist Catholics almost always politically right-wing? That profile, after all, does not fit the official Church, which Pope John Paul II so vividly represents. Although theologically conservative, he is socially and politically progressive, consistent with Catholic social teachings.

Heretofore, many conservative bishops have allowed their conservative lay supporters to get away with this glaring inconsistency. They've encouraged them to think they're "good Catholics" just because they are financially generous, don't make trouble and are "loyal" to the Holy Father.

If we really preached and taught the whole of Catholic doctrine, including Catholic social teachings, we might find that the body of dissenters out there is much larger than we thought.

And not all of them have a battering ram in hand.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



Sampling from the in-basket

From a scandalized youth:

"I am a young man who frequently reads your column in the Courier. I often times am stimulated by your faith and good sense, and other times I am disappointed by your narrow views of certain things.

"...Let me try to explain why many young people in the last two decades have left their Catholic heritage and upbrining to embrace different expressions of Christianity. This will also be based upon my relationships with other former Catholics.

"Almost unanimously, the major reason these people have changed is that, in the Catholic Church, they failed to find the life of God and the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ present in their parish. In my 18 years of being a Catholic, I never encountered a person (except one) who seemed to manifest true faith, love or hope. The only way to describe my parish and the other parishes I visited is in this terse phrase: 'They are utterly dead, and the people seemed utterly dead.'

"This negative experience led me to become a rebellious and angry young man. I came to have a hatred for this dead religion and the God of this dead religion...Finally God gave me a revelation of Himself and His Son that transcended my whole negative religious experience. I came to see Him as the warm, loving, forgiving Father that He is. I did find a church that reflects the love and warmth and life that is God in a non-denominational fellowship.

"In my first few years as a 'born-again' Christian, I harbored many nasty feelings toward the Catholic Church. However, there came a point when the Lord began to show me that there is much faith and life that I was not aware of in the Catholic Church. I began to read Catholic authors who were men of real faith and wisdom. I began to meet Catholics who were people of manifest Christian virtue. I admired the Catholic Church in her war against abortion. I was impressed by the beautiful life of Mother Teresa and the great courage and faith of Pope John Paul II. In short, I

began to see that the Roman Catholic Church was very Christian indeed, and that Jesus was truly present in its members.

"Please forgive me if my Catholic experience offends. I am only telling it exactly as it was. There is need for great renewing within the Catholic Church, and my desire is that its priests and leaders would see that and address that. I am not an enemy of the Catholic Church. I love her deeply and greatly appreciate the heritage I once despised."

Comment: This good young man and others like him have been turned away from Christ's Church by our own bad example. His problem is not doctrinal, but a genuine need for love: God's and ours. May Our Lord bless him and bring him home to the faith of his fathers.

From an anonymous reader: "Your every article in the Courier-Journal has the same subject: good, good cooks, where to stop for a good meal. It is very boring. Do you ever treat?"

Comment: To our acidulous reader, bon appetit!!!

From a Southern Tier matron: "I do enjoy your column. I noted especially your article in which you mentioned two programs from the Public Broadcasting Service, a program about Mother Teresa and Graham Greene's 'Monsignor Quixote' with Alec Guinness. While recuperating from surgery, I had ample opportunity to watch TV and enjoyed both of these. Public television has many worthwhile programs and deserves our support. One wonders how the three major networks can find so little talent for good programming.

"My prayers for you and for all priests who labor for souls is that the official teachings of the Church will be observed and carried out by all of us, no matter the sacrifice."

Comment: For a long time, I have advocated that programs of special interest to Catholics be advertised ahead of time by our diocesan communication agencies. My last correspondent would certainly be pleased if that should ever come to pass.

Council seeking volunteers for Camp Open Arms in July

The United Cancer Council is seeking volunteers to work at Camp Open Arms for one or more days, from July 7 through July 18. All volunteers must be at least 16 years of age.

Camp Open Arms, a two-week day camp for children with cancer and related blood diseases, and their siblings ages three to 15, will be held at Cobles Elementary School in Penfield from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Volunteers are needed primarily to serve as counselors and junior counselors, but special skills are useful, too. Especially needed are people with certified water safety and life-saving/lifeguard skills. Volunteers must

complete application forms and attend a training orientation program.

In order to apply, call or write United Cancer Council, Inc., 1441 East Ave., Rochester, 14624, or call (716)473-8230.

The United Cancer Council is a United Way Agency.

Marriage Encounter weekend set

A Marriage Encounter Weekend has been scheduled for June 5, 6 and 7, at Guthrie Inn in Sayre, Pennsylvania. The weekend will begin at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 5.

Call (607)722-1913 for information.

Registration for camp programs underway at Camp Stella Maris

Camp Stella Maris, located some 30 miles south of Rochester on the eastern shore of Conesus Lake, is accepting registrations for its summer camp programs. The one- and two-week programs for children and young adults (ages seven to 16) begin July 5 and will run through August 28.

Campers will be given an opportunity to take part in a variety of recreational activi-

ties, including sailing, windsurfing, water skiing and swimming.

Camp Stella Maris, which has offered resident camping programs for the past 60 years, is owned by the Diocese of Rochester and is certified by the American Camping Association.

Call (716)346-2243 for information on the camp's summer programs.

'People of Pentecost '87' set for Notre Dame High School

Parishes in the Southern Tier will be participating in "People of Pentecost '87," a one-day training session for Catholic evangelization, on Saturday, June 6, from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Notre Dame High School in Elmira.

The program is part of a seven-hour media event prepared by the Paulist Catholic Evan-

gelization Association. Via satellite, major presentations will center on evangelizing "unchurched" Americans, inactive and active Catholics. Video segments will also address evangelizing youth, as well as rural Hispanic, black and native American communities.

The \$20 cost includes printed materials and lunch.

Contact Sister Mary Jean Smith at (607) 734-6934 or 732-7909, for information or to register.

Nazareth Academy to host evening at Silver Stadium

Nazareth Academy will host a night at the ballpark on Monday, June 8. "Rochester's oldest school at Rochester's newest stadium" is the theme of this evening of baseball at Silver Stadium, where the first-place Red Wings take on the Maine Guides. The event is being sponsored by PATON (parents and Teachers at Nazareth).

Reserved tickets are available at Nazareth Academy. For information, or to reserve tickets, call (716)458-8583.

Upcoming bowl-a-thon will benefit Corpus Christi School

Corpus Christi School has scheduled a fundraising bowl-a-thon for Ladd's Bowling Lanes, Merchants Road, Rochester on Saturday, May 30, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Those interested in buying or sponsoring a bowl are asked to call the school between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. at (716)325-5850.

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