

Columnists

A patient's view of hospital affairs

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

On Tuesday, Nov. 10, I experienced surgery — a prostate operation. Although I have visited the sick in hospitals for more than 50 years, I decided to study my reactions as a patient. If you have had surgery, you may empathize. If not, thank the Lord.

SURGERY: Anticipating, I was as unconcerned as if I were sharing a cup of coffee with a friend. A young man from Canandaigua was on the next bed, awaiting surgery on his disk. In came a smiling nurse, Susan Tydings DiMaria, a niece of my classmate, the late Father Michael Tydings. She was a student nurse at St. James Mercy School of Nursing in Hornell when I was the chaplain. Having a friend around was like having the proverbial security blanket.

RECOVERY ROOM: For four hours, paralyzed and helpless, I spent a somber but interesting time. I got in six rosaries and many aspirations. There were half a dozen nurses there to check blood pressure, etc. They chatted and chatted *sine fine*. All conversation of these angels of mercy revolved about children's toys for Christmas, with lamentations at the exorbitant prices. Our Holy Father tells us that consumerism is the curse of the West. I wonder if wise fathers and mothers might better pull on the brakes before expending precious cash for short-lived toys.

NURSES: Like the holy sisters, some nurses are casting off their nurses' uniforms which has identified them since the Crimean War in 1854, with Florence Nightingale. The nurses' uniform, like the sisters' habit, is symbolic. It gives confidence to us layfolk.

Thomas a Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* wrote: "The habit does not make the monk." However, it does identify one. Our Holy Father could travel about in a pin-striped suit with a polka-dot tie and still be the Holy Father. But would that add or subtract?

Many nurses floated in and out in the unceasing postoperative care. As a group they were impressive, giving professional care. But more pleasing to me were our conversations about their home life, their hopes, their children. Most had children and regretted that economics forced them to

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leave home for work.

One with two children in Catholic schools said: "I'm sorry I can't stay home, but I want my children to have a Catholic-school education. But the tuition is so high, I just have to work. I want my daughter to go to Mercy High when she finishes Blessed Sacrament, but with tuitions as they are, I'll have to work even more hours..." When she left the room, I said to myself: "That's a person I greatly admire."

MEDICOS: To us laymen, doctors are god-like persons. With their training and knowledge, we rely on them with a trust that almost equals religious faith.

As a patient observing the medicos who cared for me, the internist, a graduate of Cardinal Mooney High School, seemed an exemplar of Cardinal Newman's definition of a gentleman. The surgeon was an interesting combination of the taciturn yet jocose. The anesthesiologist was voluble and bubbling. The assistant to the surgeon silently sidled into my room and wafted out, commenting, "Very good." A man who husbands his words.

I wonder if a bit more discussion on one's condition might be good therapy for the patient and good humanness for the doctor.

THE BROTHERHOOD: Three priests were hospitalized: Father Robert Miller, rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral; Father Dan Wheelan, who resides at Holy Cross with his devoted brother, Father Tom; and myself. Many priests stopped in, usually for a brief and casual visit, giving their priestly blessing as they left with a cheerful goodbye. These visits moved me greatly, and I remember how Archbishop Sheen used to speak of "The Fraternity of the Priesthood," a brotherhood rooted in our mutual love and service of Christ and his Church.

The bishops and the 1988 campaign

By Father Richard P. McBrien

The 1984 presidential election campaign was not an entirely happy experience for the Catholic Church in the United States, for several reasons.

1. Bishops bickered openly among themselves. Boston's Archbishop Bernard Law and 17 other New England bishops issued a statement on the relative merits of the abortion and nuclear war. A month later 23 other bishops from around the country released a statement of their own in rebuttal.

2. Bishops locked horns with Catholic politicians. New York's Archbishop John O'Connor engaged in a highly publicized debate with Governor Mario Cuomo and Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro.

3. Bishops were also perceived as aiding and abetting the political fortunes of the Republican ticket. Philadelphia's Cardinal John Krol provided a campaign platform for President Reagan at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, Pa.

Behind the scenes, most of the American bishops were appalled and embarrassed. They thought they had reached a consensus about the conduct of bishops during the 1984 campaign — namely, no endorsement of any candidates and no one-issue politics.

There are, of course, two ways to endorse a candidate. One is by an outright statement of support. The other is by attacking a favored candidate's opponent. In their statement of March 22, 1984, the bishops' Administrative Board had said nothing explicitly about "opposing" candidates. The board had only ruled out "endorsing" them.

This time, the bishops are leaving nothing to chance. In an October 14 statement entitled "Political Responsibility: Choices for the Future," the Administrative Board adds the words "or opposing." The bishops' policy statement now reads "We bishops specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates."

In 1984 nothing was said about the consistent ethic of life — also known as "the seamless garment" — approach promulgated by

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Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. The 1987 statement incorporates Cardinal Bernardin's position even though it is anathema to politically conservative Catholics.

The text reads: "We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which we address all issues in the political arena. In this consistent ethic of life, we address a spectrum of issues, seeking to protect human life and promote human dignity from the inception of life to its final moment." That's new.

The list of issues, in alphabetical order, now reads abortion, arms control and disarmament, capital punishment, civil rights, the economy, education, family life, food and agricultural policy, health, housing, human rights, immigration and refugee policy, mass media, and regional conflict in the world — particularly Central America, the Middle East, and southern Africa.

The moral force of the bishops' positions on these various issues is enhanced by their refusal to follow single-mindedly a politically liberal or politically conservative line. They oppose abortion, and favor the passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the life of the unborn.

On the other hand, they oppose any "first-use" of nuclear weapons, capital punishment, discrimination of every kind, and military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua.

By releasing their 1987 campaign guidelines five months earlier than they did in 1984, the bishops give us all an opportunity to think seriously about the campaign even before the national media have anointed the nominees on the basis of their showings in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire and Southern primaries.

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