

## Editorial & Opinion

# Post-reunion reflections on 25 years of change and growth

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In October of 1959, 96 of us from all parts of our country assembled at the North American College in Rome to begin our four years of theological study leading to the ordained priesthood. In December of 1962 in that same city, 62 of us were ordained by Archbishop Martin J. O'Connor, rector of the college. Six of the original 96 had been ordained in July of 1962, and four others were ordained in the United States in June of 1963. Last week, 29 of the 72 ordained from our class gathered to celebrate our silver jubilee of ordination at Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in South Orange, New Jersey, where Phil Morris — one of our classmates — is the pastor.

I had traveled to the event in happy anticipation because I was sure it would be a good experience. I left deeply touched by the company we shared, by the memories collected and celebrated there, and by the renewal of hope to which it gave birth. It would be impossible for me to wrap words around the whole experience and present it to you in its entirety, but let me share some reflections which have been strong in my mind since then.

I had a sense of the continuity among us from our ready recognition of one another and from the ease with which we picked up the threads of common experience and affection first woven 25 years ago and so many miles away. And yet, age, waist and hair lines symbolized the fact that certainly we had changed — and probably more than could possibly become evident in a few short hours of reunion.

## Along the Way



There were more substantial signs of change. Three of the 72 have died since ordination, two from illness and one in an auto accident. Of the 69 living members of the class, about half have resigned from the active ministry. In South Orange, nine of the 29 who attended are married. Five of their spouses joined us for the reunion.

An isolated phenomenon? No, the percentage may vary from place to place but in the past 25 years, we have experienced a heavy loss of priests ordained since the early '50s. The same could be said of communities of women and men religious.

I certainly don't know the explanation for that, but I am sure that the enormous changes which have taken place in our culture and in our Church since the early '60s are part of it. There are many examples of those changes which come to mind just now. Among those that have occurred just in the area of formation for

priesthood are: 1) a shift from the observance of a rather strict and detailed rule to a system of personal freedom and accountability to others as the catalyst for personal growth; 2) a change from a system which discouraged wide-ranging, personal relationships and often retarded the development of a person's affective life to one which regards the capacity to relate in a loving manner to other people as essential to a priestly vocation; 3) a shift from a self-enclosed, rather isolated environment for formation to one which sends candidates out for service among others as an ordinary part of seminary life.

That is not meant to sound like everything was wrong then, and all is right now. Every generation, like every person, has some strong points and some weak ones. But in every generation we need to keep learning if we are to be faithful to the intelligence God gave us, and we need to change if we are to remain alive.

I am glad for the changes I mentioned above because I believe they respect both the integrity and individuality of people. At the same time they recognize that we do not have full human life apart from healthy relationships, mutual responsibility and a willingness to sacrifice personal preference for the common good.

I may continue these jubilee musings at another time. For now, let me thank all who gathered in South Orange last week. Together and singly, they taught me or reminded me of some truths about our Lord and His Church which were hardly part of my consciousness 25 years ago. I am grateful for that.

Peace to all.

## Letters

### Writer praises McBrien column

To the editor:

I am a regular reader of the *Courier-Journal* and it seems that not a week passes without at least one letter appearing on the editorial page proclaiming Father McBrien a "scandal" to the Catholic Church and a heretic. Where, I wonder, are the letters of support? Certainly there are other readers who find his thoughtful and intellectual approach to the mysteries of metaphysics and the wonders of theology as stimulating as I do.

Most of those who object to Father McBrien's column and urge its replacement, feel not only disagreement with his ideas but seem actually threatened by their existence. Needless to say, a faith so easily toppled cannot be built on very firm ground. Are we so lacking in strength and commitment?

One of the letters in the November 5th edition requested a "spiritual and non-controversial" alternative to "Essays in Theology." The letter went on to explain that Father McBrien was in direct opposition to Jesus. "Jesus wants us to have peace, and Father McBrien's articles most of the time do not leave us feeling peaceful!" Although I hold no degrees in scriptural study, I do read the Bible and strive to make sense of the oftentimes conflicting messages concerning peace. In Matthew 10:34 Jesus states, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world; no, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." In John 16:33 "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus was not, as could be construed, contradicting himself. Instead, he

### Permit an indulgence

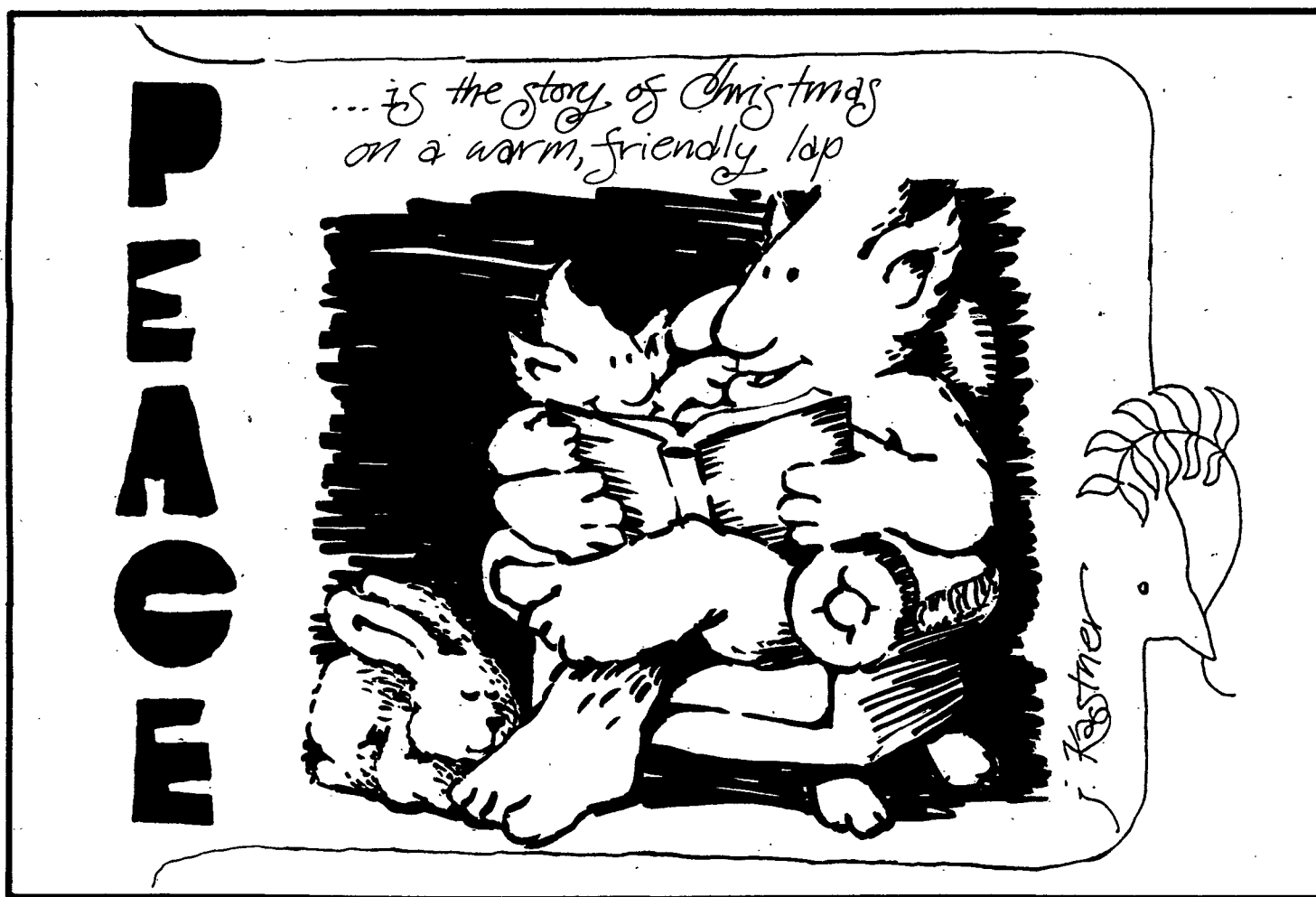
To the editor:

I, too, am a regular reader of Father Cuddy (re: "Tortured disciple laments columnist's culinary indulgences," C-J Letters, October 22). There are often many good discussions of lively topics by this learned priest. He certainly should be entitled to enjoy the pleasures of good food in this land of plenty.

As a man and a priest who has served God and his country, I offer him my best. Fathers Shamon and McBrien, along with the Bible Corner, help to make a very satisfactory (columnists' section).

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was acknowledging the two different faces of faith: in steadfast adherence, we can expect conflict and controversy — a permanent state of unrest in the framework of society; as souls, capturing the essence of our inherent spiritual God-image, we possess the peace that is exclusive of any worldly appearance.

Our teacher knew the challenge that a solid faith would present to us and the delicate nature of the balance struck between the spiritual and temporal worlds. One notices the persistent dichotomy in the life of every great spiritual leader: the peaceful center surrounded by the maelstrom of struggle in societal affairs. Could it be that he joined physical humanity just for this purpose of lending validity to mystical truths?

It is easy enough for us to criticize and condemn one another — so easy one suspects Satan at work. In the end, the minor variances in creeds ought not to matter. Faith, by definition and understanding, is a question of trust: the individual's trust in an individually revealed expression of God. Peace is ours as a by-product of faith and stems not from any particular worldly activity. If it is to exist at all, and even flourish, it must do so above and beyond the grasp of earthly concerns. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace." — Romans 5:1.

## Congress preoccupied by formalism

To the editor:

After reading the local news article on sacramental discussion (C-J Nov. 19: "Sacramental discussion challenges congress participants," I found it difficult to believe the amount of time and effort devoted to presentation, ceremony, ritual, etc., stretched to the point where announcement of the Church's or God's message is relegated to the insignificant. Didn't Christ upbraid the Pharisees for their preoccupation with formalism.

This overconcern for form instead of substance is so stifling and encumbering as to discourage the sensible and sincere catechumen and, in my opinion, is a poor substitute for

genuine meditation, research, and amplification of the Church's message based on sound doctrinal approaches in accordance with papal and magisterial guidelines. Witness the decline of the past two decades under the new breed of modernism followed by so many of the American Catholic hierarchy.

Such tinkering in the form of discussions, committees, meetings, commissions, etc., when carried to extremes leads to loss of integral objectives in the whirlwind of confusion.

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### C-J Letters Policy

The *Courier-Journal* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting Church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the Church. We will

choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: *Courier-Journal*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY, 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.