

Columnists




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**Recollections of a military nurse**

By Father Paul J. Cuddy  
**FROM A RETIRED AIR FORCE NURSE:**

"Your telephone call New Year's evening was certainly an unexpected pleasure. I went to bed still thinking of your call and remembering so many things about Morocco and the influence you had on the personnel.

"You knew us and the goings-on there all so well. I remember one sermon you gave on morality. You had observed a young woman being carried into her quarters by 'some old goat' (your words). It was all so true. Your unbridled expressions with regard to such matters were always recognized without resentment — indeed, with interest and often with a smile.

"My life since retirement is really uneventful. I think I told you I've been a eucharistic minister for over a year. My duty is to bring the Blessed Sacrament to Catholic patients at the hospital and to relieve Sister Helena during her vacation periods for visits to patients in the hospitals.

"I enjoy my home and the close relation with my family of five sisters nearby and my brother, who comes here every year from Washington State. We love to laugh and to reminisce. What more do I need along with good health and the gift of faith God has given to me? Of course, there has been sadness at times: illnesses, deaths and the loss of faith from some nieces and nephews. However, we do not allow these differences to alienate our love for one another.

"Oh yes. As a P.S.: You had a prostate operation; I had a hysterectomy. So we're even!"

**COMMENT:** Ellen, now a retired lieutenant colonel, was one of several fine nurses at Nouasseur Air Depot, near Casablanca, Morocco, in 1955-56. Several nurses were quality Catholics who were a credit to the Air Force and to the Church. They were the quality produced for so many years from Rochester's St. Mary's School of Nursing: competent, compassionate, devout. They formed a kind of nursing sorority among themselves, enjoying themselves and being active in the Church.

Ellen's recollection of the "old goat" appellation brings back memories. Some of the finest men I have ever known were military

**On the Right Side**

men. I never could understand how so many of them remained so good and so virtuous under trying circumstances. But they did. And that was also true of the women, nurses and WAFs. As I recall my Sunday sermons, they were somewhat thunderous and blunt. But I have never regarded vapid, milque-toast presentations of actual life as realistic or effective. Neither did our men and women.

At that time, there was great interest in the Catholic religion, and the number who wanted instruction became such that I had some of the more capable men teach the applicants. That was a dozen years before Vatican II and the document on the laity. And it was about the time of the much-read *Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton, which is worth reading today.

For the care of our men and women in the service, the Diocese of Rochester is now furnishing: Fathers Ed Christoph and Paul Fremesser in the Army, and Fathers Richard Mattie and Lew Brown in the Navy. In the active Reserves, we have Fathers John O'Connor (Lourdes), James Burke (Canandaigua), James Yeager (Hornell) and William Darling (Owego), plus Redemptorist Father Fred Brinkman of Notre Dame Retreat House, who is a nephew of Father Herman Brinkman, CSSR, whom many will remember as a mighty mission preacher in the diocese some 25 years ago. He later entered the Air Force and has just recently been retired.

Chaplaincy in the military leaves one free to be a miserable goof-off or open to apostolic opportunities beyond those in ordinary parishes. Thank God, most I have known have been the latter.

**Underground ecumenical movement**

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Early last month, sharp divisions within the Church of England were dramatically and tragically exposed in the suicide of a conservative Anglican priest and Oxford don. Twenty-four hours after his death, church officials reluctantly confirmed the rumor that the priest was the author of a recently published article attacking the Archbishop of Canterbury. Traditionalists in the Church of England soon hailed the priest as a martyr who had killed himself in despair over the church's continued liberalization.

This unhappy situation — minus the suicide — continues to be played out not only in the Church of England, but also nearly everywhere else on the world's religious landscape. Similar rifts — equally deep and acute — are to be found, for example, within the ranks of Southern Baptists, Lutherans, Jews, Muslims and, of course, Catholics.

In every instance, traditionalists line up against moderates. They charge the moderates with corrupting the faith through compromise and accommodation. The moderates, in their turn, accuse the traditionalists of rigidity and unrealism.

One sometimes wonders what the traditionalists of one religion think of their counterparts in another. Does a strongly conservative Catholic, for example, feel any sort of kinship with the Missouri Synod wing of American Lutheranism, Hasidic Jews, Southern Baptist fundamentalists or Shi'ite Muslims?

The pursuit of a common cause does, after all, produce a common bond. Traditionalists of every religion are committed to purging their communities of the infection of heresy, modernity, accommodationism, compromise, or what have you. Their agenda is one of exclusion rather than of inclusion. Indeed, they seem to rejoice more over departures from the fold than they do over the entrance of new members. They're always trying to get their opponents to quit or else to face expulsion.

Secondly, religious traditionalists prefer the method of censorship over that of dialogue. If individuals are teaching contrary to "the faith," traditionalists work to get them fired, withdraw approval for their writing, deny them access to public platforms and make them non-persons in the religious community.

Thirdly, traditionalists think deductively rather than inductively. To them, there are doc-

**Essays in Theology**

trines, and there are rules. Don't ask how the doctrines got there or how the rules were formulated. Just obey them. Authoritative pronouncements, rather than historically grounded reasoning, provide the only sure access to truth.

Fourthly, traditionalists seem to be particularly bothered by sex. This can be seen among Hasidic Jews burning bus-stop shelters in Israel because of advertisements featuring clothed but alluring females, and among Protestant fundamentalist preachers and Catholic prelates denouncing premarital sex, pornography, condoms, homosexual-rights bills and legalized abortion.

For some traditionalists, it seems, sexual sins are the only ones that count. Thus, traditionalists believe that when the pope speaks about sex and marriage, loyal and faithful Catholics are supposed to listen and obey. But these same traditionalists feel that when the same pope speaks about economic justice and disarmament, Catholics are free to turn off the switch until the Holy Father returns to his spiritual senses.

Finally, traditionalists tend to lack a sense of humor, and especially the capacity for self-deprecating humor. They are too certain of their own righteousness and of the sinfulness of their adversaries. Indeed, they seem to believe that God has commissioned them personally to clean up the mess *before* the Final Judgment. Who would have time for fun and laughter with a mandate like that?

Although traditionalists of every faith normally oppose ecumenical ventures, perhaps they're all part of an underground ecumenical movement — with one another. Even though they differ on such major points as papal authority and interpretation of the Bible, it's still possible that such details of doctrine could be ironed out somehow.

By accommodation, perhaps?

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