

Columnists

The Catholic television apostolate

By Father Paul J. Cuddy
To Deacon William Schmitz
St. Leo's Church, Hilton

If memory serves me correctly, you are interested in Catholic TV programs. I am taking care of St. Michael's parish in Lyons for a month and was delighted to find that Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Catholic program is on each day from noon to 6 p.m. While it is not prime time, it is six valuable hours.

I have done some home visitations in Lyons and find that many people are tuning in on these specifically Catholic programs. They have the rosary at 3 p.m. each day and, knowing how popular Monsignor Cirincione's Rosary for Peace has been over the years, think that this is a happy addition.

The channel here is the Finger Lakes Channel 28, which reaches into four counties: Cayuga, Wayne, Ontario and Seneca. Last night I tuned in on Channel 28 and found an impressive panel on "Black Catholics in the Catholic Church." The panel consisted of a black priest, a black deacon, an alert black matron and an intelligent, white Italian-American Dominican priest.

The discussion revealed there are some 1.2 million black Catholics in the United States. A few parishes are entirely or mostly black, and in these the Catholic presence is strong. But in mixed parishes, where blacks are few, the black presence is weak. There are nine black bishops — all auxiliaries excepting one, the bishop of Mississippi. The black priest seemed to think this smacks of injustice. I doubt that is so. Bishops should not be appointed because of color, but because they are holy, competent and faithful to the Holy See. Considering the small number of black priests, one can hardly expect a disproportionate number of black bishops.

Since 1983, I have been in close contact with Bishop Raphael Ndigni, bishop of Nakuru, Kenya, and president of the bishops' conference of Kenya. He is a graduate of St. John Fisher College, Rochester. He is black, as are most of the bishops of Africa. The white mis-

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sionaries and Rome have been solicitous to phase out the white priests and bishops in favor of the native black clergy. And more and more communities of entirely native black sisters are developing, trained as teachers, nurses and social workers.

I have encouraged people to send money to Bishop Raphael for the training of priests and sisters, for their seminaries are crowded and vocations from native girls abound. I explain that the cost of training seminarians and sisters is small in comparison with the training of seminarians and sisters in the States, hence a great bargain.

Getting back to the TV, The National Catholic Reporter of January 29 reports: "VISION INTERFAITH Satellite Network, a new interfaith cable television network organized by a coalition of several mainstream Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox groups, is scheduled to begin operating June 1. Start-up costs are estimated at about \$2 million dollars."

Do you know whether this is supported by our bishops' annual Catholic Communications Collection? Mother Angelica and her Eternal Word Satellite have received encouragement from very few bishops, but they have from the laity. It seems to me that communications cash might better go to the pure wine of Catholicism than to a watered-down ecumenism.

Will you discuss this Catholic TV apostolate with the Knights of Columbus and any other groups of zealous Catholics? It does seem odd that Rochester, our see city, has no Catholic cable; nor does Auburn, a city with seven Catholic parishes. The Trinity is not the only mystery.

The bishops and public dissent

By Father Richard P. McBrien

At least a few Catholic theologians are expressing gratitude these days to New York's Cardinal John O'Connor, Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law, Denver's Archbishop Francis Stafford and other conservative prelates for their publicly critical reaction to the recent statement on AIDS, formulated by the 50-member Administrative Board of the United States Catholic Conference.

For years, theologians have been cautioned by such bishops that although dissent from official Catholic teachings and policies might be legitimate in principle — although some wouldn't even concede that much — such dissent has to be confined always to "the private sector," namely scholarly publications or the sanctuary of the scholar's own thoughts.

Why? Because public dissent "confuses the faithful" and undermines the hierarchy's teaching authority.

But now these same bishops have shown us that Catholic disagreements can — and sometimes must — be brought into the public forum, despite the aforementioned dangers. The chronology of the debate, in fact, shows that these bishops went even further than theologians have.

December 11: The 50-member Administrative Board of the USCC issues a 30-page statement, "The Many Faces of AIDS: A Gospel Response." It was passed without dissent from any member of the board, even though the statement included carefully qualified approval for the providing of information about condoms in order to prevent a greater evil.

December 12: Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston and the bishops of his metropolitan province — which includes Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine — issue a statement criticizing the document for generating "considerable confusion concerning the Church's position on the use of prophylactic devices as a protection against AIDS."

These New England bishops declare that they "cannot approve or seem to approve" the distribution of information regarding contraceptive devices and methods which might lead some to think that they could in good conscience ignore or contradict "the teaching of the Church."

December 13: Cardinal O'Connor enters the fray, releasing a statement to the press following the 10:15 Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The New York archbishop characterizes the USCC statement as a "very grave mistake." He

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also repeats the charge of the Boston Province bishops and invokes the names of several other bishops as sharing his point of view.

December 16: Some of the bishops invoked by Cardinal O'Connor issued more qualified criticisms. Bishop McFarland of Orange, Calif., in fact, tells Religious News Service that he has "no problem" with mentioning condoms.

December 17: Archbishop Francis Stafford of Denver circulated a letter to his archdiocese, sends another to conference president Archbishop John May and releases an extensive critique of the conference statement. The statement, Archbishop Stafford says, has "serious and evident flaws."

December 28: The office of Cardinal O'Connor makes public portions of a private letter from Archbishop May in which the archbishop expresses concern about the controversy and raises the possibility of a discussion of the AIDS statement at the bishops' next meeting in Collegeville, Minn.

December 29: Archbishop May challenges the report issued from Cardinal O'Connor's office that the bishops' AIDS policy was now in abeyance until the Collegeville meeting in June. Chicago's Cardinal Bernardin asserts that the public disclosure of only part of the contents of Archbishop May's private letter "unfortunately led to further confusion."

Some of us theologians might not agree with the position taken by the dissenting bishops, but we would defend their right to take it and indeed to express their dissent publicly.

"We would, however, also have to concede that their arguments against theologians' public dissent would be equally valid in this case. This whole controversy has confused the faithful and has caused a lot of people, both inside and outside of the Church, to adopt an even more skeptical attitude toward the Church's teaching authority.

One is confident that Cardinal O'Connor, like Father Charles Curran, never intended such consequences.

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