

Columnists

A great missionary brother

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Ever since grade school at Holy Family, Auburn, I have had a great interest in the missions. And it has been my privilege to send occasional checks to a few missionary friends: Rochesterian Fathers Leo Welch, SJ, and Richard Kraft, SVD, in the Philippines; Bishop Raphael Ndigni in Nakuru, Kenya; and Sister Vianney Kennedy, an Ursuline nurse in Kitui, Kenya. But one who especially warms my heart is Brother Ignatius, SVD, (Salvatore DiSanto). He is from Clyde and has many relatives among the DiSanto and Salerno clans. He has been an SVD brother from some 60 years, and today is 85 years old. He could come back to the States from New Guinea, but he says: "If I do, they'll retire me. I want to work for Our Lord as long as I can."

Recently he sent me a touching letter: "Your last letter, written in Lyons, I received and turned over to Brother Paul, our bursar and rector. He came to me yesterday and asked me what I wanted to do. He had your check for my birthday and the Mass intentions?"

COMMENT: As an old-time religious, he turns any gifts over to the superior who decides how they will be used. When I write, I usually say, "I hope your superior will let you use the money as you would like." And I usually include a check for Mass intentions, which are a good help for mission priests.

"I said I need repairs on some of my old-time freezers and equipment, and the cry is, 'No money!' Therefore, I would like to use some of the money to help Brother Herman, our electrician. (The rector) said, 'All right! He kept the Mass intentions, and the rest I will use for the kitchen. Brother Herman has already fixed the freezer that was holding up the works, and I have made a batch of ice cream of 18 gallons. So much for the ice cream!"

COMMENT: Whenever I meet SVD fathers and inquire about Brother Iggy, they smile broadly and say, "Oh, Brother Iggy is our great ice cream man. What a benediction he is to us!"

Two views of episcopal conferences

By Father Richard C. McBrien

Rumors abound that the Vatican will soon issue a statement playing down the teaching authority of national episcopal conferences. If the rumors are true, the statement will give much aid and comfort to those Catholics, both inside and outside the hierarchy, who have been disturbed by the conferences' growing influence since Vatican II.

On the other hand, a Vatican statement of that kind would be a source of distress for a different group of Catholics, also inside and outside the hierarchy, who have applauded the postconciliar move away from centralized authority in Rome.

Catholics who believe the Church is a monarchical institution, structured like a pyramid with the pope at the top, regard national episcopal conferences as unnecessary at best and illegitimate at worst. Why do we need such conferences, they ask, when we have the pope at the head of the Church in Rome and our individual bishops at the head of their respective dioceses at home?

The issue becomes acutely practical for the monarchists when episcopal conferences promulgate teachings that are theologically, socially, economically and politically more liberal than the monarchists themselves can bear. The U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letters on peace and economic justice are two dramatic cases in point.

On the other hand, Catholics who believe the Church is a collegial community regard national episcopal conferences as a legitimate and pastorally necessary expression of the Church's nature as People of God. They base their argument on history, theology, doctrine and canon law, citing such authorities as the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 whose "final report" declared that "episcopal conferences are so useful, indeed necessary, in the present-day pastoral life of the Church . . ."

Even the Revised Code of Canon Law acknowledges not only the "permanent" institutional status of episcopal conferences (canon 447), but also their teaching authority (canon 753).

The views of the pro-conference side were reinforced earlier this year in Salamanca, Spain, during an important week-long international colloquium of historians, theologians, canonists, sociologists and administrators. The colloquium was held in response to a

On the Right Side

The letter continues: "My other great worry was roasting coffee. We got a used kerosene roaster that had been used in the highlands by Brother Walter. But no one knew how to use it, and surely I did not. After five trials, I was ready to quit. But I really couldn't quit. So I turned to St. Joseph and Our Mother Mary, and one morning I got the secret. Not enough air!"

COMMENT: Brother Iggy is a great prayer, and the intercession to St. Joseph and Our Lady is powerful. A pity so few of our children have this devotion.

"I made my annual retreat using some new Bishop Sheen tapes that Father Saiko got for me. I made the retreat here, going to the chapel for the tape-conferences four or five times a day, and kind of taking care of things in the shop. Believe me, I was tired. But I am happy I did it. This may be my last one. Who knows, excepting God!"

COMMENT: The Sheen tapes are still a great spiritual boon. You can buy them from me or Keep the Faith, Inc. When I read the moans and groans of discontented priests and sisters writing in the National Catholic Reporter, which is the diving board for so many angry religious, I give thanks to God for Brother Iggy. He is a great religious: prayerful, happy, living the religious vows scrupulously, grateful he can still work even at the age of 85, and contentedly awaiting the call of the Sacred Heart. Whoever reads this column can join with me in saying: "Thank you, Brother Iggy, and pray for us in the chapel!"

Essays in Theology

recommendation of the Extraordinary Synod that a study be conducted of the "theological 'status' and above all the problem of (the) doctrinal authority" of episcopal conferences.

After a week of intense discussions, participants came to the unanimous agreement that episcopal conferences do have a theological foundation. They are an expression of the collegial nature of the Church.

Such conferences are not merely administrative units, nor are they simply friendly gatherings of bishops. The colloquium reached a further agreement that the conferences as such possess an authority — rooted in the episcopal ordination of its members — to teach, to proclaim and to witness the Christian message.

This authority is more than that of the sum total of the bishops in conference. It's not a matter of counting heads. The authority is collegial.

Such authority, to be sure, is not absolute. It must be exercised in communion with other episcopal conferences, with the diocese of Rome and with the faithful generally. Moreover, a distinction must always be made between pronouncements that echo the word of God and pronouncements that give prudential advice to people in practical matters. The U.S. bishops were careful to make this distinction in both their major pastoral letters.

In light of this solid consensus of scholarly opinion, one hopes that the Vatican will not release the rumored document that is expected to downplay the teaching authority and pastoral significance of episcopal conferences.

Such a document would undoubtedly give a momentary euphoric lift to those who favor a restoration of papal and curial powers as exercised in the days before Vatican II. In the long run, however, the document would only widen the gap — already dangerously wide — between the Vatican and the mainstream of Catholic scholarship and ministry.

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Loneliness. A major problem for the widowed!
Many widowed people complain that they no longer feel comfortable with old friends and in old social situations. In addition, they feel that their empty house and evening hours increase the loneliness. Learning how and where to meet people is difficult. The best solution for finding friends is to be active socially and at work. Support can be gained through church groups and special groups for the widowed. Joining in political campaigns, community organizations, golf or tennis clubs are ways some bereaved make friends. New friends will not totally eliminate our loneliness but they can help. Naturally no one should feel pressured to meet new friends until they are ready. Please call us for referrals to local support groups.
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