

Editorial & Opinion

An Eastertide reflection on what's right with the Church

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I received an intriguing invitation in the mail yesterday, asking me to speak on the theme "What's Right With the Church Today?" I would like to accept the invitation for several reasons. Principal among them is the opportunity it would afford over the next several months to be especially attentive to the wonderful and good things happening in the Church every day.

Easter season is an especially appropriate time to begin some notes in preparation for developing that theme. It is a season in which we contemplate the presence of the life of the Risen One in us and among us. It is a time to remember that Christ will prevail over sin and death. It is a time for renewed hope and courage. It is a season to take close to our heart the fact that the powerful love of Jesus is with us, transforming us even when — especially when! — life is most difficult.

As I sit here this morning preparing this column, I think of some of the people, events and experiences that are signs of life for me during the Easter Season. I think of

• The gifted, bright and generous young people whom I am privileged to confirm throughout these Easter days. To me they are living signs of God's fidelity and of God's desire constantly to nourish our community of faith with

Along the Way



new life.

• The publication and distribution for critical response of the first draft of our pastoral letter, *Partners in the Mystery of Redemption*, which deals with the concern of women in the Church and society. The letter represents a new moment in the life of the Church and is one, I believe, that will be considerably improved by the responses it will evoke.

• Convocation '88, the assembly of all of our priests, which we celebrated last week. Our priests gathered with great enthusiasm around the theme of "Priest as Proclaimer of God's Word In Their Midst." One could almost sense the priests' hunger to be nourished by the

Word of God and to preach it faithfully and fruitfully.

• The announcement made last week that on Pentecost Sunday we will sign a covenant with the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, through which we hope to deepen common bonds joining us and to understand and respect the differences that unfortunately still divide us.

• The decision by the board of trustees of the Catholic University of America to honor the tenure of Father Charles Curran and to offer him a position in his field of study at Catholic University of America.

During this Easter Season, when I think about what's going right in the Church, several other events come to my mind. In all of the examples I have mentioned, there has been a period of preparation and/or struggle that has led to a special moment of observance, celebration or transition. And, in each one, I believe there is also the seed of a new dream, some deeper life.

Let me invite you to a similar kind of exercise. When you stop to reflect and pray about the people and the experiences of your life, which emerge as vital, hopeful, full of promise? Where did they begin? How have they unfolded? What have you realized because of them? What do you still hope for? How did the Lord surprise you in all of it?

Peace to all.

Deacon's letter 'hysterical'

To the editor:

I am writing in response to Deacon candidate Charles P. Kohlmeier's hysterical reaction to the news that "the Church plans to import priests from Africa and other Third World countries" in response to the priest shortage in the United States (C-J Letters, Feb. 25: "God provides to those whose eyes are open"). I am sorry that Mr. Kohlmeier feels so threatened by foreigners that he is ready to save the "Church of America" from the universal Church. Is it true that only priests that share the "cultural upbringing" of the local parishes should be used? What makes Mr. Kohlmeier so arrogant as to assume that foreigners will only bring "severe problems now and in the future?" He states that God will provide only to those whose eyes are open. Oh, Mr. Kohlmeier, your eyes are indeed open, but you are blind. Where would the Church be today if only locals were allowed to celebrate the Eucharist? For years, our Third World countries were served by foreign yes, even North American, priests and missionaries. What if those people in those countries rebelled against this and thought exactly the way Mr. Kohlmeier thinks? No one would disagree that foreigners may very well cause problems in a racist society in which even the local Church tends to disassociate itself with anything foreign, including the pope. But perhaps it is about time to face these problems head on and deal with them in the context of the latent xenophobia of this country.

Mr. Kohlmeier insists that "there are many women and men being called to ordained priesthood." May I ask: being called by whom? If the answer is that they are being called by the Spirit of God, I would respond: Step aside, everyone. It will happen. God's will will be done. It will happen without, or in spite of,

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American bigotry and racism; without open invitations to disobedience made by ordained priests and theologians in local Catholic publications like the *Courier-Journal*; and certainly without the unsolicited "wisdom" of deacon candidates. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul stated: "He appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, to build up the body of Christ."

I would encourage Mr. Kohlmeier not to be upset by the Third World supplying the United States with priests and, yes, even missionaries. The need is indeed great here, too. Christ never intended for Christians to stay in one place and speak only to those of similar cultural traits. "Go to the whole world," he said, "and preach the Gospel!" And the Church has always obeyed, regardless of the hatred and bigotry found in diverse countries. The United States is, for better or worse, a part of the world, and the Church in America is not to be confused with an American Church which many evidently want to see. We should look forward to meeting priests from different countries; perhaps it would serve as a goal for more young men in this country to answer a real call by the Spirit to enter the priesthood.

Hector Velez
Muriel Street
Ithaca

Disturbed by implications of pastoral draft

To the editor:

Your article headed "Bishop emphasizes broad scope of proposed pastoral letter" (April 14) contains a thought that if valid is truly disturbing in its implications, i.e. the "sin" of sexism has permeated the Church from its earliest times.

Are we to assume from this bishops' letter that the apostolic Fathers — such as St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp — somehow failed to practice Christian love but rather committed the "sin" of sexism? St. Ignatius of Antioch who in addressing the Roman Church referred to it as "president of the brotherhood of the faithful" in Greek, the agape or united love, a word which meant so far as primitive Christianity was concerned, Christian unity itself, in other words the Church. If there is unity or love, how can we have the "sin" of sexism as referred to in the bishops' letter?

How is it that the Church failed to notice the presence of the "sin" of sexism in those holy times? Times that can be referred to in the words that St. Irenaeus wrote to St. Clement "They still had the Apostles' voices in their ears and their example before their eyes." St. Clement, St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp were certainly contemporary with the last years of

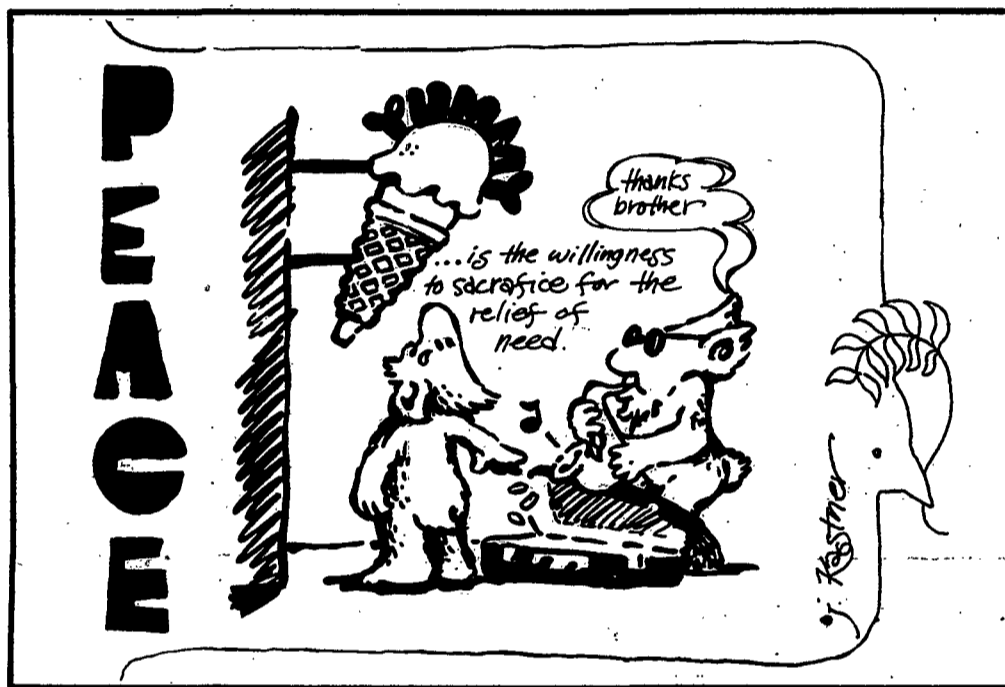
St. John.

Or shall we heed the words of St. Polycarp which surely sum up the whole of the Christian faith: "Let us keep our eyes constantly fixed on our hope and the pledge of our justice, namely on Jesus?" Does this encompass the "sin" of sexism? Doesn't justice include all that would negate sexism, namely Jesus Who is Love?

If the bishops would plant their feet on the foundation of the texts of the apostolic Fathers and apologists they might be led to concern themselves with the fundamentals of our worship. It is through these documents that "we understand the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, supernaturally illuminated by an utterly admirable faith, the mystery of the one God in Three Persons, the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Church which is simultaneously human and Divine" (The Church of Apostles and Martyrs" by H. Daniel Rops, pg. 280)

In this way, their energies would be consecrated to the glory of God and not trivialized as was the wont of the Pharisees.

William T. Hammill
Clardale Drive
Rochester



Schools are part of mission Church

To the editor:

My husband and I have been in public education as full- and part-time teachers for 29 years between us. Now being in Catholic education, as a kindergarten teacher at St. Mary's School in Waterloo, I have become very upset every time I hear of another Catholic school closing.

Catholic education builds the Catholic faith in our young, gives children faith in and respect for themselves, and is academically sound. It helps our parishes, where there are schools, to be strong and vibrant. The Christian atmosphere among the teachers, staff and fellow students is invaluable to the children. I find Catholic education to be a positive experience for the student, full of values and morals, disciplined toward academic achievement, and filled with a sincere caring by the teachers.

Our society needs all of these attributes to make it strong and healthy, and yet we're closing our Catholic schools.

I feel the bishops, priests and laity need to be re-educated to the values of Catholic education. Government studies — most recently the Coleman Report — have shown that the Catholic Schools' end product, the students, is more productive in society because of the attributes of Catholic education.

Catholic schools and students are bitterly stereotyped by our society. We in Catholic education are teaching average students from average homes. Our kindergarten national testing scores show this, but the test scores of the same children increase as they continue in the Catholic educational process. Why? Because children learn when there is a positive and caring attitude and when there are teachers committed to teaching. That is what Catholic education provides — and our bishops and priests are throwing this away.

We, as a society, are so impressed with the exterior of things. Catholic education cannot afford to drape itself with nice, but unneeded externals. So, many judge us from the outside and by past prejudices without really examining us and taking a careful look on the inside. Vocations to our Church are declining as Catholic schools are closing. Where are our

priorities as a Church? Our Catholic youth are our hope for the future. A CCD education — religion one hour a week for 30 weeks — is not sufficient. Can you imagine teaching a child to read one hour a week or practicing on team one hour a week? What would be the end results?

Catholic education is the pulse of our future Church. I pray and hope Bishop Clark will make a statement saying while he is bishop no more Catholic schools will close and will even encourage new schools to open. That he and his fellow priests will educate themselves to the values of Catholic education to the society as a whole. Those churches without schools should be financially helping those with schools and encouraging their children to attend the nearest Catholic school.

Our Catholic schools are part of our mission Church in this country. Let's take a new look at them, our values, our children, and continue to keep our schools open and continue to strengthen them.

Kathy Peters
Huff Street
Waterloo

Wear collar or quit priesthood

To the editor:

There are some clerical adolescents who don't wear the garb which is indicative of their high calling, of their sacrifice and religious leadership. Are they ashamed of their vocation or do they just want to be one of the boys?

I also take issue with the likes of Charlie Curran who runs around in a business suit, obviously leading an unreligious life, and looking very unpriestly. Does he pursue any priestly life, like celebrating daily Mass, leading a flock in worship of God, or teaching in a real Catholic school — not Notre Dame?

Clerics who do not wish to talk, act and dress like priests should get completely out of the priesthood.

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