

Columnists

Correspondence from Africa

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

During our diocesan safari to Africa in 1983, we experienced a bit of the primitive of Africa, but also the work of the Church in Kenya and developed a good friendship with Bishop Raphael Ndingi, the bishop of Nakuru, Kenya, who is a graduate of St. John Fisher College. Here is part of a recent letter from him, with comments.

"I am happy to hear that Jay (the grandson of the donor of a chapel at the pastoral center in Nakuru who attended the dedication) arrived home safely and is already a good messenger for the Church of Kenya."

Comment: Jay gave a talk in Kenya to the CCD children at Sacred Heart, Auburn. The children have begun a pen-pal program with Kenyan elementary school children, to their mutual delight.

"Delighted to hear that you met Father Steve. I hope he will do well. He is a good young man, and we look forward to his completion of his course at St. John Fisher and his return to us. I want him to do business management so he can help us with the management of our work."

Comment: Father Steve is a strong young native Kenyan, ordained four years, with an aptitude in practicalities, so necessary in good church administration. He is living with the college faculty of the Basilian Fathers, who give him room and board. The college is providing tuition. I asked him: "Father Steve, how has your bishop provided for your care while here?" He replied soberly: "The bishop bought my plane ticket and gave me enough to get me to Rochester, and said that God would provide the rest." That's faith and trust!

"Thank you for the stipends. We have noted the Masses and they are being said."

Comment: For years a few priests have been agitating to drop Mass stipends. Archbishop Sheen said to us when I was on the Priests Council long ago: "Fathers, stipends may not be much of a need for you, but in poor parishes, especially in the missions, they are the only means of livelihood." Archbishop Sheen is gone, but the need of the missionaries is still

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there. It would seem that on the occasion for funerals when there are a great number of Mass requests, people should ask that some be sent to the missions for those who need them most.

"The Church is definitely flourishing in Africa today despite the Muslims' threat. I am writing to Father Richard the Lion Hearted of Lyons (Father Orlando, so named by Father Dillon) to thank him for his generosity."

Comment: Father Orlando gave a generous stipend for my month of service at St. Michael's, Lyons. I asked him to send it to Bishop Raphael, a gift from the Lyons congregation.

"Please give our sincere regards to the Masai priest — Father Heisel — and Father Wohrab and to our many friends in Rochester whom you can see or speak to on the phone."

Comment: Of the 27 tribes, which are really nationalities, in Kenya, the Masai tribe is noted for its great height. Father Heisel is 6-foot 4-inches tall, hence "the Masai priest."

"I read with interest your column in the Courier-Journal, and agree with you fully. We must remain on the side of the Church, and do so honestly. Even in this country, those religious who have left schools and gone to the so-called poor, have been rejected by the poor. However, our situation in this country is very good, and our religious seem to understand that the poor will always be with them."

Comment: I always include a pertinent "On the Right Side" column with letters, to get my 25 cents worth and 90 cents for foreign mail. I don't know just what column I did send him, but it would seem that his remarks about fidelity to the Church and his observation about religious who have left the schools are kind of a block-buster to ponder over.

Abortion and election politics

By Father Richard C. McBrien

It is hazardous to write about a political campaign that has taken so many unexpected twists and turns, especially with a time-lag of three weeks between the composition and publication of this column.

Both the Democratic and the Republican contests have thus far had at least one thing in common: In neither contest has the abortion issue raised its divisive head.

Compare that situation with 1984. New York's Archbishop John J. O'Connor was pitted against both New York's Governor Mario Cuomo and Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate Geraldine Ferraro, with Boston's Archbishop Bernard F. Law and Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy playing supporting combative roles.

The U.S. bishops themselves were divided on the best way to handle the issue.

On one side, Bishop James W. Malone, then president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, counseled against one-issue politics. Chicago's Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin proposed a "seamless garment" or consistent-ethic-of-life approach.

On the other side, Archbishops O'Connor and Law insisted that the present danger of abortion outweighed the future danger of nuclear disaster. Catholics were encouraged to support the Reagan-Bush ticket even though Vice President George Bush's own record on abortion zigged and zagged with every turn in the political road.

This year, however, the only candidate who even made a pass at the abortion issue was Pat Robertson. He has since been driven ignominiously from the field after spending more than \$25 million to win only 17 delegates.

In 1984, politicians who differed with the pro-life lobby on the legal aspects of the issue were subject to sharp and oftentimes uncivil criticism.

This year, by contrast, there seems to be no political liability at all in remaining silent or conveniently vague on the issue, or even in being openly pro-choice, as Tennessee Senator Albert Gore has been.

The voters are more interested in jobs, in the drug crisis, in the quality of their children's education, in the trade imbalance, or in the national debt.

This isn't a happy development because abortion is a moral issue of the highest moment.

It touches the sanctity of human life, the in-

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tegrity of the family, the rights of the innocent and the powerless, and the very moral character of our society.

Why then the lukewarmness to abortion this year?

Surely one reason is that many people inside and outside politics have become disgusted with the excesses of both sides to the dispute.

The pro-life movement's reactionary political agenda and strident, mean-spirited attacks on anyone who dares to disagree with them have turned off those raised in a more civil tradition of public debate.

But the pro-choice lobby has also alienated the broad center.

A recent Senate vote on an anti-abortion amendment to a civil rights bill — which President Ronald Reagan subsequently vetoed and the Congress passed again over his veto — may be symbolic of a liberal backlash in the making.

The amendment allowed hospitals and other institutions that oppose abortion to continue to have the right to refuse to provide them.

Some women's groups were very upset — in particular with Democratic Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, and Carl Levin of Michigan — charging that the amendment would allow discrimination against women who want an abortion.

Senator Moynihan, in turn, accused the pro-abortion groups of tearing the Democratic Party apart with their uncompromising insistence on abortion rights. Senators Dodd and Levin argued that no institution should be legally required to perform abortions.

Perhaps by the time the 1988 campaign is over, the declining political power of the two extremes will be even more apparent than now.

If so, the moderates of both parties could begin doing something politically feasible about the national shame of abortion.

They will need the help and support of moderates in the Church as well — and as little interference as possible from its politically inept right wing.

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