

Columnists

Conversation with a curt critic

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

An Air Force friend of mine in his early fifties is an occasional, blunt correspondent. Recently, I wrote him and enclosed a copy of a recent column, "Hints on how not to say Mass" (C-J, June 2, 1988). He fired back with observations scrawled on the sides of the paragraphs of the article.

Article: Most priests consider themselves quite good preachers.

A.F. friend: Ego! Most stink. Most Protestant ministers are better.

Comment: Why are many priests' homilies not so great? 1) Most priests consider the Liturgy of the Eucharist as primary, and tend to be careless in preparing an explanation of the Liturgy of the Word. 2) Some think they can ad lib effectively. So my friend explodes: "Ego!" 3) Priests have a multitude of obligations which are shared by Protestant preachers, but not to the same extent, and they don't have a wife to prod them to get to work on the Sunday sermon. Especially in non-liturgical Protestant services, the sermon is the center of the worship service.

Many sermons in today's Catholic churches are obsessed with so much "love" that they tend to exclude references to duty, obligation, sin, responsibility and God's justice, without which there is not authentic evangelical love. Such homilies and sermons end up in emasculated wimpishness. Pentecostal preacher Jimmy Swaggart, between pitches for more money, preached mightily against sin, and on our duties and responsibilities. Many people, including Catholics, found such preaching more in conformity with the Gospels than insipid talks about love coming out of the ears.

Article: Secular greetings, like "good morning," detract from the sacredness of the moment.

Column: Whether that adds or subtracts is a matter of debate. Some enjoy the informality. Pope John Paul II seems to prepare his congregations adequately with the customary sign of the cross.

A.F. friend: Pope John Paul II is an anachronism, a Pole, and a scolding old man with little real help to offer.

Comment: If Pope John Paul's shepherding

On the Right Side

comes from his being a Pole, let's get more Poles. The Church in Poland flourishes. Let's face it — in the States we are closing our seminaries, our religious houses, our convents, our schools, and even our parishes. Men wanting to be priests are few. And we tolerate the violence of dissidents who won't leave the Church.

In an interview recorded in the May 23 *National Catholic Register*, I read the following excerpts:

"Sister Donna Quinn is a member in good standing with the Sinsinawa Dominican Order. She spoke with NCR correspondent Bob Olmstead at the Cathedral protest on May 8.

Olmstead: Does this mean you (women) don't want to be bishops, or that bishops should be done away with?

Sister Quinn: We hope that bishops will be done away with. I would say that there would be some kind of central core. I'm not sure what that looks like. It's difficult for people to listen to women because we're creating as we go. It's very fluid. We don't know exactly what the model or structure would be like. But I'm sure it will be different from what we have now, which is top down.

Olmstead: Does that mean the institution of the pope would be changed or done away with?

Sister Quinn: I think so. I think the whole structure will look different when we call forth the many gifts and talents of all people. As soon as you get women there, creating, it's got to be different because we're always birthing the new?

One might think this to be the utterance of some poor nun suffering from mental illness and illusions. But Sister Quinn is head of the Chicago Catholic Women. Only a milquetoast church would suffer such arrogance and utter nonsense.

The perils of one-issue politics

By Father Richard P. McBrien

The U.S. Catholic bishops, through their 50-member Administrative Board, have spoken at least twice against single-issue voting: first, in a March 1984 statement entitled "Political Responsibility: Choices for the '80s," and again last October.

In the latter statement, the bishops explicitly adopted Cardinal Bernardin's language concerning a "consistent ethic of life."

Although anathema to the Church's political and theological right wing, Cardinal Bernardin's seamless-garment approach to public policy issues is now the official position of our national episcopal conference.

But there is more to commend that approach than the bishops' endorsement of it. It also makes good political and practical sense not to trade away votes for promises on one issue.

Conservative Catholics have done that in the last several presidential elections. They abandoned their historic loyalty to the Democratic Party in 1972 because Richard Nixon promised them federal aid to parochial schools. We didn't get it.

Mr. Nixon did give us some new justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, including Harry Blackmun, who, a year after the election, wrote the pro-abortion *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Conservative Catholics went over to the Republicans in droves in 1980, and again in 1984 to support Ronald Reagan. Abortion was the new litmus test, and Mr. Reagan passed it with flying colors.

We're only a few months from the end of President Reagan's eight years in the White House. Not only have we come up empty-handed on abortion, but now we learn from the president's former chief of staff, Donald Regan, that Nancy Reagan had all reference to abortion deleted from the 1987 State of the Union Address.

When Regan told the first lady that he was sure the president wanted some reference to abortion in the message, she reportedly blurted, "I don't give a damn about the right-to-lifers."

This is a bitter pill for many politically conservative Catholics to swallow. They know they've been had by this administration just as surely as they had been had by the Nixon Administration before it self-destructed at Watergate.

Essays in Theology

In return for cynical promises on parochial school aid and abortion, millions of Catholics have ignored their own economic interests and have turned away from the wider range of moral issues that are clearly uppermost in the mind of the pope they admire so much, John Paul II.

To their credit, some conservative Catholics are honest enough to admit it. The head of the annual March for Life recently complained, "We certainly have not been able to get help for the innocent pre-born children out of this administration."

Over the last seven years there has been a conspiracy of rationalization on the part of conservative Catholics concerning this administration's patent failure to redeem its pledge on abortion.

These Catholics have blamed Congress — "Tip" O'Neill was always a favorite target — or Catholic politicians — Mario Cuomo was always a convenient scapegoat — or the pressures of foreign and domestic crises.

But now, as the President's second term fades slowly into the sunset, what was obvious to many from the beginning is starting to sink in painfully for the beguiled and the betrayed.

The administration didn't "give a damn about the right-to-lifers" except for their votes. And they got those — twice.

The U.S. Catholic bishops have been right all along. They have been right in principle because morality can't be split up. Christians must work for justice for everyone, on every issue.

No single issue, including abortion, has as yet emerged in the 1988 campaign. When and if such an issue does arise — and abortion is still the odds-on favorite — one hopes that Catholics will take a moment to look under the hood and kick the tires before laying cash on the table.

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