

## Columnists

### Auburn a step closer to eternity

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

**Question:** Are you moving from Webster to Auburn in October?

**Answer:** Yes, in October. Father Foster Rogers, the pastor, has accepted me as a priest-in-residence. The present St. Alphonsus Rectory was formerly the convent. It had 17 bedrooms for a large community of Sisters of St. Joseph. However, the community was reduced to four sisters — two few for so large a building.

The old rectory, which was really two old houses put together by Father Fred Straub, was beyond practical repair. So the new pastor, Father Rogers, who succeeded Father Clarence Gardner three years ago, consulted with the parish council. It was decided to demolish the old rectory, utilize the empty space for much-needed parking, rent an adequate house for the four sisters, and make the convent the new rectory.

**Q:** How does that work out?

**A:** Father Rogers has no priest assistant, though he does have two deacons: Deacon Gregg Lawson and Deacon John Tomandl. But he has in residence Father Robert Casey, retired from a parish in Skaneateles 10 years ago. The retirement age in the Diocese of Syracuse is 75. There is also Father Gardner, retired pastor of St. Alphonsus, aged 73. In October, there will be myself, aged 80. And the following June, Father Joseph Gaynor of Elmira Heights, who will reach the magic age of 70, will join us. My classmate, Father William Gaynor, comes each day from Owasco to celebrate Mass. Recently, a youthful black Franciscan, Father Regis Rhodda, also took up residence at St. Alphonsus when he assumed his duties as chaplain of the Mercy Rehabilitation Center, run by the Syracuse Franciscan Sisters, the order who joined the great Father Damien, the leper priest, in his work at Molokai, Hawaii. It will be a congenial community.

Each priest will have two rooms: a bedroom and a study. The bathrooms are community-style. There is a community dining room, a

### On the Right Side

common room, and several office and meeting rooms in the rectory, which are needed for an extremely active parish.

**Q:** With the alleged shortage of priests, why retirement at age 70? Rome says 75.

**A:** We have 74 retired priests in our diocese. Most are in good health and active, assisting in parishes regularly or filling in on occasion. Most live in rectories, though a few live in apartments or homes. The diocese would be in tough shape without these retired priests. I was on the Priests' Council when this retirement at 70 was proposed. Most of the council members were younger priests who were looking forward to pastorates or larger parishes. The only two to vote against it were Bishop Dennis W. Hickey and myself. The age set for retirement by Rome is 75. However, only two priests have rejected the 70-year age of retirement. We are a docile presbyterate.

**Q:** Why are you moving to Auburn in October?

**A:** My 15 years in Webster have been happy ones. After deciding to move back home, I put up a notice: "Moving to St. Alphonsus in October to prepare for eternity." From this, some concluded I have a terminal disease. The only terminal disease I have is old age; and God has treated me gently in this so that I expect to continue to help out at parishes when needed, continue to write this weekly column and continue to perform the work of the priesthood with thanksgiving to God for the greatest vocation in the world. In fact, Father Richard Orlando has engaged me for three weeks in Lyons next January and February, so the work of the Lord flows on. Deo gratias!

### Gorbachev and Pope John XXIII

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Serious political observers are beginning to note the remarkable similarities between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the late Pope John XXIII.

Does it seem far-fetched, if not irreverent, to draw such a comparison?

A recent article in the *The Boston Globe* by Olin Robison, president of Middlebury College in Vermont and a longtime advisor to the U.S. State Department on Soviet affairs, makes a persuasive case for the comparison.

Robison argues that the Soviet Communist Party conference held in Moscow at the end of June was to Gorbachev what Vatican II was to John XXIII. In October, 1962, during the fourth year of his papacy, Pope John convened the Church's 21st ecumenical council in order to bring about *aggiornamento*, an updating of the Catholic Church.

Right from the start it became clear that the unquestioned power of the Roman Curia had been broken. The outcome stunned even progressive bishops and their advisers. They simply didn't realize how widespread the desire for reform had become.

In June, 1988, in the fourth year of Gorbachev's reign as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, he convened the 19th party conference in an attempt to restructure and modernize Soviet communism — what Robison calls "the most expansive secular religion of the 20th century."

Pope John announced that he was throwing open the windows to let some fresh air into the Church. In his turn, Gorbachev proclaimed a new era of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) for the Soviet Union.

Lest anyone take offense at such comparisons, Robison is quick to point out that Lenin expected the Communist Party to replace the Church in the lives of the Russian people. It has not turned out that way, but the notion remains. And so the party conference was intended to articulate "a new vision of the Marxist-Leninist faith."

The secular religion that Gorbachev is trying to modernize is no less captive to entrenched bureaucratic interests than was the Catholic Church in Pope John's time. As was the case with the aged pope at Vatican II, Gorbachev's primary goal at the party conference

### Essays in Theology

was to set and control the agenda.

Because ideology is as important in the Soviet system as doctrine is in the Catholic Church, the party conference, like the council, had a second major purpose: to make the boundaries of faith less rigid.

"Never mind whether it works, or whether it is practical," Robison observes. "The Soviet system cannot change in fundamental ways unless and until there is a rearticulation of Marxist-Leninist ideology to suit the moment."

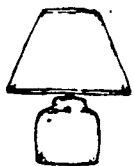
Gorbachev was very careful to insist in his opening speech that his program for reform was firmly grounded in the true faith of Marx and Lenin. The Soviet leader had to keep his conservatives in line. After all, it was their support that had been crucial in his selection as General Secretary, just as the votes of conservative cardinals were decisive in finally putting Angelo Roncalli over the top in 1958.

Although Gorbachev's lengthy agenda, like Pope John's, could not possibly have been acted upon, it didn't really matter. Vatican II made it impossible for the Catholic Church to go back to the old ways, as schismatic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre came to realize. Robison suggests that Gorbachev would be fortunate if his party conference were to achieve the same result for the Soviet Union and its Communist Party.

What Robison doesn't mention in his perceptive article is that the forces of reaction never give up. Both inside and outside the party hierarchy, some will stubbornly refuse to accept Gorbachev's program of reform, and they will use every available bureaucratic maneuver to thwart it — in spite of the 19th party conference.

Just as some Catholics, both inside and outside the hierarchy, continue to resist John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* — in spite of the Second Vatican Council.

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