

Columnists

Neglected middle-ground Catholics

By Father Richard C. McBrien

According to sources close to the vice president's successful presidential campaign, George Bush's strategists targeted three voting groups as key to an electoral victory: women, evangelical Protestants in the South, and Catholics.

The president-elect worked hard at cultivating all three constituencies, but he seemed to pursue the Catholics with special determination.

He made well-publicized and highly controversial appearances at the University of Notre Dame and at Seattle University, a Jesuit institution, and spoke at a number of smaller Catholic institutions as well, including several high schools.

Mr. Bush's campaign managers also scheduled some crucial photo-opportunity sessions with Catholic bishops: Archbishop John May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Archbishop John F. Whealon of Hartford; and Cardinal John Krol, retired Archbishop of Philadelphia.

Mr. Bush even appointed a campaign liaison for Catholics, Mr. Dinesh D'Souza, a young journalist with strong conservative credentials.

Governor Michael Dukakis did speak at Georgetown and the University of Scranton, both Jesuit institutions, but otherwise showed no special interest in Catholics as a distinct voting bloc.

Although exit polls disclosed that Governor Dukakis won the Catholic vote by a clear margin, they also revealed that abortion had been a significant issue for many.

Conservative pro-life Catholics were angered by the governor's stand on abortion, and they voted for Vice President Bush overwhelmingly. But that was to be expected.

What the Dukakis campaign may not have anticipated was the uneasiness felt by many middle-of-the-road and moderately liberal Catholics over the platform's and the candidate's abortion stance.

These Catholics largely agree with the governor on the legal aspects of the abortion controversy, but they are convinced that the issue has a moral dimension as well.

Neither the platform nor the candidate displayed much sensitivity to that moral dimension, or else they confined their moral analysis to an affirmation of the woman's sovereignty over her own body.

The national Democratic Party and its candidates have been misreading the minds of their Catholic constituents on this issue. As much as it may hate to do so, the party is going to have to take another look at abortion before the 1992 election. When it does, it had better not seek counsel only from left-wing Catholics who fol-

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low a straight pro-choice line.

There is a large middle ground in the U.S. Catholic community that both parties have been neglecting. The Democrats seem to regard left-of-center Catholics as genuinely representative of the Church on an issue like abortion.

Why else, for example, would Catholic members of Congress have invited Marquette Professor Daniel Maguire rather than Father Richard McCormick, SJ, formerly of Georgetown and now of Notre Dame, to address them on this issue earlier in the decade?

The letter of invitation, co-signed by then-Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro, included materials provided by the pro-choice organization Catholics for a Free Choice. The whole episode came back to haunt her during her 1984 run for the vice presidency.

The Republicans, on the other hand, seem to think that only right-wing Catholics are genuinely representative of the Church. Why else would Mr. Bush have selected someone like Dinesh D'Souza to be his campaign liaison with Catholics?

Mr. D'Souza was associated during his college days at Dartmouth with the independently financed conservative student newspaper that has been embroiled recently in national controversy and has served as editor of the often stridently conservative journal *Crisis*.

More to the point, he has been a strong and persistent critic of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letters on peace and the economy, and of the work of key staff members at the bishops' conference — Father J. Bryan Hehir in particular.

If Mr. Bush had selected a middle-of-the-roader instead of a hard-line conservative to tend his relations with U.S. Catholics, his designee might not have won him any more Catholic votes, but he or she would have at least given him an accurate picture of the Catholic community and its values — more accurate certainly than Mr. D'Souza seems to have provided.

In an interview with National Catholic News Service at the end of the campaign, Mr. D'Souza said, "The (Bush) campaign made an effort to identify with Catholic values." His examples of Catholic values? Abortion, voluntary school prayer, and tuition assistance.

Compare that list with the U.S. Catholic Bishops' consistent-ethic-of-life agenda and you see how far off the mark it is.

The story of Gideon, Part two

By Cindy Bassett

Nearly every available man in the entire country prepared to join Gideon's army. Soon, more than 30,000 men were assembled and preparations began for the battle against the Midianites. Even so, Gideon was still not convinced that they would be able to defeat their enemies. So he went alone to pray to God.

"Lord, please forgive me," Gideon prayed. "I know that you promised to use me to rescue the Israelites from the Midianites. We will be outnumbered by them 13 to 1. If you could just give me a small sign that you are with me, I'll lead your people in the battle. Tonight I'll put some wool on the ground outside. If, in the morning, the wool is covered with dew but the ground remains dry, I'll be certain of your promise."

The next morning, it was just as Gideon had asked of the Lord, but his faith remained weak. "Lord, please don't be angry with me for asking a second time," he prayed. "Tonight I'll put out the fleece again. In the morning, if it is dry and the ground is wet with dew, I'll be ready to lead your people against the Midianites no matter what the odds."

After God had given Gideon a second sign of his favor, he was ready to take charge of the huge army. Before he had done so, God gave him these instructions: "Your army is far too large. These men will think that they defeated the Midianites by their own power. Remember my promise to you: 'I will be fighting for you and the victory will be won as if these Midianites were only one man.'"

Gideon went before his army and announced: "All of those who are afraid to fight the Midianites should return to their homes." After that, there were only 10,000 men left in Gideon's army, but even so, the Lord told him again that there were still too many men. After the Lord showed Gideon which men to use in the battle,

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there were only 300 left. The Israelites were outnumbered by the Midianites 450 to 1.

Gideon surveyed the Midianites camped in the valley below. Then he commanded: "Tonight we attack!"

The 300 men who surrounded the Midianites in the middle of the night were a peculiar sight. Each man carried a trumpet in one hand and a jar with a torch inside it in the other hand. When Gideon gave the signal, each of them blew his trumpet, broke the jar and shouted: "A sword for the Lord and Gideon!"

The Midianites, confused by the odd spectacle, began attacking each other. The ones who ran away were pursued by Gideon's 300 men and defeated.

When the battle was over, the Israelites tried to make Gideon their king. "You have defeated our enemies!" they shouted. "You and your descendants, Gideon, shall rule over us forever!"

"We must never forget that it was the Lord who defeated the Midianites," Gideon reminded them. "And he alone shall be your ruler."

The Israelites lived in peace for 40 years until Gideon died. Today, when someone says they are "putting out a fleece," that person is asking God for a small sign as did Gideon.

Scripture reference: Book of Judges, Chapter 6:36 — Chapter 8:28.


Meditation: One person cannot do much alone. But one person who has faith in God's promises can do just about anything even when he is outnumbered by the odds.

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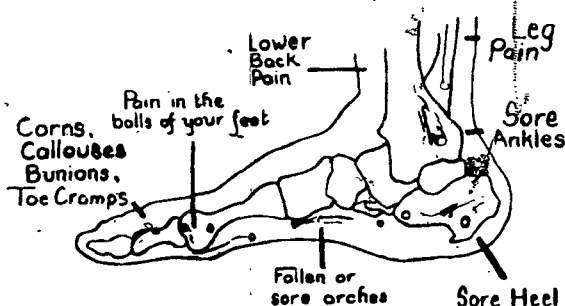
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