

Reflection day brings forth potpourri of questions

ON THE RIGHT SIDE



By Father Paul J. Cuddy
Catholic Courier columnist

The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Alphonsus Church, Auburn, invited me to give an afternoon of reflection Sunday, March 13. It began with noon Mass; then a fine dinner at the hall; then a 30-minute talk on "The Church as an Institution and as the Body of Christ."

People often have questions in their minds, but rarely ask for answers. So on such occasions as our reflection day, I give each person a small paper with the words: "This I am wondering about..." The people can write their questions for discussion. Here are some.

Q.: Why should we be encouraged to listen to Billy Graham by advertising in the *Courier*?

A.: Billy Graham is a devout Southern Baptist. When he preaches, he does not emphasize a denominational Baptist theology which might conflict with our religion. He does emphasize things very much in accord with our faith; the love of Christ; our acceptance of Jesus as our Savior, which surely is good Catholic teaching; the cross of Christ, sin, divorce, family unity, marital fidelity, condemnation of evil, irreligion and infidelity. Often these are little preached from some of our modern Catholic pulpits. He does not attempt to persuade listeners to become Baptists, but he does encourage them to return to their own churches, including the Catholic Church. The following question points to this problem.

Q.: When will they EVER get back to

discussing the Ten Commandments publicly??? And MORE OFTEN???

A.: In the time of Bishop Kearney and Bishop Casey, we were directed to preach a three-year cycle: one year on the Commandments; one on the sacraments; one on the Creed. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, at the end of his life, recommended this cycle because he was convinced of the weak understanding of even essentials among our people. Parents and grandparents might test their youngsters and probably agree.

The intention of the new Mass rite is to emphasize the Scriptures. The new rite gives a greater amount of Scripture readings. So instead of a carefully planned series of instructions, our homilists are instructed to explain the Scriptures of the particular Sunday. However, much of it is incomprehensible to the ordinary congregation.

Furthermore, many priests and deacons get so caught up in preaching about love

that they remain silent about responsibility, sin, the whole gamut of the New Testament. For example, St. Matthew's warnings are often ignored.

The old method of memorizing the Ten Commandments, the seven capital sins, the commandments of the church, and St. Paul's instruction on charity (1 Corinthians 13) should be restored in schools and CCD classes and reinforced by parents and grandparents. A memory in which are stored great truths and beauty from Scripture, poetry, literature, is a treasure chest.

Q.: How do you feel about God being referred to as "He/She?"

A.: At Mass in Ithaca College, the congregation used to be instructed to recite the Creed thus: "We believe in God, the Father-Mother almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." This is not from religious devotion but from a goofy sex hang up. Jesus always referred to God as His Father. Don't you think what is good enough for Jesus should be good enough for normal Catholics?

Thirst for revenge familiar to inquisitors everywhere

By Father Richard C. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

There is something in every fundamentalist's heart that empathizes with the Ayatollah Khomeini's reaction to Salman Rushdie's novel, "The Satanic Verses."

Whether they be Hasidic Jews, Bible-belt Protestants or traditionalist Catholics, religious fundamentalists the world over understand implicitly why the Ayatollah ordered his fellow Muslims to hunt down and assassinate Mr. Rushdie.

Mind you, these non-Muslims wouldn't go so far themselves. Putting out a contract on someone's life when that person has committed no crime of violence is a bit excessive, but they can appreciate the Ayatollah's fevered thirst for revenge.

For the Hasidic Jew in Israel, the object of scorn isn't named Salman Rushdie. It's the secular Jew who operates a movie theatre or promotes soccer matches or drives an automobile on the Sabbath. Or it's Jerusalem's Mayor Teddy Kollek for allowing all these profanations to occur.

For the Bible-belt Protestant, it's film producer Lew Wasserman and director Martin Scorsese for insulting Christians and blaspheming the Lord via "The Last Temptation of Christ."

For the Catholic traditionalist, it's theologians like Fathers Hans Kueng and Charles Curran, or politicians like Governor

Mario Cuomo and Senator Ted Kennedy — challengers all of divinely sanctioned truth and of divinely sanctioned authority.

Our non-Muslim fundamentalists wouldn't countenance assassination, but if any of their hated enemies were to die suddenly from natural causes or an accident, they'd hail the event as the act of an avenging God and would figuratively dance on their graves.

We Catholics are in no moral position, therefore, to look disdainfully upon the Ayatollah or the Muslim world generally. This whole frightening reaction to the Rushdie novel has ample precedent in our own history as well.

We, too, put people to death for blasphemy and heresy. We, too, employed the stake, the rack, and the sword to settle accounts for the Lord. The Spanish Inquisition and the Galileo case are permanent blots on the Catholic record.

And we, too, declared holy wars, like the much-romanticized, but morally disgraceful Crusades. Launched to free the holy places from the same Muslim "infidels" we are now inclined to denounce, the Crusades represent one of the shabbiest and ugliest periods in the entire history of the church.

The highly respected *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* damns them with characteristic British understatement: "Lit-

ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY



tle that is specifically Christian can be discerned in the manner in which they were conducted, and the Crusaders on occasion behaved with extreme brutality, both towards the Jews at home and the subjected people in the East."

The repressive spirit of the Ayatollah, therefore, isn't an exclusively Muslim specter. For centuries it has darted menacingly back and forth across religious lines.

And so, too, has the irreverent spirit of Salman Rushdie. It knows no religious, social, cultural, or political boundaries. It pokes at and punctures the icons of orthodoxy wherever it finds them, much to the consternation and fury of the defenders of the faith.

Sometimes it happens that yesterday's heresy becomes tomorrow's orthodoxy, and yesterday's blasphemy, tomorrow's piety. And sometimes yesterday's heresy remains a heresy, and yesterday's blasphemy remains a blasphemy.

Not every rebel, in other words, is destined automatically to become a hero. Some rebellions are misguided, and even

harmful. Some rebels are self-serving and without virtue.

But we don't always know at the time which causes are favored by God and which are not, which rebels are prophets and which rebels are fakers.

Given this dilemma, we Americans have always insisted on the value of freedom. It is better, we think, to allow truly heretical, even blasphemous ideas to circulate freely than to run the risk of crushing good ideas that only seem heretical or blasphemous at the same time.

When Peter and the other apostles were accused of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin, there was an immediate call for their death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, "respected by all the people," stood up and warned his fellow members to be careful. "If this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

The Ayatollah should follow the Gamaliel principle. But so should we all.

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We hope to offer a few helpful tips for the outdoor green thumbs and even a couple of home sprucing suggestions.

If you or your business is interested in advertising in this Spring-time section, please call the *Catholic Courier's Advertising Department* at (716)328-4340.

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