



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

By Father Paul J. Cuddy
Catholic Courier columnist

Question: What is the best thing about priests' retirement?

Answer: My own "best thing" is having nothing to do with marriages. Why? In a Catholic marriage, two things are involved — the religious aspect and the social. As a priest I am concerned about marriage: 1) as

Catholic nuptials more than social galas

a sacrament; 2) as a happy union which will endure "until death do us part;" 3) as the nest for children in which to be born and nurtured as good, loving, religious persons. It bothers me that many couples put almost exclusive emphasis on the social element.

Q.: What do you mean: "the social element?"

A.: An unbalanced concern about gowns, tuxedos, jewelry, the guest list, the dance band, the reception. These are important, but what has been your observation of those marriage splashes a year or five or 10 years afterward, if the couple

just used the church as a nice building for a marriage extravaganza? I am glad for a beautiful marriage if it is intertwined with a genuine reverence for the sacrament, wherein a man and woman become one, a unity in love and devotion, with the hope for children and the establishment of a permanent family.

Q.: You seem pessimistic. Aren't there good marriages?

A.: Yes. When the sacredness of marriage is regarded. Let me tell you of a recent one. I was once pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Savannah, which is a mission to the church in Clyde. Teresa Tiberio, a

young teacher in the Lyons school system phoned me. "Father, Richard Molisani and I are to be married. We want the marriage at 5 p.m. on Saturday in St. Patrick's. Our pastor has Mass in Clyde at 5. But he said if we could get a priest, it was satisfactory with him. Would you perform the marriage?"

I had not performed a marriage in years, and certainly didn't want to get involved, but out of friendship with their parents and grandparents on both sides, with some reluctance, I agreed.

Though I had known both families for years, I did not know the young couple and asked the pastor, Father Thomas Nellis, "What are they like?" He said "They're a nice young couple. They both go to Mass every Sunday, which is something today."

At the Friday rehearsal, I met the bridal party, a likeable group of young people. I was impressed by the selection of Scripture passages, which stressed the blessing of children and the holiness of the marriage union. The social aspects were good: beautiful attendants, virile ushers, a cute ring bearer and flower girl, a radiant bride and groom, two sets of glowing parents, good music and a church full of well wishers.

But there was one huge hitch. The nuptial Mass is like the Masses people are familiar with excepting for this: after the homily the priest goes to the prie-dieu and performs the marriage ceremony. Then he returns to the altar, and continues with the offertory, up through the Lord's Prayer, when he returns to the couple at the prie-dieu and gives a special blessing.

Oh shock of shocks! After the Our Father, I stood in front of the couple to give the blessing, and was stunned: "Good heavens. I haven't married you yet!" I had passed over the marriage ceremony. The couple looked relieved. The congregation was delighted. We did the marriage contract then and there, with the blessing following.

And history was made at one of the nicest of weddings, where the religious and the social elements of a good marriage were beautifully combined.

Jesuit's library appointment honors priesthood

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

The recent appointment of Father Timothy Healy, S.J., as president of the New York Public Library has provoked a minor storm of protest from within the intellectual and homosexual communities.

A few well-known literary figures have viewed with alarm the prospect of a Jesuit priest trying to balance the demands of his secular responsibilities against the dogmatic and moral dictates of a church to which he is bound in strict obedience.

Still others, speaking on behalf of gay and lesbian groups, have questioned Father Healy's even-handedness in dealing with homosexuals. As president of Georgetown University he waged a battle in the courts to deny student homosexual organizations official recognition on campus.

Apart from the special concerns of this latter constituency, the controversy surrounding this appointment raises two basic questions: one regarding the nature and role of the ordained priesthood; and the other regarding the Catholic Church's record on human rights and intellectual freedom.

Some of the opposition to Father Healy's appointment comes from those, even within the Catholic Church, who believe that priests ought to "stay in the sacristy" and leave other pursuits to the laity.

A Catholic editorial writer for *The New York Times* asked in a recent column if "a church strapped for priests can find no more important use for one of such great talent than to run the New York Public Library."

To be sure, if all priests were restricted to parish ministry, there would be more than enough work for them to do. But the history and tradition of the church — including especially its religious orders — have never limited the ordained priesthood in that way.

Moreover, how many additional priests might the church lose and how many fewer young men might be attracted to the priesthood if it were determined that parish ministry is the only activity in which priests could ever be engaged?

All hyphenated versions would disappear: priest-editor, priest-teacher, priest-president, priest-television host, priest-scholar, priest-administrator,

priest-poet, priest-novelist, priest-playwright, labor-priest, priest-scientist, priest-chancellor, priest-secretary, priest-principal, priest-psychiatrist, priest-psychologist, priest-physician, or, for that matter, priest-librarian.

Significantly, no one objected when Father Healy served as vice-chancellor for academic affairs at City University of New York between 1969 and 1976. And no one objected when he assumed his new duties as president of Georgetown University immediately thereafter.

Father Healy did an outstanding job in both places, by the way, and there is no reason to believe he won't be equally successful at the New York Public Library.

And neither is there any reason in theology, in doctrine, or in the richly diverse history of the church to believe that this new post is somehow incompatible with the nature and role of the ordained priesthood.

Simply put, priests have no fixed job description. Those who may be inclined to doubt this should consult the record, beginning with the New Testament. Therein they will find no reference to any except Jewish priests, apart from Jesus himself.

The second basic question this controversy has surfaced concerns the reputation of the Catholic Church on matters of human rights and intellectual freedom. Is the church, after all, the implacable enemy of freedom — of thought, of inquiry, and of expression?

Is the Catholic Church an inherently censorious institution? Does it tremble in fear of the truth? Does it doubt so much the validity of its own faith that it cannot tolerate the dissemination of views which are apparently at variance with that faith?

At worst, the Catholic Church's record on human rights is mixed, and certainly no more deplorable than that of enlightened political democracies like the United States, which for decades had legalized slavery and racial segregation and which, until the early part of this century, denied women the right to vote.

And the list of outrages could be extended to include the enforced incarceration of Japanese-American citizens during the Second World War and the nation's long-



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standing treatment of its Native Americans.

However, to say that we aren't any worse than comparable secular institutions isn't an acceptable defense for a community that calls itself the Body of Christ. As a sacramental reality, the church is called to an even higher standard of behavior.

Nevertheless, for some inexplicable reason we seem determined these days to add to, rather than subtract from, our own list of infractions: the censure and attempted censorship of respected theologians, the reimposition of loyalty oaths, anti-feminist statements and policies, and the appointment to positions of pastoral leadership men known for their ideological rigidity and uncritical institutional loyalty.

"This is a piece of frozen history," Father Healy told *The New York Times* recently, "and the sooner the church gets rid of it the better."

Meanwhile, both the New York Public Library and the Catholic priesthood are honored by his appointment.

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