

How not to win hearts and minds for Christ

Eastern Bloc Catholics and believers of all denominations are rejoicing over their first taste of religious freedom in decades.

Meanwhile, some U.S. Catholics are advocating an effort to win hearts and minds with a method reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition.

During that era, Jews and Moslems were forced to profess Christianity on pain of death.

Today, some bishops, including Bishop Leo T. Maher of San Diego, are threatening to bar prominent Catholics — politicians in particular — from the Eucharist unless they profess the church's pro-life position.

In a Nov. 15 electronic letter, Bishop Maher announced to Catholic Assemblywoman Lucy Killea that he would deny her the right to receive Communion because of the "pro-choice" position on abortion she has taken in her campaign for the California state Senate.

Last January, published reports revealed that during a Mass in Alexandria, Va., a parish priest withheld Communion from a city council member who had voted in favor of a school-based health clinic.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has no specific policy on such sanctions, according to Father Kenneth Doyle, conference spokesman, who added that actions like Bishop

Maher's are properly taken at the diocesan level.

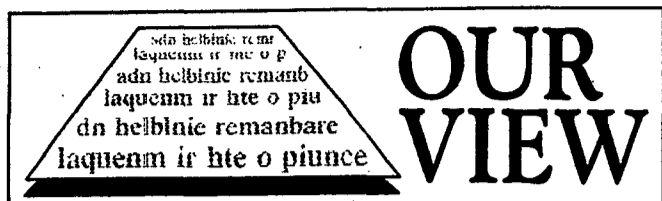
But at last month's NCCB meeting, debate surfaced over whether to consider a "hierarchical response" to Catholics who back abortion. Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago did not exclude the possibility of such penalties when he said at a press conference that the bishops should consider a "response" to Catholics who back abortion.

Politicians are easy targets thanks to their voting records and public-policy statements. Is a lack of hard evidence all that prevents us from going after the "real sinners," the men and women who obtain abortions and the doctors who perform them?

What about Catholics who work in such agencies as Planned Parenthood, which provides abortion counseling and artificial birth control?

And why prosecute only abortion-related offenses? Shouldn't Catholic defense-department officials who sanction a nuclear first strike be penalized?

What aims do such public sanctions accomplish? Perhaps some church officials believe their hard-line approach to orthodoxy will dissuade Catholics from questioning church teaching on life issues. But are these Catholics' doubts swallowed by silence? Or does harsh treatment of a



vocal few simply raise more silent doubts and secret disobedience?

It seems that an invitation to dialogue would stand a better chance of changing a dissenter's mind and heart. That seems to be the approach favored by Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who hopes that discussions among bishops in New York state and throughout the United States will produce ways of engaging those who disagree with the church's teaching on life.

"It is my hope that through this dialogue we will be able to change minds and convert hearts," the bishop explained in a written statement, "and that this work lead to legal protection for unborn life as well as for all life until its natural end."

As to the question of denying Holy Communion to dissenting Catholics — if the Jesus revealed in the Gospels never barred sinners from his presence, then who are we to try?

— The Editors



History casts new light on Bishop Sheen

To the editor:

I read Father Robert McNamara's November 9 "Centennial Scrapbook" feature on Bishop Sheen's work in Rochester with special interest. In 1967, after several years of teaching in the diocesan minor seminary program at St. Andrew's, I became associated with its successor institution and one of the Bishop's unique creations — King's Preparatory School. The words of its prospectus reflected both the singular vision of its conceiver and the promise of its purpose: It also set forth descriptors which later were to be characterized as manifestations of an overly idealistic, elitist approach to education. Bishop Sheen saw King's Preparatory as a co-educational secondary school for the formation of Christian vocation, both reli-

gious and lay, "a kind of testing ground for the new heroism of youth, for the leaders of the next generation, either in the vertical relation to God through the religious life, or the horizontal relation to humanity." King's Preparatory, he wrote, "will appeal to a certain type of young boy and girl who are prepared to enter into a tradition of bravery, and who with hardy souls and strong wills, are resolved to prepare themselves for a radical revision of youth for the sake of a spiritually renewed Church."

As Father McNamara aptly described him, Bishop Sheen "was a visionary, an 'idea man,' a conceiver of sometimes brilliant concepts." In the heady days following the birth of King's Prep, its faculty, under the caring guidance of Father Emmett Halloran, endeavored to struggle with such concepts and create a framework and a program and a set of attitudes that would do justice to the vision. But we found that the Bishop could not always be directly helpful in these matters: His presence was captivating but his counsel difficult to transfer into a practical realm. In hindsight, we understand now that his attention was focused on loftier considerations: Implementation was up to us. To the credit of Father Halloran and a most talented and enthusiastic group of teachers, King's Prep came to life.

Yet it was never to receive sufficient enough support from various sectors of the

diocese. Bishop Sheen's florid terminology — "King's Preparatory is for the spiritually elite ... for eagles who want to rise above dull conventionality" — was often a hindrance to promoting acceptance and endorsement of the school. After his departure from Rochester, competing priorities and financial concerns forced the diocese to close its doors in June of 1970. Shortly thereafter, the building was transformed into the site of the Pastoral Center and, for a time, also as the location of the School of the Holy Childhood. But, for those of us who labored during its short-term existence, the spirit of King's Prep has endured. In that sense, Bishop Sheen's concept lives on.

I agree with Father McNamara's assessment of him. Granted, his tenure as Bishop was controversial, had some administrative shortcomings, and was the source of many misunderstandings. Yet the perspective of history, as it does for all positions of leadership, will make a clearer evaluation. Twenty years later, Fulton Sheen is beginning to be viewed in a different light as a charismatic figure who, not without discomfort, led the Church of Rochester to a new view of itself and to the exploration of fuller ways to exercise its ministry.

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Don't undermine St. Pius School

To the editor:

We are writing in regard to the South-west Quadrant reorganization of schools.

St. Pius the Tenth School has a long-standing history of quality education. We have a large enrollment with waiting lists at several grade levels. Our enrollment is 97 percent children from our parish or surrounding affiliated parishes.

There is a documented survey of parents who have stated that a change in our school configuration would suggest to them the first step in weakening our school. They would then have to consider sending their children to the public schools in the area. As we have witnessed in other schools, declining enrollment is a definite impediment to quality education. Our school would therefore go from a viable, vibrant one to a struggling one in a very short time.

If we may be so bold as to use the type of illustration that the Great Teacher did: There once was a man who had three houses, two very weak and one very strong. In an effort to strengthen the two weak ones, he took some of the girders from the strong one to support them. When the first storm came, all three structures fell. Would it not have been wiser to combine the two weak ones into a strong one, and in the end have had two standing structures?

We are strongly committed to quality, Catholic education. We understand that, in some areas of our quadrant, schools are struggling and we applaud the effort to

make these strong again. It is our belief that St. Pius Tenth parishioners would be willing to do their part to help guarantee Catholic education to all children in the quadrant, but not at the expense of quality education for their own children. Let us go about the business of maintaining our school as is, while at the same time supporting other schools in our quadrant.

David and Bernadette Best
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Laity must assume greater responsibility for church

To the editor:

Concerning the decreasing number of vocations across the country, I would like to note my observations:

We are all aware of the critical shortage of priests throughout the country. We must realize it is going to get much worse before it gets better.

I believe the Catholic laity has been thoroughly spoiled over the years. We have had a priest at our beck and call from the moment of Baptism until the time of death. I think it is time that we admit to the fact that those days are gone.

The average Catholic sees his pastor and associate at Sunday Mass and wonders what they do the rest of the week.

It is time for the Catholic laity to take an honest look at themselves. What are you doing to help your parish and school to help alleviate the pressure of those in au-

thority? Are you an active Catholic or do you fulfill your obligation by attending Mass on Sunday? Do you volunteer for different ministries in your church, nursing home visits, Pre-Cana, etc? Do you contribute to the support of your church according to your means, or does God get what is "left over?" When called upon to work on fundraisers, are you there, or do you leave it up to "the other guy?"

The time has come for all of us to take a look at our priorities in life. In this busy world, all of us can say, "I don't have time," "I'll get to it when the kids are older," "I'll give to the church when the kids are out of school." Let's admit to the fact that all the above are cop-outs. If you don't give of your time and finances now, you never will. There is never a "good time." If you believe in anything worthwhile, you will make the time and sacrifice

in order to hold onto it. If we are so apathetic toward our church and schools, what will our children be like 10 years down the road? Do you think they will care?

We cannot expect our priests to shoulder the responsibility of our churches and schools alone, there are too few of them. It is our responsibility to carry on the traditions and beliefs our parents handed down to us, so that someday we may "pass the torch" to the next generation.

It is up to the Catholic Community to give our leaders the support that is needed; physical, financial and moral support are needed now. Perhaps by giving all of the above plus prayer, vocations will increase in the years to come.

Kathleen A. Cotopy
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