

Martyrs

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tyrs?

In response, Pope Benedict XIV issued standards in the 18th century, stating that the reason for a person's death was one criterion in deciding whether that person was a martyr. He further stated that a person could be a martyr if his or her killer was motivated by *odium fidei* — hatred for the faith.

Oodium fidei is the key to an ongoing cause for the canonization of five Franciscan priests killed in what is now Georgia in 1597. Known unofficially as the "Georgia martyrs" were murdered amid a dispute over the church's marriage regulations.

According to the book *American Martyrs* by Father Albert Nevins, MM, the dispute began when one of the five priests, Father Pedro de Corpa, forbade a young Indian convert from taking a second wife because doing so would violate church teachings. In response, the young man and some of his followers later murdered Father de Corpa and the other four Franciscans.

Franciscan Father Alexander Wyse of Boston has been examining the cause for the past decade.

"The objective now is to find documents and statements we can use to show that they died for the faith," Father Wyse said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Among the needed documents are reports the Spanish colonial government filed about the incident, trial testimony from the Indians arrested for the killings, and the reports of witnesses and of the attack's sole survivor, Father Francisco de Avila, OFM.

One of the documents Father Wyse has

obtained is a 1612 statement asserting that the five Franciscans "were put to death for teaching and defending the teachings of the church."

Once he has amassed all the evidence, Father Wyse will submit a report to a special tribunal the Diocese of Savannah, Ga., has established to study the case. If the tribunal decides to proceed with the case, it will conduct its own investigation. The outcome of that investigation will then be reported to the bishop of Savannah.

"The key player in all of this is the local bishop," Woodward told the *Courier*. The bishop could decide to propose the case immediately to the Vatican's Congregation for the Cause of Saints, consider it further, or do nothing at all, he noted.

Frequently, Woodward observed, politics influences whether a bishop and/or the Vatican congregation will decide to proceed with a cause.

"You don't make somebody a saint if it's going to cause problems for the local church," Woodward said, citing as an example the case of Mexican Father Miguel Pro, SJ.

Father Pro was murdered in 1927 during a period of intense persecution of the Catholic Church by the Mexican government. Although the congregation accepted the cause of Father Pro in 1952, and soon gathered enough evidence to support his beatification, it opted in the late-1960s to delay action.

Mexico's government at that time was of the same political party that conducted the persecutions in which Father Pro was killed. Thus, Woodward said, the Vatican congregation hesitated out of fear that action might precipitate another round of persecution.

The same party remained in power over the next two decades, and, by 1986,



St. John Fisher was executed in London on July 22, 1535.

Woodward said, Pope John II decided the church had waited long enough. The pope approved the decree for beatification of Father Pro in 1986, but the actual ceremony did not take place until September of 1988 — following the 1987 elections, which again were won by the same party.

Woodward pointed out to the *Courier* that political concerns also have influenced the cause of Archbishop Romero, who was identified with El Salvador's political left.

During a visit to the country in 1987, Woodward found its bishops to be divided over the issue. He said some members of the hierarchy fear a declaration of martyrdom for Archbishop Romero would further unsettle the nation, which remains torn by civil war.

But talk of Archbishop Romero's saintliness continues to spread, and a number of supposed miracles have been attributed to him. Meanwhile, his tomb in San Salvador has become a kind of shrine for pilgrims from throughout Central America, Woodward noted.

Despite concerns about the political situation, Archbishop Rivera finally decided to launch the cause.

Beyond the concerns of the local hierarchy, the desires of the reigning pope also may advance declarations of martyrs, Woodward pointed out, citing the case of Father Maximilian Kolbe, OFM.

On Aug. 14, 1941, Father Kolbe voluntarily died in the Auschwitz concentration camp in the place of a fellow inmate who had a wife and children.

A number of investigations into the life and death of Father Kolbe were conducted in the years after the war, Woodward noted. These investigations concluded that while Father Kolbe was a good man who took courageous action, he could not be declared a martyr under the church's traditional understanding of the term.

But Pope John Paul II, who had a devotion to Kolbe, overruled the findings of the various commissions, canonizing Father Kolbe in 1982.

In so doing, Woodward contended, the pope opened a new category for martyrs — martyrs of charity. This raises the possibility that men and women could be declared martyrs for such reasons as working and dying for social justice, he said.

Indeed, the parameters of martyrdom continue to expand, Father Nevins said.

"To my mind, martyrdom is much broader today than it ever was," Father Nevins said. "I think theologians are beginning to take that into account."

Yet Father Nevins likewise believes that bishops in the United States today have little interest in the causes of martyrs.

Woodward acknowledged that the U.S. bishops are not actively promoting the causes of martyrs at this time, and suggested that the bishops' apparent lack of interest may stem in part from a need to concentrate for the time being on other matters of concern.

Father O'Malley, however, attributed the seeming lack of action on causes of martyrdom to the fact that the church today requires investigations into the lives of the deceased to be far more exacting than was once needed. This, he said, makes the process more difficult.

In previous times, Father O'Malley explained, "most people in the world heard of all these people 20-30 years after they died." Such time lapses allowed for stories about the deceased to grow — and for the less pleasant details to be forgotten.

"Now, you here about them almost immediately — including all the warts," Father O'Malley said.

Woodward observed, in fact, that some of the martyrs named in earlier periods of church history would fail the rigorous investigations reputed martyrs must undergo today.

Still, martyrs have value even in this more skeptical age, Father Nevins contended.

"We have to have people we can hold up and say, 'These are what we should be like,'" Father Nevins concluded. "We need heroes, and these people are certainly heroes."

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Harold J. Conaty; Holy Name Society head

SCIPIO CENTER — A Mass of Christian Burial for Harold J. Conaty, a lifelong parishioner of St. Bernard's Church, was celebrated on Saturday, May 18, at St. Bernard's. Father Robert J. Downs, pastor, celebrated the Mass.

Mr. Conaty died unexpectedly on May 16, 1991. He was 70-years-old.

During his years at St. Bernard's, Mr. Conaty served as president of the parish's Holy Name Society. After he retired, Mr. Conaty looked after the grounds of the church and the parish cemetery. He also performed maintenance work at the church and rectory.

Mr. Conaty also worked for many years

as a farmer with his father, the late Edward Conaty. He also worked at the Owasco Water Works, the Cayuga Heights Water Works and the Canandaigua Water Works.

Mr. Conaty was also a lifelong member and past chief of the Scipio Fire Department.

Predeceased by his father and mother, Genevieve Bowness Conaty, Mr. Conaty is survived by his sister, Carmen Parker of King Ferry, as well as many cousins.

Interment was in St. Bernard's Cemetery.

Donations in memory of Mr. Conaty may be made to St. Bernard's Church, Center Road, Scipio Center, N.Y. 13147.

Lucille E. Donke; served at Holy Sepulchre

ROCHESTER — Miss Lucille E. Donke, a member of the Catholic Women's Club and longtime assistant treasurer of Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, died at Genesee Hospital on Sunday, June 2, 1991, after a brief illness.

The daughter of the late Charles and Martha Donke, Miss Donke served as assistant treasurer of Holy Sepulchre for more than 50 years. She was also a member of the National Catholic Cemetery Conference.

Miss Donke is survived by two sisters,

Dorothy Wendelgass and Marcella Florest of Florida; nieces Barbara Sheedy and Patricia Martel; and nephews Eugene D. and Robert Donke, and Patrick Walsh.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Tuesday, June 4, at St. Thomas More Church, 2617 East Ave., Rochester. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre.

Friends wishing to do so may have Masses offered in Miss Donke's name, or may send donations to the Abbey of the Genesee, Piffard, N.Y., 14533.