

A letter to a priest about 'Joshua'

EDITORS' NOTE: The late Father Paul J. Cuddy mailed this column to the Catholic Courier office just before leaving for his retreat in Massachusetts.

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The following is a letter I wrote to a fellow priest:

Thank you for your candid expression of disagreement with my critique of the book *Joshua* in the Dec. 5, 1991 issue of the *Catholic Courier*. I expected the embers to be stirred from the critique because the book has been acclaimed by many good people as a great spiritual event. I am puzzled that even some of the clergy and religious should be among the acclamers. I think it is not.

Reaction to the critique has varied. Some express indignation and defensiveness. Why, I am not sure. Is it because of the gentle person of Joshua? The message of love and concern? The zest for freedom from church regulations and guidance? Is it their aversion toward priests and bishops? A hostility toward the Institutional Church? Is it a contempt for Canon Law which is really to protect the rights of the people? Is it possible that the literary style is at-

tractive to many, so that a criticism seems a slight?

Some have expressed their appreciation. Fewer, of course. But people are less likely to express satisfaction than dissatisfaction. One note I especially appreciate reads: "Thank you for your critique. I am uneasy that good Catholic friends of mine are pushing that book which I think baleful and insipid. I suppose that *deus ex machina* intervention technique as a simple solution to problems has a certain attraction."

Might this not be a correct parallel? If one gave you a beautiful rosy apple, sweet and delicious, but shot through with a mild poison, would you eat it? *Joshua* is like the sweet apple, with a sweet attractive Joshua, but shot through with the virus of anti-clericalism and a rejection of the Catholic Church as uniquely from Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately the *Courier* omitted from the critique the specific reasons for the conclusion. Here they are, and do have the charity to believe my concern about a highly uncharitable picture of mean-spirited priests, and manipulating bishop and a derogation of Christ's Church comes only from a love of the authentic Church established by

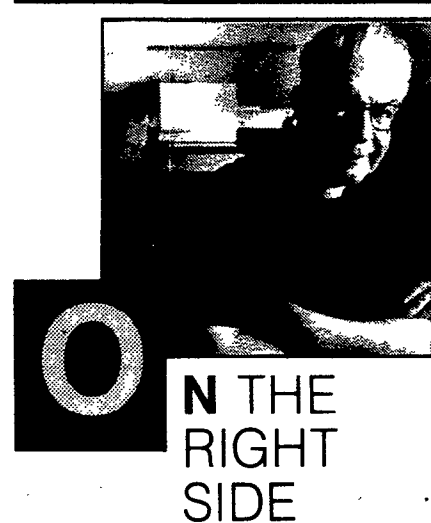
the historic Jesus Christ.

The critique reads: "Joshua declares (to an ecumenical meeting with multi-denominational clergy): 'Take the Christian denominations. It is not the following of Jesus that makes them different from one another. It is the denominational practice that you have created that makes them different from one another, and keeps them apart.'"

The *Courier* omitted what immediately followed: "This is hardly the conclusion of history, logic, reality and truth. The divinity of Christ, the Sacraments, the moral law, the necessity of baptism, the unity of faith with the bishop of Rome and his fellow bishops, the validity of priestly orders, the Blessed Eucharist, the teaching on marriage. All these are not up for grabs.

Jesus said to His apostles, the foundation stones of His Church: "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mark 28-19)

Before the priest receives Holy Communion at Mass, he prays: "Keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be separated from



you." Joshua gives encouragement to do many good things: to have compassion, love, tolerance. Joshua misses the full teaching of the Gospel.

Why not pick up your copy of the documents of Vatican II, and reread the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church? As priests we are called to tolerance and love, but neither you nor I nor Father Joseph Girzone can rightly disregard the teaching of Christ for a sentimental journey into fantasy land.

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