

Catholic press needs more freedom

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

There are many features of Catholicism in the United States that set it apart from Catholic life in other countries of the world.

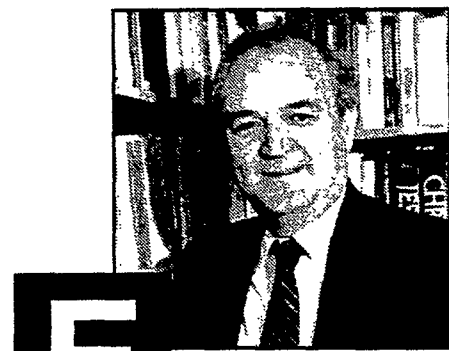
One is the vast network of non-government-supported schools, colleges, and universities. By and large, they are good schools; some are better than good; and a few have attained national and even international stature.

Another is the extensive network of weekly newspapers, magazines, and journals. One has only to page through the annual Catholic Press Directory to appreciate its diversity and scope.

It's more difficult, however, to render an opinion about the quality of the Catholic press in the United States than it is to render a judgment about the quality of Catholic schools, colleges, and universities.

In the case of Catholic higher education, there are accreditation reports and comparative ratings in books and magazines, such as the annual review of colleges and universities in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Some Catholic publications are very good. Many are ordinary. But one has the impression that too many are poor. If we had, proportionally, as many below-standard Catholic schools, colleges, and universities in this country as we have inferior Catholic newspapers, the intellectual and professional status of the American Catholic laity would be considerably less exalted than it is.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Why the difference between Catholic education, especially higher education, and the Catholic press?

Catholic colleges and universities are, for the most part, free institutions, administered and staffed by people who have passed the test of peer-review.

Institutionally, our colleges and universities are autonomous, that is, not controlled by outside ecclesiastical authorities, and their faculties are protected by academic freedom, that is, not subject to reprisal for occasionally expressing ideas at variance with ecclesiastical authorities.

That is not the case with much of the Catholic press, particularly diocesan newspapers and newsletters. The expression of opinion, whether in editorials or columns, is in too many in-

stances controlled — at least indirectly — by the views of the publisher, namely, the local bishop.

The censorship is rarely overt. Picking up on a variety of signals, editors develop a feel for what might be "too controversial," and so they engage in self-censorship.

The self-censorship doesn't stop with editorials and columns, however. Even the choice and treatment of news stories are affected.

Some might say, by way of rebuttal, that the secular press is no different, that some secular publishers are just as much "involved" with the policies and content of their papers as the bishops.

Undoubtedly, there are secular papers whose publishers do exert that kind of control, but of what quality are those papers and what reputation do they enjoy among their peers?

The best example to the contrary is *The Wall Street Journal*. It is a business-oriented publication with a strongly conservative editorial page. But nothing else in the paper is affected. Freedom and the highest standards of journalistic excellence prevail on every other page. Which is why *The Wall Street Journal* is generally regarded as one of the nation's best newspapers.

It should be pointed out that the national Catholic press is different from the diocesan press. Except in the case of *Our Sunday Visitor*, there is no direct episcopal involvement in these papers' management.

The Wanderer and *Twin Circle* have

always been strongly conservative in orientation, with a decidedly polemical tone. The *National Catholic Register*, once as notably conservative as the preceding, has moved closer to the center. The *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) is the only national paper with a liberal orientation. It also has the highest circulation of the four.

One perennial cliché about the NCR and *The Wanderer* ought to be put to rest; namely, that they are ideologically equidistant from the center, with the NCR as far to the left as *The Wanderer* is to the right.

A recent editorial in an Eastern diocesan paper, for example, refers to "ecclesiastical polarities of the right and left, *The Wanderer* and — its liberal cousin, *The National Catholic Reporter*." Say what you will about *The Wanderer*, the NCR is not its "liberal cousin." No careful and objective reader of both papers could sustain the judgment that the NCR is but a mirror-image of *The Wanderer*.

On the contrary, I know of no weekly Catholic publication that is more faithful to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, more open to the full spectrum of news and views in the contemporary Catholic Church, and more securely situated in the church's broad, moderately liberal-to-conservative mainstream than is the NCR.

U.S. Catholicism has been enriched by its impressive network of autonomous and free academic institutions. Might not an autonomous and free Catholic press have a similarly positive effect?

Forgiveness offered to all during Lent

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 8:1-11; (R1) Isaiah 43:16-21; (R2) Philipians 3:8-14.

The theme of Sunday's readings is confidence in the future. "Remember not the events of the past," proclaimed the Second-Isaiah (R1). The past event he referred to was the exodus from Egypt. That, of course, was great, but Isaiah promised that, in the near future, God was going to do something even greater for his people who were languishing in captivity in Babylon.

The liberation of their ancestors from Egypt was by violence; their liberation from Babylon would come about peaceably, simply by touching the heart of Cyrus. So wondrous would this liberation be that the Jews themselves would say, "We were like men dreaming ... our mouth was filled with laughter;" and the nations would say, "The Lord has done great things for them."

But the exodus from Egypt and the exodus from Babylon, both liberations from physical slavery, were only shadows of the greater exodus to be brought about by Jesus — the libera-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

tion from the far worse terrible slavery, that of sin.

The dramatic story of the adulteress exemplifies how easy redemption is since Christ's coming.

For the woman taken in adultery, her meeting with Jesus was a new start. The same grace is offered to all of us, this Lent, for Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Consider this deeply moving event of the woman taken in adultery in light of a

second chance.

She had been caught in the act of adultery. Offhand, there is something unjust about the situation. The law which the Scribes and the Pharisees referred to ordered that both the man and the woman, caught in the act, should be stoned. Yet it was only the weaker person who was made to stand in front of everyone. The malevolence of the enemies of Jesus. Zeal for the law was not what had made them act, but hatred of Jesus — they posed the question to trap him.

Jesus simply bent down. What a gentleman He was! He would not inflict greater embarrassment on this poor woman. In response to their question, He simply doodled on the ground, like a man who scratches on a pad when he has to listen to someone whose talk bores him to death.

But they persisted. So Jesus straightened up and with a withering look that penetrated their very hearts, He said, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." A second time he bent to the ground and doodled again, this time to release His mounting anger against these heartless, brazen and shameless hypocrites.

When all had drifted away, and the

poor woman stood there, waiting for the condemnation that never came, Jesus straightened up and spoke, not words of condemnation, but of forgiveness. He did not gloss over her sin; He forgave it and exhorted her to repentance. "Nor do I condemn you," He said softly. "But from now on, avoid this sin." And she went away with a song in her heart. "The Lord has done great things for me. I am filled with rejoicing."

The strange, fascinating, and often overwhelming attraction of sexual desire is the heritage of original sin. Rare is the person who has not felt the sting of the flesh. If we have succeeded in using our bodies well, let us not glory but humbly thank God for having shielded us from temptation. We have all been tried, and we know that but for the grace of God there go I like the adulteress.

Therefore, when another sins in the flesh, let us be truly humble, loathe to judge or to condemn. We need not approve of the sin, but surely we must love the sinner who so often turns to sins of the flesh precisely because true love has often been denied him by those who profess to be Christ's followers.

LOW VISION PRACTICE

George S. Kornfeld, O.D.
Optometrist

Telescopes • Microscopes • Magnifiers • Closed Circuit TV Readers

NEWARK OFFICE
c/o Pearle Vision
513 W. Union St.
315-331-3657

ROCHESTER OFFICE
c/o Gitlin Optical
2180 Monroe Ave.
716-271-7320

CANANDAIGUA OFFICE
c/o Gitlin Optical
Parkway Plaza
716-394-4230

1/2 OFF Easter Sale

Hop in today and purchase any one Easter item at regular price and receive a second item of equal or lesser value at half price.

Expires 4/15/95

Leewards
arts & crafts

Offer applies to regular priced merchandise only. Not valid with any other coupons or discount offers. Present ad at time of purchase. One coupon per customer. Does not include custom framing and custom floral arrangements.

Stoneridge Plaza 621-2770
Henrietta Plaza 272-9310
Hours: Mon.-Sat. 9:30-9, Sun. 11-5

