

## Two speakers address state of church in the U.S.

### N.D. professor counters critics

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Contrary to gloomy prophets and naysayers, the Catholic Church is not heading for a schism, according to Dr. Lawrence Cunningham, head of the theology department at the University of Notre Dame.

In fact, the controversies that sometimes divide many of this nation's Catholics from the Holy See are no more serious than many other controversies that have divided Catholics for centuries, Cunningham said.

"Every age has its own particular problems," said Cunningham, who studied at St. Bernard's Seminary on Lake Avenue from 1955-57. "(Today's) seem terrible because they're *our* problems."

The theologian and author made his remarks during a speech in Basil Hall at St. John Fisher College on Thursday evening, March 30.

Critics of the U.S. Catholic church, particularly those on the extreme right

unhappy with the church's current state, often allege that part of the church in this country is already in unofficial schism with Rome, Cunningham said.

Such critics — along with equally unhappy liberal Catholics — get all the play in the secular press whenever the pope makes a strong statement on matters such as artificial birth control or celibacy, Cunningham explained.

Nonetheless, the Catholic Church has survived such intense disputes before, and church controversy does not equal church schism, the theologian emphasized. Those who agonize over the church's current state need to know that Catholics have been bitterly divided over a number of issues in the past, he added.

Cunningham noted, for example, that the U.S. church in the 19th century was divided over such questions as the affirmation of papal infallibility and the assimilation of Catholics into U.S. life.

Cunningham reminded his listeners that the Rochester diocese's founding bishop, Bernard J. McQuaid, was a key player in the "Americanist" controversy pitting those who advocated greater participation in U.S. public life against those who thought the nation's civic life was tainted by Protestantism and liberalism.

The theologian added that the pre-

Vatican II Church of this century and the last one also was marked by division — particularly between ethnic groups.

"It is a pious fiction that before Vatican II, there was an essential sameness in all the local churches," Cunningham said.

And many who consider themselves traditional Catholics longing for some past uniformity would be surprised to learn how the church viewed some cherished customs in the past, he said. An early church council, for example, prohibited kneeling during the Mass because only slaves knelt and such behavior was deemed inappropriate for Christians made free by Christ.

To clarify for today's Catholics whether their local church is in danger of schism, Cunningham defined what it meant for a local church or diocese to be Catholic. For a diocese to be Catholic, he said, its bishop must be in union with the See of St. Peter (Rome); it must celebrate the sacraments; and it must affirm the Apostles' Creed.

No U.S. diocese has yet to disavow any of these distinguishing characteristics, Cunningham said. However, he also pointed out that the U.S. Catholic

church does have some real and difficult disputes with the Vatican.

To illustrate his point, Cunningham noted that many U.S. bishops are unsure of where they stand in relation to the pope. Prior to Vatican II, bishops were seen as delegates of the Holy Father, Cunningham said, but the Second Vatican Council highlighted the shared authority of the bishops and the pope.

Nonetheless, not all bishops see themselves as colleagues on par with the pontiff, Cunningham said. For example, when Pope John Paul II released the encyclical "Veritatis Splendor," last year, one U.S. bishop was asked by a reporter what he thought of the papal pronouncement, Cunningham continued.

"He said, 'The magisterium has spoken and we must obey,'" Cunningham recalled. "I said, 'Bishop, you *are* the magisterium. What do you say about this?'"

At the end of the day, though, such concerns are less important than the church's need to lead its members to Christ, Cunningham said.

"Catholics are called to be followers of Jesus, not the pope," the theologian said. "Every pope would agree with this."

### Young Catholics poorly educated

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — The U.S. Catholic church has lost a generation of young people, many of whom do not even consider Jesus God incarnate, according to Dr. Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College.

"Not all of our kids are going to heaven," Kreeft said during a speech on Friday night, March 31, at St. Thomas the Apostle School Hall, 4536 St. Paul Blvd.

And if they do go to heaven, it is more likely that young people will be assigned a place among history's virtuous pagans rather than its Christians, Kreeft said, because they are unaware of the importance the church places on faith in Jesus Christ and fidelity to His teachings for salvation.

Kreeft's speech was sponsored by the parish's Irenaeus Center, which provides adult education to the Catholic community. In addition to his March 31 talk, Kreeft gave three more lectures on the state of the U.S. church on April 1.

Kreeft has been surveying incoming freshmen at Boston College — a Catholic institution run by the Jesuits — for decades now, and among his queries he asks students what they would tell God if they died and had to give Him a reason for letting them into heaven.

"Ninety percent of the students never even mention Jesus Christ," he said.

Most of the students respond that they should be allowed into heaven because they are good or nice, rarely confessing to any kind of sin that might cast doubt on their worthiness to enter God's presence, Kreeft explained. In doing this, the students unconsciously echo the scriptural pharisee who went to temple justifying himself before God, a justification Jesus dismissed, Kreeft said.

Kreeft added that salvation presupposes that there is something to be saved from and the church must begin to reemphasize this point if it is to stay faithful to Christ's Gospel message.

"You don't get to the Good News without the Bad News," he said.

Further complicating the issue for young Catholics is the widespread lack of

belief in many of the physical realities that the church has proclaimed for centuries, Kreeft said. Many Catholics, for example, no longer believe in the importance of Christ's physical resurrection, and some see it as a poetic metaphor, not a fact, he commented.

"I think most young Catholics who grow up today think of our religion as more an art than a science," he said.

Kreeft added that belief in Christ's divinity has been replaced with admiration for His human virtue.

"I'd say that half the people who call themselves Catholic don't believe Jesus is God," he observed.

Kreeft blamed a lack of emphasis in catechetical classes on the church's basic teachings for the ignorance rampant among young Catholics today. He noted that his own son was delighted to read an old copy of the Baltimore Catechism — at one time, the catechetical handbook of young Catholics throughout the nation — because it clearly laid out what the church taught.

"Why can't they teach us this?" Kreeft recalled his son asking him.

Young people also long for heroic stories, yet few know anything about the lives of the saints anymore, Kreeft said.

"No abstract eternal principles?," he asked rhetorically. "Fine. Give them the lives of the saints."

Despite the fact that he lamented how young Catholics currently receive the faith, Kreeft outlined four strengths of the U.S. church that he believed could serve as the foundational corners for its rebuilding:

Most of its members are good.

"I have very rarely met a wicked, corrupt, nasty enjoyer of sin," he said.

Although the church's teachings on birth control and abortion meet much opposition, most traditional Catholic morality is admired, even by non-Catholics.

Faith, hope, love, God, heaven and the saints are still attractive terms for most people.

Even the most dissenting Catholics have some sort of loyalty to the church.

This last point comes home most clearly when Kreeft talks to ex-Catholics, especially those who still drop into a church because they miss the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

"Their heart is much more loyal than their head," he said. "If their head were more loyal than their heart, I would be pessimistic."



Wendy Longlade/Photo intern

### Helping hand for campaign

Approximately 5,000 people participated in United Way's Day of Caring on March 29, performing such volunteer duties as painting, distributing food, serving lunches, and reading to children. The annual event marks the official start to the United Way's annual fundraising campaign. (Above) Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who volunteered his time at the Catholic Family Center's Community Residence Center, 218 Clifford Ave., Rochester, greets Israel Qualle Chino while handing out lunches to residents. Chino was visiting a friend at the center.

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