

Don't divide faith, culture



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The moral life

Elements of modern society such as pluralism, religious toleration, recognition of the rights of gay and lesbian and all minority people, secularism, the equality of women, multiethnicity and democracy ought not to frighten our religious sensibilities. We should be searching for ways to let our long history of cultural adaptation and critique inform our responses to contemporary society.

H. Richard Niebuhr's book *Christ and Culture* described several typologies for the ways Christianity has responded to its surrounding culture. He notes that we have at times opposed it and abstained from participation in it, we have sometimes embraced culture as itself being a vehicle for the Gospel, we have tried to establish Christianity as the ruling force, we have advocated Christians entering into culture in order to lead and transform it.

If we are to develop skills for living in society while remaining faithful to our faith, it will not do to withdraw from culture or conceive it as the enemy of true faithfulness. The vision of the Second Vatican Council established the church in the midst of the world, encouraging Catholics to work in partnerships that promote Gospel values. It encouraged us to enter into critique of those elements that contradict the Gospel and the kingdom.

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I've been reading a collection of the essays written by the columnist Thomas Friedman since 9/11/01. I agree with some of what he says and am critical of some of it as well. In one interesting segment he asks the question: "But who were the hijackers?" He tries to answer this question by making two trips, one to Belgium and the other to Saudi Arabia. What he found on his journeys raises some interesting points for anyone concerned with religion and its relation to modern society and contemporary culture.

Friedman's contention is that the key hijackers followed a pattern of conversion to the radical form of Islam that they eventually adopted. He suggests that these men were primarily well-educated children of privilege. They were able to leave their homes in the Middle East for study abroad. Friedman writes that "virtually all of them were living in Europe on their own, grew alienated from the European society around them, gravitated to a local prayer group or mosque to find warmth and solidarity, got radicalized there by Islamic elements, went off for training in Afghanistan, and presto, a terrorist was born" (p. 333, "Longitudes and Attitudes").

He suggests that these men fit the pattern of what he calls "the classic revolutionary," characterized as "deracinated, middle-class, shaped in part by exile," and compares them to Lenin in Zurich, Pol Pot and Ho Chi Minh in Paris. Friedman in-



ears, hooves and tails. Horses, used to draw attacks from the bulls, are often mutilated. The pope has honored bullfighters by granting them private audiences. He has been unresponsive to the pleas for him to condemn bullfighting and animal abuse.

In 1567 Pope Pius V threatened excommunication for support of or participation in torture fiestas or bullfights. Pope John Paul could remind today's world of God's love for all His creations, and he could put a stop to some hideous practices, but he has not done so.

I like the words of one Episcopal priest, quoted by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals columnist Carla Bennett, "Whether or not the other animals have souls is as unprovable as the proposition that the human animal has a soul. Such things are a matter of faith and I, for one, believe that the spirit of God dwells in his entire creation."

All religious leaders and clergy should address the need to include animals in our circle of compassion.

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Freedman chairs the public education committee of Animal Rights Advocates of Upstate New York.

Seek priests yet unborn

To the editor:

Regarding "Tougher issues await in new round of planning" (*Catholic Courier*, Sept. 5): Is anyone outside the chancery aware of

what is being proposed by the pastoral planning process? If you haven't been paying attention, go to www.dor.org and take a look.

The article definitively states that there will be 62 priests in the year 2025 — that's 23 years from now. And that number is firm enough to "bring more severe issues into play" now.

Fewer priests mean fewer Masses as Mr. Pickett has so bluntly stated. Yes, canon 905, section 2 does limit the number of Masses that a priest can celebrate on Sunday. How about a temporary indult to raise the number of Masses that can be celebrated by a priest on Sunday? I have no desire to injure our priests, but if they are physically able, and willing to celebrate four Masses on Sunday under an indult, let them. But that is not a long-term solution.

Is it possible that in 23 years we could reverse the decline in vocations? A baby born today will be 23 years old in 2025. I think that we have plenty of time to foster vocations in those that have not even been born! And maybe even in those young men that are 10, or 15, or even 18 years old today.

My guess is that with some old-fashioned prayer, and sermons, and rosaries, and the example of good priests, the decline can be reversed. Let's give that a try before we destroy any more parishes in the name of pastoral planning, and to fix a problem that need not exist.

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