

# Vatican guidelines aimed at politicians

For those unfamiliar with the ways of the Vatican, it may have come as a surprise last month when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued specific guidelines for Catholic politicians which attempt to dictate how they should vote on various issues relating to the protection of human life.

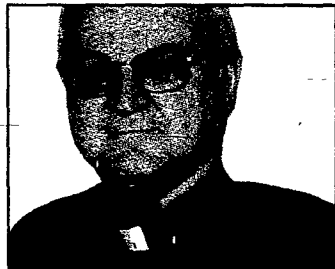
This is not the first time in this pontificate that Catholic politicians have been instructed on their civic duties, and it probably will not be the last. The question, however, is whether this latest directive will have any greater impact than previous ones have had — which is little or none.

The document, entitled a "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life," was issued just days before the 30th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Citing previous statements of Pope John Paul II, the document insists that it is impossible for Catholic politicians to promote any law that attacks human life or to vote for such a law.

The guidelines were released last month with relatively little fanfare. Vatican officials indicated that the document would be distributed to bishops' conferences in various countries as well as to individual bishops, and that it will be up to them to decide how to promulgate them.

As always, the most ef-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

fective conduit for the wide distribution of Vatican statements is the much-beat public media. If it were not for the press, however, few people would ever be aware that the Vatican had issued anything — on this matter or on any other.

The *Boston Globe* was quickly on the story. Its religion reporter, Michael Paulson, contacted two obvious targets, Edward M. Kennedy and John F. Kerry, both of whom represent the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate — Kennedy, the most prominent member of that body, and Kerry, an announced candidate for the presidency of the United States.

Both had essentially the same response to questions regarding the document's potential impact on them as Catholics and as members of the Senate. They appealed to the stance adopted by John F. Kennedy in an address before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association during the 1960 presidential campaign.

"I believe in an America," the future president said,

"where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the pope, the National Council of Churches, or any other ecclesiastical source." Kennedy insisted on that occasion that if there were ever a conflict between his conscience as a Catholic and his constitutional responsibilities as president of the United States, he would resign rather than violate the latter obligation.

Robert F. Drinan, a Jesuit priest, former five-term member of Congress, one-time dean of the Boston College Law School and currently a professor at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., was also asked for his reaction to the document.

"This is a pluralistic society," he pointed out, "and we do not impose our views on others. The pope is trying to be a moral leader, and we should welcome moral directives from whatever source, but we're not going to put them into civil law."

But there is another factor at work here. The ecclesiastical environment has changed dramatically since January of last year when the same *Boston Globe* first exposed the sexual-abuse scandal. Catholics are now much less inclined to accept moral guidance from the hierarchy without first taking a hard, critical look at it.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Choir leader intended to inspire many

To the editor:

I was dismayed to read the letter to the editor authored by Patricia Seiler in the Jan. 30 *Catholic Courier* ("No dilution for chorister"). Her remarks are insulting. In addition, my views are inaccurately represented so as to appear anti-Catholic in nature.

I am proud to be of the Catholic tradition but my interpretation of "Catholic" differs from Ms. Seiler's. I know of no strictly "Catholic" music. Throughout history the church has endorsed many traditions, of which Latin chant and polyphony are but two. Holy Trinity's music program includes chant, hymnody, both traditional and modern, and modern song, including some bilingual pieces. The choir sings motets and anthems from the Middle Ages on down to the present day. This to my mind is catholic and Catholic — upper and lower cases intentional — and in the present "tradition" that the Church of Rome and the American Catholic Bishops encourage.

The intention of my comment regarding the Holy Trinity Choir's participation in the Choir Festival was that Latin and music composed in past centuries are not the only way we should represent ourselves at the Festival. I was suggesting a more modern piece to demonstrate our range of ability. I also commented that a more spirited modern

piece might better inspire the particular congregation that attends the Festival.

As far as I know the Roman Catholic Church endorses ecumenism. Photographs of Pope John Paul II embracing the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch and kneeling in prayer with the Archbishop of Canterbury should speak volumes. I don't expect all Christendom to be united in my lifetime, but meanwhile, I consider it an honor to participate in the yearly Choir Festival and I enjoy standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow Christians praising the Lord in song. I believe the greatest majority of the participants feel the same.

Michael Costello  
 Choir Director,  
 Holy Trinity, Webster

## Unseen God always there

To the editor:

I am writing in response to the letter written about Harry Potter (*Catholic Courier*, Feb. 6: "Dismayed by Potter review"). I thought the woman who wrote in had a bad view on the issue. As a child, at age 12, I really couldn't believe what she was talking about. There is spirituality in Harry Potter, for those willing to see it. It may not say that it is related to God right out, but God doesn't always say what he's doing right out either.

As for being a slow poison, I have grown older as I read the Harry Potter books, and my faith in God has actually increased, but the books really had nothing to do with it. The kids in the books are taught magic tricks, yes, but wasn't I taught to pray? J.K. Rowling could have made them stories about talking to God, but that isn't the main story line. The magic is a fun touch, yes, but Harry Potter is really a classic story of good versus evil, and a kid who learns that there is good in the world, but you have to deal with evil, too. I see it as a story of life, put in

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