

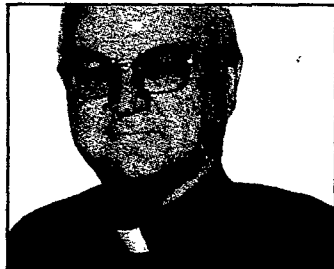
# Dissent occurs in religion, politics

For a number of years Catholics located to the right of center on the ecclesiastical spectrum used the term "cafeteria Catholicism" as an epithet dismissive of fellow Catholics. In their minds, "cafeteria Catholics" are somehow less than fully Catholic. Just like someone in a real cafeteria line, such Catholics pick and choose among doctrinal items.

According to this view, "cafeteria Catholics" turn up their noses at "dishes" labeled "sexual ethics," "reproductive morality" or "ordination of women," while rushing to fill their theological plates with items marked "social justice," "war and peace" or "capital punishment."

It was suggested recently that noncafeteria types in the U.S. Catholic Church are without a political home these days. If they are pro-life, in the sense that papal teachings on abortion are pro-life, their natural base is the Republican Party. But if they are also pro-social justice, pro-peace and pro-environment — about which papal teachings are also emphatic — their logical base is the Democratic Party. No party provides an unambiguous welcome to Catholics who embrace a consistent-ethic-of-life approach.

A few of the right's leading spokespersons now use the expression "culture of dissent" — perhaps on the assumption it cannot so easily be turned back on them.



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

But they are mistaken in that regard, as a recent editorial in the *National Catholic Reporter* (1/31/03) makes clear.

The editorial's point of reference is Pope John Paul II's comments on the Bush administration's growing preparations for war against Iraq. In his address last month to diplomats assigned to the Holy See, the pope said it would be a "defeat for humanity" if such a war were launched.

"War cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option, and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations," the pope said.

John Paul II's thinking is at odds with that of the Bush administration and its Catholic political supporters in the U.S. Somehow they must spin away his inconvenient utterances and cite other papal words, taken from other contexts, to justify a pre-emptive attack against another nation.

R. James Nicholson, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See and former chairman of the Republican National Committee, tried mightily to reconcile the pope's sharp words with the intentions articulated by President Bush. "If you examine carefully what the pope said," Nicholson observed, "he said that war is not always inevitable, and we agree."

The present and future question before the Vatican, he continued, is whether there would be "sufficient provocation" for the United States to take military action against Iraq. "The answer to that," Nicholson acknowledged, "may remain something that we don't agree on."

The NCR editorial points out that this issue exposes a "culture of dissent" on the U.S. Catholic right as well. "There is nothing wrong with believing that a pope and his top aides can err in their political or social judgments," the editorial concedes. "But when Catholics, especially those in the public eye, draw conclusions at odds with the Holy Father, sincerity would seem to require naming this for what it is — dissent from noninfallible papal statements — rather than some linguistic sleight-of-hand that makes contradiction seem like coherence."

The cafeteria line forms here.

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

## Msgr. Duffy recalled for compassion

To the editor:

For many of us for whom Msgr. John F. Duffy was an old and loyal friend, the news of his death at the McAuley Residence of the Sisters of Mercy, where he had spent his last years, made us feel somehow diminished.

A faithful priest of the Rochester Diocese since 1945, he served in a variety of parish assignments. It was, though, as diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith Society that he especially continued the tradition of his uncle, Msgr. John M. Duffy, who died in 1980, who was the first diocesan director of schools and, later, director of the urban Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

But titles and rank he carried lightly, whether he was in a parish or a diocesan office, for to most he was just Father Duffy, considerate, compassionate, and comforting.

Even his humor reflected those qualities for it was free of any mockery or cutting disparagement of another, and given more to what became a characteristic exercise in playful and quaint diction and turn of phrase. Whereas most of us, for example, would speak, say, of "driving down" to Avon or Addison, or "driving over" to Phelps or Geneva, he, rather, would prefer to "motor down" or "motor over."

But his journeyings, however phrased, whether

around the diocese, around the country, or even abroad for the Propagation of the Faith, are over, and now he is, thank God, finally at home.

E. Leo McMannus  
Sail Pointe Circle  
Venice, Fla.

## Where is compassion for victims?

To the editor:

There are some ordained priests in the Church that have sexually abused young children, teens, and vulnerable women and men. This abuse was carried out with deception and misuse of trust.

Instead of focusing on the horrendous crimes against these innocent victims and rallying for justice, most Catholics choose to ignore the scandal or question the validity of the victims accusations. The media is blamed (comments by Cardinal Ratzinger in the *Catholic Courier* of Dec. 12), gay men in the priesthood are blamed, lawsuits are dismissed because of current statute of limitation laws and there is denial and there are cover-ups. WHERE is the outrage for the victims?

Remember how in 1989, PTL television minister Jim Baker was convicted of bilking people out of \$158 million dollars. He spent five years in jail and the justice system was hailed for his sentence. Everyone was outraged that a minister could be so deceiving and dishonest!

The money Jim Baker was convicted of taking is NOTHING compared to the devastating effects cast upon victims of sexual abuse. Then, when the victims do come forward, it is not only very personally painful for them to do, but they are often met with criticism and skepticism from their fellow people of faith.

It is time for each of us to re-think our perception of this scandal. The perpetrators and those who cover-up this crime are the

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