

Assumptions plague Voice of the Faithful

Not even people adept at deciphering riddles can easily figure out how any bishop can justify banning members of the lay group Voice of the Faithful from using church property for meetings — property bought and paid for by the laity.

VOTF's threefold agenda is to support the victims and survivors of sexual abuse by priests, to support priests of integrity and to offer its services to assist in the internal governance of the church. It is the last item that rankles.

In the minds of still too many bishops, the laity have no place on that terrain. For them, there is only one earthly authority in the church, namely, the pope's. And it is the pope's sole prerogative to determine who else may share that authority with him by way of appointment to the hierarchy.

They assume that the Lord established the church as an absolute monarchy, with full power vested in the pope. Bishops exercise a similar power, limited only by the pope's, over their respective dioceses.

Certain bishops and their allies assume VOTF's real agenda is the undermining of the church's official teachings and regulations regarding human sexuality and reproduction, the ordination of women, obligatory celibacy for priests and the selection of bishops.

In other words, VOTF is condemned not for what it says and does, but for what its critics assume that it is



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

for or against.

This places the organization in an impossible position. Whatever its adversaries wish to project upon it is taken as fact, and bishops prohibit the group from meeting on church property and from advertising in church publications.

The cardinal-archbishop of New York recently, in retaliation against Fordham University's new president for allowing VOTF to meet on campus, refused to send a representative to the president's installation.

Consistency is a major casualty of such machinations. Lay organizations with a right-of-center membership are not treated in similar fashion. No bishop has forbidden them from meeting on parish property or advertising in church publications because members of these organizations are opposed to papal teaching on capital punishment, Third-World debt, the war in Iraq or the preferential option for the poor.

Is there a double standard at work here? Organizations that have a largely moder-

ate or progressive membership — no more "moderate" and "progressive" than Vatican II itself — are circumscribed, while organizations whose views are closer to the defeated minority's at the council, but which currently enjoy Vatican favor, are given a free pass.

Even VOTF's motto, "Keep the Faith, Change the Church," has come under attack. In a recent op-ed piece in the *National Catholic Reporter*, Paulist Press senior editor Don Brophy pointed out that some critics see the second part as "a thinly veiled attempt to change the fundamental structure" of the church.

He gives just two examples: admitting women into the priesthood and doing away with clerical celibacy. Leaving aside the question of women's ordination for the moment, whatever one thinks of clerical celibacy, it is clearly not part of the "fundamental structure" of the church. The Catholic Church has married priests, and always has had them.

According to Brophy, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago is concerned that "any change" in the church would, "unless carefully thought out, change the faith."

Without specifics, VOTF is forced to shadowbox against invisible forces. And that's hardly a fair fight.

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

How does church show disapproval?

To the editor:

The headline for the "Our Turn" column of Oct. 23 appears to have it wrong, i.e., "First comes love — ..." I think it would have been more appropriately: "First comes lust — then cohabitation?"

The second-last paragraph starts out: "The church's disapproval of cohabitation..." Where would one expect to find it out that the church disapproves? Certainly not from a homily at Sunday Mass. You won't find out a whole lot of other things the church is supposed to disapprove of in a homily either, such as abortion, divorce, contraception, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, cheating, lying, gossip, scandal, etc. Have you ever heard mention of *Humanae Vitae* — some 40 years old — in a homily? It is hardly any wonder that whole generations of Catholics have gotten their morality from Fox TV, MTV, and HBO, or that the morality of Catholics is generally no different than that of the general population, or that large numbers of Catholic voters support candidates that vote consistently to favor abortion, forced sterilization, population control, etc.

It was my understanding, probably way outdated, that the role of the Church is to teach and to sanctify. This is supposed to be why we are under a strong obligation to attend Mass each Sunday

and Holy Day. I find little justification for this obligation any longer, since the obligation for the church to teach and to sanctify has apparently been done away with, without any notice. What is going on?

John J. Long
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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Humanae Vitae* was issued in 1968.

Tapes offer faith review

To the editor:

Of the seven sacraments, the Eucharist and Penance are the most important ones. Jesus gave them to us to be used often.

When it comes to receiving the Body and Blood, the whole congregation goes. But how many of us receive Jesus worthily?

We became accustomed to general absolution, but how much effort is it on our part? Not much! I believe that nothing ventured, nothing gained. We lost the sense of sin. To get us on the right track I am encouraging all the readers to listen to Father Larry Richards' audio cassette called "Confession."

I found this tape to be an excellent review of our faith. He claims that every time we don't think of God above everything else, we break the first commandment. We don't kill, yet when we are angry with others, we sin. So what happened to us? Are we all saints, who don't have any sins and that is why we don't need to receive God's mercy and forgiveness through the sacrament of Reconciliation?

It's humbling to go to individual confession, but when we're sorry, not only are our sins forgiven, but we receive graces which will help us to overcome our sins. The priest can also give us good advice and be our spiritual director.

Please make a good confession first and then receive Jesus. You will receive graces, joy and peace that Jesus can give.

To understand the Mass

more fully, Father Richards has a cassette tape called "Explained." Father Richards starts with the office of Abraham, the resurrected Jesus to Emmaus.

Both of these cassettes can be ordered at www.catholiccourier.com

Pray to honor

To the editor:

I read the two cassettes, "Saints stir for Reconciliation." It is difficult to believe that anyone can believe that burial of Joseph was otherwise in his honor. The reason for the burial in the Binz's house.

Father Volino does not believe that anyone can take anything away from the worship to Christ the Trinity.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "After you shall ask me that I will do, that may be glorified. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

Jesus answers the prayers of Christians and the saints.

In the first place, the prophet Isaiah said, "There is one mediator between God and men — the man

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