

# Catholic politicians get conflicting advice



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

Without their powerful influence in our schools today, we are at a great loss — and so are future generations. To the committee working on priesthood vocations: Keep up the good work! You are on the right track — I pray for your success.

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## Discipline key to more vocations

### To the editor:

According to the May 5 cover article, "Who will answer the call?", priests at the Convocation discussed and gave a list of "forces obstructing vocations." In reality these are symptoms. The list of "things the diocese could do better to encourage vocations" are superficial. Is there no one among the gathered priests to point out that the socialization of the Eucharist, regrettably, has taken a toll on spiritual fervor. Might this have a bearing on lagging vocations?

The noisy chit-chat prior to Mass and immediately at the conclusion stifles the possibility of prayerful preparation for encounter with Eucharistic Mystery, or after receiving Holy Communion to reverently reflect on and thank God for the wonder of it all. In some congregations gathered for the Eucharistic celebration,

the noisy atmosphere is that of a people anticipating a sports event! The noise pollution infecting society has penetrated the sacred walls of the church. You priests and pastors, unfortunately, allow it. This is not the kind of environment in which the seeds of religious vocations are planted.

The respectful reverence of what was once disciplined church protocol, which encouraged prayerful silence, is gone for the most part. Where are the pastors who will silence a noisy congregation? Or correct disrespectful misbehavior? Or remind of need for modest wearing apparel? For instance, at a youth Mass at a local church a young lady wore a spaghetti strap dress, yet was allowed to serve Holy Communion! If the pastor does not set limits and reign in the abuses, nobody will. It is sad to say that many of our people today have the mind set that church is no different than a social meeting hall.

Where large numbers of priest vocations are happening, the church is considered holy ground. Their faith formation is imbued with traditional, orthodox practices and devotions out of which grows and develops sturdy faith, spiritual vitality and evangelistic zeal. It is out of such sacred spiritual soil that priestly vocations are harvested.

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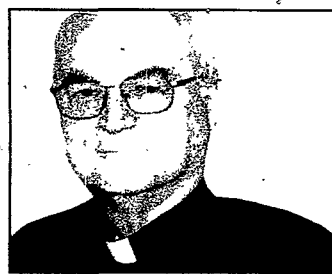
Pressure on Sen. John Kerry and other Catholic politicians from fellow Catholics on the political and ecclesiastical right is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, abortion has become a highly sensitive political as well as moral issue within the church.

Catholic politicians have found themselves under a special kind of fire since the mid-'70s. In the mind of their Catholic critics, *Roe v. Wade* was an illegitimate decision, and Catholic legislators and executives are still bound by the moral principle that abortion is tantamount to murder and, as such, always to be prevented at any cost.

However, once the Supreme Court had determined abortion to be a constitutionally guaranteed right, Catholic legislators were faced with the dilemma of either upholding their oath of office to enforce the law or of subordinating the laws of the land to the teachings of their church.

The issue arose almost immediately following *Roe v. Wade* in the confirmation hearings to decide whether Joseph A. Califano Jr., a Catholic, would become secretary of health, education and welfare in the new Carter administration. Califano writes about this, and more, in his new book, *Inside: A Public and Private Life*.

Just before his confirmation hearings opened, Califano consulted his Jesuit pastor, who told him that in



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Essays in Theology

our democratic and pluralistic society he was free to express his own views on abortion, but if another view prevailed, he could in good conscience enforce the law.

His pastor recommended that he seek a second opinion from one of the Catholic Church's leading moral theologians, Father Richard McCormick, S.J. Califano reports that Father McCormick offered the same advice as the pastor had.

In office, Califano adhered to a minimalist approach to the funding of abortions. Because the law permitted the funding of abortions in the case of rape and incest if they were "promptly reported," he issued regulations giving women 60 days to make such reports.

"The Catholic hierarchy erupted," Califano writes.

He also issued new rules to restrict federal funding for sterilizations and to make sure none were performed without informed consent. There were to be various exceptions to the rule, but within the parameters the secretary laid down.

Once more, the bishops voiced their displeasure.

With many of the bishops questioning his decision, Califano's pastor suggested that he sit down with the then-archbishop of Washington, Cardinal William Baum, to help Cardinal Baum and the other bishops better understand his position.

A dinner was arranged with the cardinal, the pastor and Father McCormick. Cardinal Baum seized the occasion to chastise Califano for not restricting abortion even further in cases of rape and incest, for not banning all forms of federal funding of sterilizations and for opposing tax credits for tuition paid to Catholic schools.

Califano writes that, carried to its logical conclusion, Cardinal Baum's argument was that "Catholics must adhere to the positions of the church or resign from public office."

"I pointed out," he writes, "that such a position would disqualify all Catholics from the HEW post and thousands of other positions in local, state, and federal government. My arguments about serving in a pluralistic democracy fell on deaf ears."

Some of those hierarchical ears seem deaf even today to the realities of a pluralistic society and to the complexities of applying moral principles in the political order.

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

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