

# 'Values people' must learn to talk the talk

PBS correspondent Margaret Warner recounted a conversation she'd had with a John Kerry aide, still reeling from the results of a contest he and his boss were certain they'd win. "You know, Margaret," he said, "the Republicans were talking to 5, 6, 7 million people that we don't understand at all ... and you and the press don't understand them either. And the pollsters aren't picking them up." The comment was deeply revealing and brutally honest.

Judging from the post-election reaction of his more fervent journalistic and academic supporters, the Kerry candidacy was attractive because it represented the "Europeanization," the "secularization," of American public life. A Kerry presidency would keep the great unwashed hordes of evangelicals at bay; put assertive Catholic bishops in their place, leaving the field to the more "understanding" staffers at the bishops' conference and their episcopal allies; regulate biotechnology in utilitarian terms; support the federal courts' efforts to legislate social policy, thus nailing down "choice" as the supreme value involved in "social issues"; insist that the unborn's right to life and the traditional understanding of marriage are matters of "doctrine," not to "be im-



George Weigel

## The Catholic difference

posed on a pluralistic society"; and secure a virtually unlimited abortion license.

The new president wouldn't let the moral teaching of his church interfere with his policies, although that teaching expresses basic norms of natural justice rather than particular Catholic claims. Religious faith would be privatized: a matter of what Americans do with their solitude, to paraphrase William James. Publicly assertive Catholics and the rambunctious evangelicals would be dealt a crushing blow.

It was not to be. Indeed, I felt a twinge of sympathy for Sen. Kerry after the election as former acolytes turned on him, suggesting that a more likeable candidate could have sold the Democrats' message. But I thought the message, not the messenger, was the problem.

What Kerry's secularist supporters can't seem to understand is that evangelicals, John Paul II Catholics and observant Jews don't need explaining; what needs

explaining is the Harvard faculty club, Michael Moore and most of the op-ed regulars at *The New York Times* — people who've persuaded themselves that a profound belief in God, a commitment to live by the Ten Commandments, is the fast track to fascism. They are the anomaly. If they'd take a field trip out of their secularist bunkers to meet the rest of America, they might find we're not so scary after all.

The secularists did have one triumph: Proposition 71, which embroils California in scientifically dubious and morally reprehensible stem-cell research. It's success suggests that we "values people" haven't yet learned to talk the talk of the new biotechnologies. We make scientific, moral, philosophical arguments which are rationally persuasive. Then Michael J. Fox comes into the hearing room, and the debate is over.

What language meets the challenge of misconstrued compassion ("Did you want Chris Reeve to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair?") and utilitarianism ("If it works, it must be right.")? We don't have it yet. We need it. Soon.

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

## Sympathizes with parents

To the editor:

Once again, the American Catholic Church is failing to recognize a crisis — the closing of Catholic schools and the very future of the Catholic Church. Bishops and priests look at our school enrollment problem as a bookkeeping and financing problem, not the future of our Church. Their closed society misses the whole point of how Catholic Schools have generated vocations to religious orders, and the very commitment and dedication to our parishes that is needed under their failing leadership.

I am a Cardinal Mooney graduate and totally sympathize with the parents that worked hard to keep their Catholic school open only to find out it is being closed without consulting with parents. Merging schools is not the answer. Small Catholic churches or parishes are very similar to U.S. Army units. Their members are totally loyal and dedicated to their Church and work hard to make it the best it can be. When you lose a parish school, you lose the future, the young people who will repopulate the pews as the population ages. Most of these parents of closing/merging schools will not send their kids several more miles away to another Catholic school that they have no

loyalty to. Instead, they will be fed up and send their children to a closer public school.

If you go and visit any Catholic school and talk to the very dedicated lay teachers and administrators, you will find that almost all of them are the product of Catholic schools themselves. Their experience motivated them to work at seriously low wages because they believe in what they are doing. How many times have you recently seen diocesan officials writing newspaper articles, being interviewed on television, etc., trying everything in their might to tout how great our Catholic schools are?

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Sayers wrote while at home on leave from his Army base in Germany. To read Bishop Clark's letter to parents and other materials explaining the reasons for the schools announcement, visit the Catholic Schools section at [www.dor.org](http://www.dor.org).

## Policies omit some values

To the editor:

This presidential race was won in part, it seems, because of a set of "moral values" based in Christianity. If we're going to bring God into politics, then let's talk about some of the Christian values that this administration seems to ignore. What about the clear principle taught by Jesus of caring for those who are in need? I don't think he meant the pharmaceutical companies. People are struggling to make it in this country. People truly go to bed hungry, uncertain of what the next day may bring.

And what about Jesus' teaching of acceptance of others? Jesus reached out to people who were different from him — even those who were shunned by society at the time. We seem to be afraid of anything that is different or unfamiliar to us. What about that tricky val-

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