Encyclical Criticized

NEW YORK (NC) — The American Jewish Congress has criticized a passage in Pope John Paul II’s new encyclical, “Dives in Misericordia” (Rich in Mercy), which it says misrepresents justice in Old Testament times.

According to Henry Siegman, AJC executive director, the questionable statement, on the “eye-for-an-eye” phrase from the Bible, is objectionable.

The encyclical, issued Dec. 2, states:

“Not in vain did Christ challenge his listeners, faithful to the doctrine of the Old Testament, for their attitude which was manifested in the words: ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ This was the form of distortion of justice at that time; and today’s forms continue to be modeled on it.”

Siegman said “the passage ‘misrepresents’ Judaism at Christ’s time, ‘which in fact understood and interpreted the biblical ‘eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ to require monetary compensation for injury inflicted on one’s fellow man,” the Jewish leader wrote.

Long overshadowed by the age and size of pharaonic monuments and located in the euphemistically titled “popular quarter,” the mosques, fountains, Koranic schools and caravan inns have been crumbling into obscurity under the accumulated weight of population, refuse and neglect.

But an international rescue operation, along with new interest from the Egyptian Government, is trying to prevent further destruction. The question facing it is whether any amount of interest, good will and even funding can now make a difference.

Under the auspices of the Egyptian Government, the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), sent a team to study the monuments and their environment. Its report formed the basis for a conference about saving the monuments held in Cairo in December.

Dateline

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II told Yugoslav President Czjjetin Mijatovic Dec. 19 to examine his country’s policy on religious freedom in relation to the Helsinki Accords.

GDANSK, Poland — Officials of Poland’s Catholic Church and Communist Party joined the leader of Solidarity, the new independent trade union, in calling for national unity and reconciliation at a memorial service for workers slain by government forces 10 years ago.

HARTFORD, Conn. — WTNH-TV, Channel 8, in Hartford, assisted by Fr. Edmund S. Nadolny, director of the Office of Radio and Television of the Hartford Archdiocese, raised $400,000 in pledges to aid the victims of the Nov. 23 earthquake in Italy.

NEW YORK — The interfaith organization, Clergy and Laity Concerned, sent President-elect Ronald Reagan an open letter urging him to make “a strong and unequivocal statement affirming this nation’s historic commitment to peace with justice, democracy and human rights.”

UNITED NATIONS — The human rights situation in Chile worsened in 1980, affecting the activities of the Catholic Church and academic life, according to a report to the United Nations General Assembly.
Letters

Sanity

The letter is prompted by several others which have appeared recently in the Register. In the first, the author gives the impression that we are living in a "lost world" where people are "lost in a wilderness of sin" and "lost in a sea of darkness". The second letter expresses the fear that society is "drowning in a sea of confusion" and "sinking in a sea of despair". The third letter talks about the need for "a spiritual revival" to bring people back to "righteous living".

The fourth letter is written by a person who is "deeply troubled" by the state of society today. They mention the "sins and immorality" they see around them and express a "tremendous sense of defeat".

The fifth letter is written by a person who is "heartbroken" by the "corruption" and "deceit" they see in society. They mention the need for "honesty and integrity" in all aspects of life.

The sixth letter is written by a person who is "extremely concerned" about the "lack of meaning" and "sense of purpose" in modern society.

The seventh letter is written by a person who is "disturbed" by the "chaos and conflict" they see around them. They mention the need for "peace and harmony".

The eighth letter is written by a person who is "hopeful" about the future of society. They mention the "goodness" and "kindness" they see in people.

The ninth letter is written by a person who is "happy" about the "positive changes" they see in society. They mention the "progress and innovation".

The tenth letter is written by a person who is "worried" about the "environmental issues" they see today. They mention the need for "sustainable living".

The eleventh letter is written by a person who is "angry" about the "injustice and inequality" they see in society. They mention the need for "fairness and justice".

The twelfth letter is written by a person who is "sad" about the "loss of culture and tradition" they see today. They mention the need for "preservation and celebration of our heritage".

The thirteenth letter is written by a person who is "grateful" about the "opportunities and possibilities" they see in society. They mention the need for "education and opportunities".

The fourteenth letter is written by a person who is "confused" about the "complexity and diversity" they see today. They mention the need for "understanding and acceptance".

The fifteenth letter is written by a person who is "confident" about the "strength and resilience" they see in society. They mention the need for "hope and optimism".

The sixteenth letter is written by a person who is "excited" about the "innovation and creativity" they see today. They mention the need for "encouragement and support".

The seventeenth letter is written by a person who is "worried" about the "loss of direction and purpose" they see in society. They mention the need for "vision and guidance".

The eighteenth letter is written by a person who is "happy" about the "sense of belonging and community" they see today. They mention the need for "togetherness and connection".

The nineteenth letter is written by a person who is "angry" about the "corruption and fraud" they see in society. They mention the need for "honesty and integrity".

The twentieth letter is written by a person who is "sad" about the "loss of cultural and historical values" they see today. They mention the need for "preservation and celebration of our heritage".

The twenty-first letter is written by a person who is "confused" about the "complexity and diversity" they see today. They mention the need for "understanding and acceptance".

The twenty-second letter is written by a person who is "confident" about the "strength and resilience" they see in society. They mention the need for "hope and optimism".

The twenty-third letter is written by a person who is "excited" about the "innovation and creativity" they see today. They mention the need for "encouragement and support".

The twenty-fourth letter is written by a person who is "worried" about the "loss of direction and purpose" they see in society. They mention the need for "vision and guidance".

The twenty-fifth letter is written by a person who is "happy" about the "sense of belonging and community" they see today. They mention the need for "togetherness and connection".

The twenty-sixth letter is written by a person who is "angry" about the "corruption and fraud" they see in society. They mention the need for "honesty and integrity".

The twenty-seventh letter is written by a person who is "sad" about the "loss of cultural and historical values" they see today. They mention the need for "preservation and celebration of our heritage".

The twenty-eighth letter is written by a person who is "confused" about the "complexity and diversity" they see today. They mention the need for "understanding and acceptance".

The twenty-ninth letter is written by a person who is "confident" about the "strength and resilience" they see in society. They mention the need for "hope and optimism".

The thirtieth letter is written by a person who is "excited" about the "innovation and creativity" they see today. They mention the need for "encouragement and support".

The thirty-first letter is written by a person who is "worried" about the "loss of direction and purpose" they see in society. They mention the need for "vision and guidance".

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A Moral Issue

It is rather difficult to elevate the acrimony surrounding "birth control" to the level of sensible discussion. First of all, the phrase "birth control" is misleading. People generally have a wrong conception, not controlling birth. So let us discuss contraception.

A vast majority in the pro-contraception camp are interested in the moral consequences of this issue. They merely want to indulge their appetites freely and would put up a fight if the Archangel Raphael appeared to them to lay down the law.

The more enlightened minority argue that contraceptives are "socially desirable." Teen-age pregnancy or curb population growth (especially minorities). While it is tempting to point out to such altruists the ultimate failure of contraception in promoting reductions, they assume that the same benefits of population growth, such discussions are irrelevant. The real issue is moral, not pragmatic.

If contraception is an immoral means, the most noble end in the world cannot justify it.

Many individuals—including Catholics who should know better—think that the Church's opposition to contraception applies only to Catholics. This is false. The Church's opposition to contraception, like her opposition to lying, cheating, stealing, murder, fornication, and divorce, is based upon the natural law. All men are aware of this law, and all men are bound to obey it. Thus, contraception is not wrong because the Pope says so; rather, the Pope says it is wrong because every man's conscience says so. But most men usually aren't listening.

The Church can no more change the natural law than the American Mathematical Society can change the multiplication table or the decimal expansion of Pi. All she can do is call attention to the obvious facts which we all discover for ourselves, if we try hard enough. Let us see how far common sense will take us.

The gluttons of ancient Rome had a rather disconcerting practice. After gorging themselves on a sumptuous meal, they would leave the room and induce themselves to vomit. Then they would return to the banquet hall and start all over again. Even the more liberal-minded Romans of that age would find this habit deplorable.

Eating has two purposes, nourishment and enjoyment. So long as the former purpose is achieved, the pursuit of the latter is proper. In fact, many think a man is ill if he takes no enjoyment in eating. But when a man deliberately precludes nourishment because it stands in the way of unlimited gastronomical indulgence, we rightly judge his actions to be perverse.

The analogy to contraception is obvious. Sexual union also has two purposes, procreation and pleasure. Pursuing both is healthy; pursuing one at the expense of the other is not.

Furthermore, contraception is contrary to the art of medicine. The task of a physician, as any man of common sense will tell you, is to do the patient good. The art of a state of health. If he merely took a patient from one state of sickness to another, or worse, from a state of health to a state of sickness, the patient would be justified in suing for malpractice. And for a doctor to do this deliberately would be grounds for criminal prosecution.

But a cursory glance through an elementary physiology text will tell you that the reproductive system of woman with a healthy reproductive system is able to reproduce, that is, he or she is fertile. The opposite of fertility is sterility, which is precisely the status of a person using contraceptives. Thus, when a physician prescribes contraceptives, he is acting directly contrary to his own art.

(To illustrate my earlier point about the hysteria surrounding this issue: A young lady once complained to me that the contraceptive she was using was hopelessly medieval for opposing contraception. When I presented this argument to her, she was dumbfounded. After staring at me blankly for several seconds, she snapped indignantly, "You're just saying that because you're a Catholic," and stormed out of the room.)

Once upon a time, when the world was just about as evil but

The Epiphany

E piphany. Manifestation. Appearance. Revelation. The Church's celebration this Sunday of the showing forth of the Light, not only to the Jews but to "every man who cometh into the world," is one of the oldest holy days in the calendar. Mentioned by Clement of Alexandria around 200 A.D., it was not celebrated in the Latin church until the 6th century.

The Gospel of Matthew is the only place in the Bible where we are given a full account of the recognition by men of the Son of God on earth. It seems almost always to refer to a place of spiritual darkness in the full glory of God revealed in the Baby in Bethlehem.

It is probably worth noting that these men from the east contrast rather sharply with the "wiser men" who lived in Babylon. The wise men seemed to be more skeptical; they came with the idea of finding the object of their worship in a humble family in Bethlehem. They had no difficulty recognizing in the Baby the light to lighten the Gentiles. They had seen it in the page of faith and strength, and the idea of light in spite of—or even because of—their earthly wealth and power and learning is perhaps the more striking.

The three wise men Gentile kings were told the ancient Hebrew prophecies by the scribes when they came to Herod's court. The Gentiles shall come in to the light and the kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:3). The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: thy shall dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon the mountains of light shined" (Isaiah 9:2). "Unto us a child is born; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth... saith the Lord... to His princes also shall worship" (Isaiah 45:6).

Simeon's beautiful prayer (the Nunc dimittis), incising the Holy Ghost at the infant Jesus' presentation in the temple when He was eight days old, is also a prophecy: "Lord, lettest thou servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).
Infant Baptism

The recent instruction of the Doctrinal Congregation reaffirming the necessity of infant baptism for the ‘serious danger of losing [salvation],’ as necessary for salvation is an implied rebuke to several modern theological trends, including, but not limited to, the denial of the necessity itself, the practical denial of Original Sin, the denial of the doctrine of original polypolytheism, and the outright denial of Limbo.

The necessity of infant baptism cannot be contradicted without heresy. The Council of Trent declared (D, 701): “If anyone denies that newly born infants are to be baptized, or says that they are not, or only for the reason of sins but that they do not contract from Adam any original sin that must be expiated in the first period of regeneration... let him be anathema.”

Of late years, baptism has been increasingly regarded as merely a rite of initiation and not of regeneration. If baptism’s effect of regeneration is denied, this can only be because the dogmas of Original Sin is denied, or else explained away. It is explained away by all who, like the leaders of the Dutch Catholic Church, define it as “the sin of mankind as a whole.” In other words, Original Sin is just a name for the fact that we are involved in a climate of sin. But how explain the climatic wonder that is it that no one is free of sin and why do we allow the tendency to it? The Dutch Catholic idea seems only a version of the Pelagian heresy that Original Sin is transmitted by imitation and not by propagation from Adam.

This explaining away of Original Sin derives directly from a denial of monogenesim, or the doctrine of the absence of double baptism. Saint Paul saw this clearly in his address of July 12, 1996, in what he described as “the teaching of the Scriptures of Sacred Tradition, and the Church’s Magisterium, according to which the sin of the first man is transmitted to all his descendants, not through imitation but through propagation, in each as his own, and is the death of the soul, that is, privation and not simple lack of holiness and justice even in newborn babies.” The historical existence of Adam and Eve, if not directly defined as a dogma, is so solidly built into the deposit of faith that it cannot be denied without making shipwreck of it. Likewise, part of Sacred History, and not a chain of symbols, is the creation of the first pair in a state of supernatural grace, in which they would have effortlessly ruled their emotions and have never suffered or died; and their sin of pride, by which they lost these gifts and transmitted their fault to all mankind.

We come now to the unpopularity doctrine of Limbo, of which James Martain and Saint of the Carmine of the Caronine, that it is scorned by so many of today’s theologians who don’t know what they are doing, but which should be recognized as a precious treasure but not to be explained away.

We know from two ecumenical councils (Lynn and Florence) that the same case with only Original Sin cannot reach the Beatific Vision. Therefore, unbaptized infants who do not reach Beatific Vision unless God has made plans for their salvation that no one can understand but cannot presume. Unless we know for certain—and how can we know it for certain—that all unbaptized infants who die are saved, or given a chance of salvation by such means as supernatural illumination whereby they may make a choice for or against God, then we must assume the existence of a place called Limbo, where such souls enjoy natural happiness but miss the unmerited end for which they were created.

The necessity of infant baptism sums up in itself pretty well the whole message of Christianity.

Bishop Romeo Blanchette

SILENT PRAISE

...as a son, brother, student, teacher, benefactor, etc. In this article, I would like to concentrate on the voice of an ordained priest and his ministry in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass...

As a student, I remember hearing a teacher speak about somewhere about an early church writer saying that the power of the priest to say Mass, and make present on the altar Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, is one greater than that of the angels. Even this great privilege of the priest in a sense is greater than the privilege of Mary who gave birth to Christ. She brought Christ forth only at Christmas, whereas the ordained priest makes Him present on the altar every day. Many church writers have also spoken in this vein. As one chosen, approved and called and ordained a priest and bishop over 43 years, I am grateful for all the daily Masses celebrated and concelebrated so many thousands of times. What a tremendous privilege how many times, for the living and the dead!

While there is sorrow at not being able to celebrate Mass, the ordained priest can find joy in making this sacrifice and placing his hands along with his suffering in the chalice uniting them with Christ’s own suffering and offering them mentally to the Father, while another priest celebrates the Mass.

The Council of Trent, according to the words of the Holy Eucharist, states that when Holy Communion cannot be received, spiritual communion (an ardent desire to receive Christ’s Body and Blood) is more fruitful than any other form of devotion (Dezinger: Eucharistien Symbolum #881). That being so, could we, without being rash, not say that for an ordained priest physically unable to say Mass, the burning desire to do so would also be most meritorious.

Let us not forget that the disabled priest at baptism was made to participate in the priesthood of the laity. Consequently, when he is unable to say Mass, he, like the laity, can still participate in the Holy Sacrifice to the best of his ability. In my case, my participation would be by my presence and by mentally saying the responses that are proper to the laity. I am sure that the Lord would find this, our sacrifice, pleasing and acceptable to Him.

When Christ was on the cross, His last words were “consumma...” “It is finished.” He finished the work the Father had asked of Him and which He had accepted. When the Lord calls me, I may not have the opportunity to say “It is finished” and at the next moment may I hear our Blessed Mother say “eternal life is beginning for you, joy unsurpassed by any finished.”

Paul H. Hallert

January 4, 1931

National Catholic Register

James Hitchcock

Liberal’ vs. Conservative’

Without thinking, we commonly use the terms “liberal” and “conservative” to describe the division in America for the first time. For various reasons I do not think these terms are the best. (For instance, there is a divide between conservative Catholics and liberal Catholics.) However, they are terms which we are apparently stuck with, at least for the time being.

Some years ago I wrote a book which contained the term “radical Catholicism” in its title. Some people criticized the term for being too vague and, in retrospect I think that they were right. Let me define here what I mean by my terms: Conservative Catholics are those who intend to adhere to all the official teachings of the Church. (I say “intend,” to allow for honest misjudgment.)

Radical Catholics are those who recognize no final authority in religion. They believe the Church can be changed endlessly to accommodate the needs of modern society. The radical Catholic would do professor to accept some ultimate authority in religion but believe that there is a higher authority is more reliable, and a lot more flexible, than conscience. They call themselves “protesters in the faith.”

Some years ago I also wrote about what I called “the case of the disappearing middle.” It referred precisely to radical Catholicism. My argument was that it is an unstable, and finally non-viable, position.

The main problem with liberal and conservative thinking is that they both essentially ignore the social context in which they believe. A liberal might believe that the current legal system is flawed, but would still believe in the possibilities of reform. A conservative might believe that the current legal system is flawed, but would still believe in the possibility of a return to a more stable system. It is this ignoring of the social context that makes both liberal and conservative thinking so problematic.


Liberal vs. Conservative

Without thinking, we commonly use the terms "liberal" and "conservative" to describe the divisions in the Church at the present time. For various reasons I do not think these terms are the best. (For example, a conservative Catholic might be a follower of Archbishop Lefebvre and not altogether orthodox.) However, they are terms which we are apparently stuck with, at least for the time being.

Some years ago I wrote a book which contained the term "radical Catholicism" in its title. Some people criticized the term for being too vague, and in retrospect I think they were right. Let me define here what I mean by my terms.

Conservative Catholics are those who intend to adhere to all the official teachings of the Church. (I say "intend," to allow for honest misunderstanding.)

Radical Catholics are those who recognize no final authority in religion. They believe the Church can be changed endlessly to accommodate the needs of modern society. Liberal Catholics are those who do profess to accept some ultimate authority in religion but believe that authority is a lot more remote, and a lot more flexible, than those who are conservative do. They sometimes describe themselves as the "loyal opposition."

Some years ago I also wrote about what I called "the case of the disappearing middle." It referred precisely to liberal Catholicism. My argument was that it was an unstable, and finally non-viable, position, and I'd lost respect that position.

The main problem with liberal Catholicism is a failure to think through their own position. Conservative and radical Catholics, whatever else might be said about them, are at least consistent. Liberals, on the other hand, agree that there is ultimate authority but usually fail to express it extremely difficult to say where it lies.

For example, a liberal Catholic, in the Protestant manner, might say that the Bible is ultimately the Church. But then it turns out that troublesome passages in the Bible can be endlessly explained away as merely reflecting the times in which they were written. Birth control is a good example of the liberal mind at work. In 1968 many people rejected Humanae Vitae because they said it was not a solemn infallible statement. But by 1980 many of these same people are admitting that they are not sure whether solemn infallible statements must be believed either. They agree with Hans Kung that the Church is protected from ultimate error, but in practice they proclaim all kinds of official teachings as in fact erroneous.

I first noticed this pattern years ago. Reform-minded Catholics who would give absolute assurances that they fully accepted certain doctrines which they were accused of undermining. Six months or a year later, they were questioning precisely those same doctrines.

The liberal mind instinctively reaches for compromise as the solution to every problem. Many of them believe that the papal pronouncements are of interference in Poland's internal affairs as it mobilizes hundreds of thousands of its own interventionist troops.

Comunism and Poland

At the time this column is written, the daily news is concerned about a possible Russian invasion of Poland. As usual, it is all too easy to forget that 10 years ago the Pope visited Poland, and the world paid little attention. On May 13, 1975, and renewed the consecration of their country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Later, the cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon proclaims the day a day of prayer and penance by the hundreds of thousands. On one occasion, over a million pilgrims came to Fatima.

The power of Our Lady's message has been demonstrated. After World War II, when Austria was partially occupied by the Russians, 10% of the population signed a pledge to comply with the Fatima requests. On May 13, 1985, it was estimated that one in five of the Austrian population was present at Fatima, the Russians suddenly agreed to withdraw from the occupied half of Austria. It was the only time the Soviets have ever publicly acknowledged a request from the Holy Father.

Eleven years later, the Communist Party in Brazil was so certain of taking power that its secretary told its members that Moscow the precise day it would be achieved. The case was not only in the hands of pro-Communists. At the 11th hour, a nationwide Chinese crusade was launched. Six hundred thousand people marched on the streets of Sao Paulo praying the Rosary aloud for 3 hours. They cried out: "Mother of God, preserve us from the fate and suffering of the martyred women of Cuba, Poland, Hungary, and other enslaved nations."

The same scenes took place in other Brazilian cities. President Goulart, a Communist, witnessing the groundswell against him, fled the country, and the takeover collapsed.

I am writing this column in 1974 and 1975. Portugal's Communists were daily news in those years. The Portuguese people remembered the requests of Our Lady of Fatima and started praying and penance by the hundreds of thousands. On one occasion, over a million pilgrims came to Fatima. Out of a total population of less than 10 million, who on May 13, 1975, and renewed the consecration of their country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Later, the cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon proclaims the day a day of prayer and penance by the hundreds of thousands. On one occasion, over a million pilgrims came to Fatima.

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