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What it means to be Catholic debated by liberal, conservative

(Editor's Note: Too often polarization develops and grows in the Church and elsewhere, because both sides are not dialoging with one another. In the interest of drawing all sides together, NC News Service asked liberal Donald J. Thorman, publisher of National Catholic Reporter, and Christopher Derrick noted conservative author and lecturer, to dialogue in print. This is another in a series of such dialogues in print in which they discuss questions and issues being debated in the Church today. Readers may want to express their own opinions on these issues in the letters-to-the-editor columns.)

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CATHOLIC
By Christopher Derrick
This word "Catholic" in

common usage, it seems to me to have a two-fold meaning. It concerns a man's beliefs, and it also concerns his relationship to a socially recognizable society or group. It hardly ever concerns his character or behavior. A man can be a grotesquely bad Catholic, guilty of all manner of wickedness, and no less "a Catholic" on that account.

This word refers you to a question of fact, not a question of value, of approval or disapproval, and I have a nasty suspicion that in the last analysis, it's a word of the institutional and juridical kind. If so, we can't expect it to mean very much to those among us who dislike the whole institutional and juridical aspect of the Christian brotherhood or Church.

The rest of us — more incarnationally minded, perhaps —

will find it a useful and necessary word, but one that always needs to be clarified. Who is, and who isn't, "a Catholic"? Who decides?

Comparable questions arise elsewhere. When the state of Israel was established, with its Law of Return, it became necessary to formulate some working definition of Jewishness. One of the proposed definitions was "Anyone who says he's a Jew is a Jew". Can we follow this example? Can our rule be "Anyone who says he's a Catholic is a CATHOLIC"?

If so, we shall be wrenching language rather violently, and making that word mean something wholly unrelated to what it has meant hitherto — and that's never a helpful thing to do with language.

But if we reject that formula,

we shall be admitting — perhaps with reluctance — the possibility that one of these days some man may claim to be "a Catholic," and have that claim challenged or disallowed — perhaps in respect of his declared beliefs, perhaps in respect of his relationship to the ecclesial brotherhood, the visible Church. But who is to make such a decision?

It seems to me that if the word "Catholic" is to exist meaningfully in our vocabulary, existence must also be allowed to two less palatable words, "heresy" and "schism." It seems to me also that this word "Catholic" implies (in principle) one particular answer to the concrete problems so arising: it implies that in any case of doubt, we appeal to the historical and current witness of those distinctive people to whom

God said "He who hears you, hears me" — that is, to the witness and decision of the apostolic or episcopal college, defined as such by its unity with the See of Peter. When the chips are down, it is on their terms that we are, or are not, "Catholics."

The trouble is that the chips don't seem to be down just now. In the past, there were loud and swift decisions, excommunications, tough rebukings of heresy and schism, real or alleged. But now, a great many priests and laymen say what our fathers would have considered wildly un-Catholic things, and their right to call themselves "Catholic" still is questioned very mildly — or not at all — from on high.

This new situation can be seen



SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Brother Joseph Davis, S.M. (left), director of the National Office for Black Catholics, Washington, D.C., receives the annual Brothers' Newsletter award for outstanding contributions as a religious Brother. Presenting the award at the Brothers' Institute held at LeMoyn College in Syracuse is Brother Damian Carroll, C.P. (center), director of the Institute. Looking on is Father Charles D. Burns, S.V.D., a staff member of the Campaign for Human Development. (RNS Photo)

Rights of retarded child defined

United Nations, N.Y. (NC) — The UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons is an important educational tool, according to Father Henry Bissonnier of Paris, vice chairman of the Council of International Non-Governmental Organizations Interested in Rehabilitation.

A draft text of the declaration was adopted by the spring session of the UN Economic and Social Council and will be up for final adoption by the UN General Assembly this coming September.

The UN declaration, which the UN Assembly may adopt in September, states that the mentally retarded person "has, to the maximum degree of feasibility, the same rights as other persons."

It specifies his right to "proper medical care and physical therapy" and to education or training that will "enable him to develop his ability and maximum potential;" the right to "economic security and a decent standard of living;" the right to engage in "meaningful occupation to the fullest extent of his capabilities;" the right to a qualified guardian, to protection from exploitation, abuse and degrading treatment, and to "proper legal safeguards against every form of abuse" if his handicap is so severe as to prevent the exercise of some or all of his rights in a meaningful way.

Father Bissonnier, who for the past 20 years had headed the Medico-Socio-Psychological Commission of the International Catholic Child Bureau with headquarters in Paris, said he hopes the declaration will be extended to other handicapped persons.

"It is important, however," he told NC News Service, "that the first declaration has dealt with the mentally deficient since they are the most segregated, generally the poorest, and tend to be the objects of more contempt, whether or not it is expressed. The declaration should help to create a more comprehensive and cooperative atmosphere, enabling the mentally deficient to be integrated into community life. This is the big problem."

Associated for 12 years with the

Institute of Applied Psychopedagogy (now officially recognized as an English word by the Oxford Dictionary), he noted with a twinkle, Father Bissonnier now divides his time between the Catholic University of Paris, where he teaches special catechetics and pastoral work for the handicapped, and the University of Louvain, where he is professor of "special education," also dealing with the handicapped.

He was in this country for an international seminar on the vocational rehabilitation of the mentally retarded organized by the American Association for Mental Deficiency with the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the World Rehabilitation Fund, the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. One person from each of 30 countries was chosen to participate on the basis of his work, and Father Bissonnier was chosen from France.

The French priest was particularly impressed with the seminar, held in Houston, where for the first time mentally retarded persons addressed the participants on their problems.

"They were aware of and accepted themselves as mentally retarded," he said. "It marked a great step forward."

Father Bissonnier said he is generally impressed with the progress in this country with respect to the mentally retarded.

He said he feels the U.S. is still in the lead in caring for the retarded — as he found it to be when he first came to this country 18 years ago.

"There was even then great acceptance of the handicapped as normal members of the community which was exceptional in comparison with the attitude in Europe," he noted.

He said he felt that the example of President Franklin Roosevelt and the family of the late President John F. Kennedy had done much to create the proper climate of acceptance in the United States, where he said he finds "great public awareness of

the needs of the handicapped."

The Council of International NGOs Interested in Rehabilitation works closely with the United Nations, and is represented at the annual UN Inter-Agency Committee meeting in Geneva.

The UN, Father Bissonnier said, has done a great deal to stimulate interest in the handicapped, especially in developing countries, which used to consider the handicapped "a secondary problem."

"Now they are as interested as the developed countries," the priest added.

"The UN provides technical aid, fellowships, organizes seminars, regularly invites the NGOs to report on their projects and sometimes cooperates in a joint project with the NGOs," he pointed out.

The UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is compiling a dictionary of terms and a compendium of all "realizations in the field of special education."

As for the response of the mentally retarded to religious instruction, the white-haired priest commented: "We go to God not only with our intellect, but also with our feelings, actions and bodies. It is more difficult for the mentally retarded to understand abstractions, but they very well understand the importance of symbols, and sometimes create the symbols themselves. They go to God more intuitively, perhaps. All of us must make contact with God through various levels of our personality."

He paid great tribute to the Sisters of St. Coletta in Jefferson, Wis., who, he said, were among the first to do something about special catechetics for the retarded.

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Clergy appointments

Rev. Mr. John Gedbow, Deacon, is appointed to St. Vincent of Paul Parish in Cape Vincent for the summer.

Woman gynecologist opposes abortion

(Undated) — The Radio Board of the National Association of Broadcasters has voted to prohibit advertising for paid abortion referral services.

The Radio Board noted, however, that the ban would not rule out public service announcements on sex education or population control.

In New York state, profit-making abortion referral services have become illegal under a new state law prohibiting medical referrals for pay.

There are more than 20 abortion referral agencies in New York state which has the nation's most liberal abortion law. Some of the agencies were reported to have collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees from women seeking abortions.

In the meantime, the Family Planning Information Service — New York's City's largest free referral service — announced that it has doubled its capacity to help pick up the load carried by the commercial agencies.

Most of the commercial agencies had financial arrangements with hospitals or clinics to which they referred patients. Another new state law bars fee-splitting between hospitals and referral services.

The New York abortion law was one-year-old on June 30, and it was estimated that in New York City alone 164,000 abortions were performed under that law.

A report by the state's Health Services Administration showed that 55.5 per cent of the women who had abortions in New York City were not residents of the state.

The report also showed that more than half of the abortions were performed on women under 24 years of age; 27.3 per cent were in the 20-24 age group, 23.4 per cent in the 15-19 group and 0.2 per cent on girls under 15.

City Administrator Gordon Chase said that while there have been 15 abortion-related deaths since the law went into effect, no deaths have occurred in the past four months.

"The safety record is improving," Chase said, "probably because doctors are gaining experience with the procedures."

In Toronto, a woman gynecologist who is a Jew, said she has become so active against liberalized abortion laws that people often write her to thank her for being a "right-thinking Christian."

Dr. Heather Morris says she has found it necessary to defend

the unborn fetus on three grounds. "I am a woman, an obstetrician and a gynecologist and therefore intimately connected in my professional life with pregnancy in all its aspects," she said.

She said her belief comes from biblical teaching that man was created in the image of God. "If I didn't think that God created man in his own image, then obviously I would be much less concerned about an unborn fetus or about any other human being for that matter," she said.

In Chicago, industrialist Norman Lazarus told a conference concerned with population growth that couples who do not have children should be given government-paid vacations.

Lazarus suggested that the vacation increase in value each year that a family does not increase, and that small families be given free tickets to movies and sporting events.

Lazarus also proposed a "non-mother of the year" award, tax exemptions to childless couples, and a graduated "child tax" as a deterrent to having children.

In Grand Rapids, Mich., the biennial general synod of the

United Church of Christ passed a resolution calling for the repeal of all legal prohibitions against physician-performed abortions.

A synod statement declared that such a move would take abortion entirely out of the realm of penal law and make voluntary and medically safe abortions available to all women. The vote was 523 to 51.

In Pittsburgh, an abortion suit which a Catholic obstetrician filed against a hospital on behalf of the rights of unborn children is expected to reach court during July.

Dr. Richard N. McGarvey has filed his suit against Magee Women's hospital at the federal court here.

Dr. McGarvey's suit charges that the Magee hospital deprives unborn children of constitutional rights guaranteed by the Civil Rights Act and the 14th Amendment by permitting abortions.

In effect, he is asking for the court to rule that an unborn child is a person with legal rights protected by due process. He maintains that the hospital receives state funding and is therefore under the Civil Rights Act.

Describes two main problems of Church in U.S.

Louvain, Belgium (NC) — The American Catholic Church's greatest problem, Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit told a convocation at the famous theological school here, is poor communication between bishops and priests and incomplete understanding among the laity of precisely what the Church is.

In a prepared talk at Louvain University, as he accepted an honorary doctorate on June 30, the cardinal also praised the Church in the United States for its optimism, spirit and diversity.

Cardinal Leo Suensens of Malines-Brussels, who delivered at the same gathering a lecture on the European Church after Vatican II, agreed that diversity may be a good thing.

The Belgian cardinal quoted from an article he had seen in a diocesan newspaper in the United States in which conservative columnist Frank Morris compared religion to football and called for one set of rules for everyone.

"Unfortunately, things are not that simple," said Cardinal Suensens. "We must not impose on each other the solutions to our own particular problems."

In his own talk, Cardinal Dearden said he preferred to reflect upon the American Catholic Church rather than appraise it because appraisal "is at best a risky pursuit."

He cited a lack of comprehensive studies, wide population distribution, a wide range of ethnic origins and various cultural traditions to show that "it is not a homogenous, uniform structure."

He also pointed to "strongly conservative and traditional" patterns of thinking and acting, alongside "a more dynamic spirit."

"A limited level of communication adds to American

Catholic complexity, said the cardinal, who heads both the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Despite the existence of a Catholic press that is moderately strong," he explained, "there is a meager awareness from diocese to diocese of concrete pastoral programs that are being carried out."

He said the Vatican Council was "a very traumatic but enriching experience... the movement from the old order to the new has not been easy... in the process our failings have been many. But so also, I think, have been our successes."

Cardinal Dearden said a "notable number" of adults have stopped going to Mass "because of their inability to adapt to some of the changes that are taking place" and many young Catholics have also stopped attending services. That points to a need to communicate the Church better to the laity, he said. He suggested the Vatican Council's pastoral on the Church in the modern world as a preferred text.

Among the Church's post-conciliar successes, Cardinal Dearden listed liturgical renewal, parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils and the elective, representative National Advisory Council of the United States Catholic Conference. He said the advisory council has "served effectively" and has been "a sort of pilot project determining how and if activity at the national level is possible."

The American cardinal said there has been no determination yet whether to form a national pastoral council. "Because of the complexity of our country," he said, "we need constantly to face the issue of whether it is better to move along regional lines or to

try to do things at a national level."

The successes have also created new problems, the cardinal said. As examples he pointed to priests who may be unsure of their role, seeing parish councils as a threat or an escape from responsibility. Bishops also have difficulty, he added, since "it takes time and adjustment to become accustomed to sharing with others responsibilities that in the past have been borne by the bishop himself."

Cardinal Dearden said that if he were asked what are the most pressing problems of the American Church, he would identify them as two: a need for "greater openness and understanding" between bishops and priests — not only for the good of the two groups but for the well-being of the entire Church; and a far from complete "task of communicating to the laity 'precisely what the Church is,'

although understanding is growing.

"Nonetheless, 'inevitably we will continue to make movement' in the direction of shared responsibility," he declared.

He quoted a 1971 Gallup poll which showed that only 16 per cent of American priests think the Church will be weaker ten years from now, while 66 per cent think it will be "stronger in the world."

"In this time of turmoil, of doubt and uncertainty, many would counsel a course of prudent moderation," Cardinal Dearden summed up. "But it seems to me that such a thought is out of step with the times."

"The Christian Faith has always entailed the acceptance of risk," he said. "By nature, we Americans are an optimistic people. In the Church that optimism takes the form of our Christian hope."

Seed money to be used to help parish CCD programs

The Bishops' Fund for Diocesan Development will allot \$7,500 to be used as seed money to help parishes with new projects and programs in Religious Education and \$2,000 for a special project of the Youth Department headed by Father Louis Gardner, Pastor of St. Michael's Parish in Antwerp. Both programs will help more parishes and people to benefit directly from the Bishop's Fund.

The Budget Committee of the Bishop's Fund Committee headed by Monsignor Francis P. Devar, Vicar General of the Diocese met Tuesday to discuss the dispersal of the \$7,500 which will be used for new catechetical projects and helping the parishes initiate new programs. The

"Seed Money" program originated from the proposal at a recent meeting of the Advisory Board for the Bishop's Fund Appeal that a grant be given to help more parishes benefit directly from the Bishop's Fund. Pastors throughout the Diocese were invited to apply for funds to help them initiate these new programs. This includes the purchasing of land for a catechetical center, hiring a full-time Religious Education Coordinator for a parish or a group of parishes, building a catechetical center or improving a present program in some new or creative way.

Members of the Budget

Grey Nuns elect Superior General

Sister Helen Dorothy Philip was elected superior general of the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart at the opening session of the general chapter on Monday, June 28, at the Motherhouse in Yardley, Pa. Sister Helen Dorothy, former secretary general, succeeds Sister Jane Frances Cabana whose term expired.

Sister Elizabeth Bagen of Buffalo was elected assistant general, and Sister Irene Marie Murphy formerly of Ogdensburg was elected treasurer general.

Candidates chosen for a four-year term were Sister Mary Raphael, Courtney of Yardley; Sister Teresa, Diocese of Philadelphia and Sister Francis Maureen, White of Atlanta.



St. Peter's Church, New Bremen, where parishioners observed the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the parish recently. Story on page two. (Buskey photo)