

STRUGGLE IN SAINT LOUIS

In 1891 Polish immigrants in Saint Louis received an unusual gift from Peter Kenrick, their archbishop. Property connected with their parish, named for the Polish Jesuit novice Stanislaus Kostka, was handed over to a parish corporation that had a lay board of directors. In 2003 another archbishop, Justin Rigali, demanded the property back, and Rigali's successor, Raymond Burke, won a Vatican ruling that the amended incorporation documents under which the present board operates failed to conform to canon law. When talks broke down, Burke gave a deadline for the board to surrender the property, worth nine and a half million dollars, or face the ecclesiastical penalty of interdiction. The board refused, and on February 10 the six members were informed that they were now banned from the sacraments.

On February 21 the clearly unrepentant board issued a press statement in which they acknowledged that attempts at dialogue with the archbishop had ended and that it was time to move on. "To deprive a parish and individuals of all religious guidance and celebrations over a property dispute is not in religious doctrine," the directors commented. "Yet it is acceptable and enthusiastically embraced through clergy made law, called Canon Law."

So what to do?

"That being said, the BOD has unanimously voted that during this most holy Easter season, to seek interim religious guidance and celebrations from an order of priests or an individual priest outside the authority of the Archbishop of St. Louis. We will do our best to obtain a Roman Catholic Priest with Polish Heritage and who speaks the Polish language. Please bear with us, as this will be difficult, but it may be our ultimate future."

Archbishop Burke has several options, one of which is to turn to the civil court and build a case that St. Stan's no longer functions as a Roman Catholic parish and so, by terms of the original incorporation, the property should revert to the archdiocese. This would be a stronger case if, as could happen, any priest invited to minister to the congregation is someone who, by canon law, is no longer allowed to function licitly as a priest. Another option is to extend the interdict to anyone who participates in the services at St. Stan's, which most likely would only help swell attendance. A third, least probable given Burke's style, is to give up his demand for surrender and negotiate a new arrangement that would both fit within canon law and the tradition of the parish.

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ARCC clearly endorses the efforts of the parishioners to protect their rights and we appreciate the dilemma faced by the board of directors: attempt to function as a parish and risk losing the property for no longer being Catholics in good standing (a requirement of the bylaws for board members), or not function as a parish and run even a greater risk of losing the property. We note also that the dispute demonstrates a key flaw in the American Catholic system of church ownership: a bishop risks being seen less as a spiritual leader and more as a bullying Donald Trump in clericals.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Brian Paul, who replaced Deal Hudson as the editor of Crisis Magazine, in a special e-report on January 14 proposed twenty-three ways to recognize a “faithful” parish. “Faithful” appears to be a synonym for “traditional” and as such most of the indicators are predictable (forget guitar Masses, for instance). However, I was especially interested in the last two, and with Brian’s permission I reproduce them here.

22. The church's Website doesn't link to dissident groups like Call to Action, Voice of the Faithful, or Catholics for a Free Choice.

23. If there's a literature rack in the church, look at the publications the parish is carrying. Dissident magazines or newspapers tend to go hand in hand with a dissident parish. On the other hand, should you see a copy of Crisis in the rack, join that parish. The pastor is clearly a man of great taste and refinement.

I think I understand what is meant by a dissident group (even though ARCC did not make the cut for specific mention), but I had to stop and think what would be an example of a dissident magazine or newspaper. A bit of time searching various conservative sources did provide an interesting list that included the National Catholic Reporter, America, Commonweal, and U.S. Catholic. Since at one time or another I have had articles or reviews in three of these four, I suppose I share a certain guilt by association even if I were not already editor of this newsletter.

At the same time I am bothered by this cavalier use of the term “dissident,” especially as it might apply to a parish. Granted, there are groups on both the left and the right that have created parish structures outside the official diocesan structure, but what would it mean to have a dissident parish in which the pastor has been appointed by the local ordinary and presumably remains in good standing? Jesuit parishes are likely enough to have America available to their congregations, but does that mean they too should be assumed to be “dissident”?

The problem, I think, is this. “Dissident” sounds something like “dissent,” but it obviously connotes a rejection of the established structure. ARCC, for example, has taken a stand often enough on what we think the church should become, but we have never officially advocated that Catholics should abandon the official church. If we were truly dissident, we would not think of ourselves any longer as Roman Catholics. Yet this is our church, and as an organization we intend to support those changes which will make the church live up to its own ideals. Yes, we support, for example, an end to mandatory celibacy and we hope to see the ordination of women, but the fact that this is not the current position of the Vatican should not be enough to invoke the label of “dissident.”

How do traditionalists define “dissident,” and who makes the list? Check the following:

http://www.catholicculture.org/sites/sites_browse.cfm?browseby=ratings

<http://www.ourladywarriors.org/dissent/dissorg.htm>

IMAGINING THE POPE

Novelists and screenwriters have only two figures whose imagined lives allow for a consideration of where the whole world is going—or where it should go. There is the President of the United States, “leader of the free world,” portrayed as a compassionate liberal by Michael Douglas (“The American President”) and Martin Sheen (“The West

Wing”) or as a sadistic womanizer by Gene Hackman (“Absolute Power”). And there is the Pope, portrayed as the survivor of a Russian labor camp in the Morris West novel *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (Anthony Quinn in the 1968 screen version) or as an Irish mystic favoring a married clergy and the ordination of women (but opposing all

opposing all forms of birth control) in Peter de Rosa's 1997 novel *Pope Patrick*.

Discussing novelistic portrayals of the Pope, Australian journalist James Murray suggests that one thing at work is what he calls "the Corvo Syndrome," named for the novelist Frederick Rolfe, Baron Corvo, and defined as "a quasi-delusional state in which an individual sees himself, not the incumbent, as the Pope of Rome." Murray's special animus is directed at "those who condescendingly accuse the Pope of being out of touch with the world as it is," and clearly he opposes anyone who attempts to see the Pope as anything of a revolutionary. Fellow Australian Morris West is a major target.

Any realistic assessment of the Vatican as an institution has to favor the idea that whoever is elected to be Pope will be as supportive of tradition as a justice of the American Supreme Court. *Stare decisis*—standing by previous decisions—is simply good policy, since any major break with the past threatens the very basis of institutional legitimacy. But this hardly keeps a good writer from imagining what could be, especially if that supports the writer's own hopes for the future.

A rather fun version of this can be found in the three novels making up *The Franciscan Trilogy* by ARRC member Bill Park. His hero is the adventuresome friar Dom Masone, who is chosen to be Pope and takes the name Francis I. Masone's concept of reform does not sit well, however, and he is quickly targeted for assassination. He resigns and then goes on a series of adventures that finally land him in Tibet and an opportunity to explore what really lay behind the discoveries of the censured Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin.

Park himself is not shy about suggesting what he would like to see. As summarized in one interview, his main character is "a

new pope, who, plagued by assassination attempts and Vatican intrigue and corruption, rejects the claim of infallibility, supports a choice of marriage for priests, opens a dialogue for a female priesthood, creates a democratic church administration, and lifts a gag order on theologians." Bill, a devout Catholic who is serious about the reforms he wants to see made, brings the skills of an experienced writer for radio and TV to his novels. They are a good read, possibly even an antidote to the essentially anti-Catholic balderdash that is Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.

The difficulty, though, is in moving from fiction to reality. In a novel we can imagine how a charismatic figure takes an existing institution, whether the presidency or the papacy, and transforms it for better or for worse (as in Upton Sinclair's *It Can't Happen Here*, which anticipated Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*). In reality, institutions prove far less open to change from the top. Whether we are talking about George W. Bush or John Paul II, a forceful leader is arguably at his strongest when he rejects those changes most threatening to the more powerful beneficiaries of an existing status. Whether president or pope, he learns that to prevent dissent he must also close off discussion. Too often he gets his way.

How could things be different? One suggestion is not to look to the top, as with the Pope, but with insiders lower on the ladder. Author and Vatican expert Robert Blair Kaiser, a former ARCC Board member, has been considering how radical change might occur this way. In a novel in progress, he spins a tale about a reactionary U.S. cardinal who ends up putting himself on the line to make the American church into something more democratic. Plausible? Maybe not. Visionary? Definitely so, and it is the vision that perhaps matters most.

For the interview with Bill Park, go to

http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=6708149&BRD=1459&PAG=461&dept_id=506062&rfi=6

For Murray's analysis, see <http://loughnan.tripod.com/corvo.htm>

A JESUIT THEOLOGIAN IS SCOLDED BY THE VATICAN

Roger Haight is hardly a household name among Catholic readers, although that may be changing. Formerly someone training young Jesuits and others at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, he now teaches in New York's Union Theological Seminary. His 1999 book *Jesus Symbol of God* was a prize-winning theological discussion that came to the attention of the Vatican, and in February Father Haight joined Hans Küng as an individual prohibited from teaching in a Catholic institution. The key problem: Jesus is only "one of many symbolic actualizations of God's loving presence to mankind." For anyone still immersed in the pre-Vatican II vision of *nulla salus extra ecclesiam* this is dangerous stuff, since it suggests that God may not be as narrow as the Vatican elite. We are including Father Haight's book on our list of selections available at our archives site and invite you to form your own opinion.

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