

## A Legacy of Dissent . . .

## Diocesan Newspaper Reflects The Legacy

By PAUL LIKODIS

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — During the years of Bishop Matthew Clark's predecessor, Bishop Joseph Hogan (1969-1979), the *Catholic Courier* of the Diocese of Rochester (then the *Courier-Journal*) was often criticized by faithful Catholics for editorial policies that favored dissenters to Church teaching on a range of issues, including those of Bishop Hogan who was an advocate for women's ordination to the priesthood as early as 1976, and who publicly dissented from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's January 27, 1977 declaration that the Catholic priesthood is reserved to males.

Hogan called that CDF document "a theologically horrible statement."

But under Bishop Clark, whose reign as bishop began shortly after the election of Pope John Paul II, the *Catholic Courier* positioned itself as a sort of "loyal opposition" to the efforts of John Paul II over 25 years to reassert Catholic orthodox belief and practice after the tumultuous decades that followed the Second Vatican Council.

Both Clark and his newspaper were honored by the Catholic Press Association at its recent meeting in Indianapolis. As the Catholic News Service reported June 26:

"Bishop Matthew H. Clark of Rochester, N.Y., publisher of the *Catholic Courier*, the diocesan newspaper, has received the Bishop John England Award from the Catholic Press Association. The bishop, who will turn 75 July 15, has headed the diocese since 1979. He was honored for his work in supporting the newspaper and its staff in carrying out its journalistic responsibility throughout his tenure and instituting a dramatic restructuring of the newspaper in 1985 during a time of plummeting revenues and mounting debt. . . . It is the CPA's highest award for publishers."

A look back at some of the *Catholic Courier's* reporting on some significant documents from John Paul II's pontificate will illustrate both Clark's and his newspaper's commitment to dissent.

One consistent feature of Clark's episcopate is that he was always looking forward to a "Church of tomorrow."

On numerous occasions, he has lamented that the Church is slow to change and in catching up to where the people are, whether the issue is birth control, women's ordination, homosexual rights, or whatever.

On May 24, 1990, 12 years into the pontificate of John Paul II, the *Catholic Courier's* Lee Strong reported on a talk Clark gave at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, where the bishop expressed his hope that in the coming years the Church will "become more expansive and inclusive in its way of thinking and acting...and will be unafraid to explore fully and courageously the questions which are active in the hearts of so many of our people."

"Such exploration," Strong reported, "would include further study of issues that cause tension in today's Church, including birth control, abortion, celibacy, and the ordination of women, Bishop Clark said."

On these issues, Clark said, "We are not now where we ought to be with any of these questions."

The bishop acknowledged that "pastoral practice" in the Diocese of Rochester "has advanced beyond the applicable universal norms which speak to those respective issues," and he firmly defended the practice of general absolution in the diocese and lay preaching.

He also worried that the "Holy See is moving toward a more centralized control of Church life," but hoped "that the local churches will continually become freer than they presently are to make significant judgments by which they shape the concrete ways in which they celebrate and proclaim the faith" and that the Church "will be willing fully and carefully to hear the people as they express their convictions about some of the issues which cause tension in the Church."

**A "Flawed" Document**

Seven months after Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, dated August 1993, the document was discussed at a forum at Clark's theologate, St. Bernard's Institute. The *Catholic Courier's* Rob Cullivan opened his March 24, 1994, report by saying: "Some see the encyclical as a long-needed corrective for a Church and world riddled with errors and moral laxity."

"Others see it is an ambiguous, flawed document marked by sexist language, and questionable and mistaken conclusions."

While one priest who attended the conference, Fr. William Cosgrove, was quoted as saying the document is a "veritable godsend for pastors seeking to instill moral values among today's Catholics," the bulk of the article hosted critics of the encyclical, including Casey Lopata, described as "graduate student at St. Bernard's"; Lopata is also a founder of numerous pro-homosexual agitprop organizations, including the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.

"I think the intention is fine, but the way it comes across hurts the intention," he told the *Catholic Courier*, adding: "[it] could have been much more effective if it were a little more humble and a little more forthright."

"In particular," reported Cullivan, "he criticized what he saw as *Veritatis Splendor's* emphasis on the Church's possession of certainty in relaying moral truths, an emphasis he found at odds with the Vatican II image of a pilgrim church."

"I think this certainty is something we're all searching for, including the church," he said.

After Pope John Paul II issued, on May 30, 1994, his apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which affirmed once again the Church's doctrine that the priesthood is reserved to males, the *Catholic Courier* headlined its report, "Local Views of Papal Statement Suggest Continued Debate."

Reporter Lee Strong opened his report this way:

"Denise Mack experienced a feeling of irony after reading news accounts of Pope John Paul II's May 30 apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which reaffirms the Church's ban on women priests."

Mack told Strong that she expected the Pope's letter, rather than ending debate on women's ordination, "is more likely to prompt continued debate."

Mack, at the time, was the "pastoral associate" at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Mendon, and — though Strong did not inform his

readers of this — she was a founding member of the Women's Ordination Conference. Prior to her posting at St. Catherine of Siena by Bishop Clark, she was a member of the schismatic Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, whose long-time pastor was eventually excommunicated by Clark and who subsequently led much of his parish into schism.

Mack also was as a "lay president/preacher" for Rochester Dignity/Integrity's "song-filled Roman Catholic liturgy of the word."

Mack wrote a book (with Roslyn Karaban) on lay preaching — *Extraordinary Preaching* — which was endorsed by Bishop Clark. He said of it:

"With great enthusiasm I recommend *Extraordinary Preaching*. I have the privilege of serving as bishop of the local church to which these women bring such wonderful gifts. They have given strength and hope to my life, and I know they have done the same for thousands of others in our local church. They love and live the Word, have a deep reverence for the human story, and possess an uncommon ability to draw them together in a way that puts our hearers in touch with God and their own hearts."

Strong also quoted Marvin Mich, described as "associate professor of Christian ethics at St. Bernard's Institute," who told the *Courier*: "The issue is not going to go away because the pope is not willing to talk about it. It's an instruction from the pope, and it needs to be taken seriously. But that does not mean you can thwart the process of theological reflection. . . . This does not end the conversation. We must trust the Spirit."

Bishop Clark was also quoted in the *Courier* report, explaining that his "best understanding" of the letter "is that it intends to say that there can be no further doubt about the Church's self-understanding in regard to the ordination of women." But Mich was given the last word in the report, telling readers that the Pope is giving a "dominant" position to tradition, while downplaying Scripture, reason, and experience.

As Rochester's *Democrat & Chronicle* reported on November 21, 1995, John Paul II's letter was still causing heartbreak in the Diocese of Rochester, and it quoted several women serving as pastoral associates expressing their disappointment. The report added that the papal letter "leaves Clark in a delicate position."

"In the past," reported Michael Wentzel, "he has said if it were possible, he would be 'happy' to ordain women as priests. He has said he did not find reasons offered against ordination compelling. . . ."

"At the same time, the bishop said, 'Our parishes and diocese could hardly function without the leadership provided by women.'"

As the authors of the *Cleansing Fire* web site observed two years ago, however, the parishes run by women have an average rate of attrition of 5.6% annually, compared to a 3.5% annual loss of churchgoers at other parishes, according to diocesan statistics.

*Cleansing Fire* observed in a May 24, 2010 posting (<http://cleansingfire.com/tag/nancy/page/2/>):

"All four progressive parishes have experienced sizable declines in attendance since 2003. St. Mary downtown has 256 less, St. Anne has 338 less, Lourdes has 216 less, and Good Shepherd has 336 less. For the sake of comparison, Our Lady of Victory averaged 401 people in 2003, and today has well north of 700 for an increase of at least 300 people."

"[W]e took a look at the attendance numbers for the weekend of

the 14th/15th of March in 2010 and compared them to the weekend of the 14th/15th of March in 2009. We wanted to see if there was any change in attendance over the past year in these parishes led by progressive leaders. Let's check out the data:

"These results seem to corroborate the previous table. St. Mary lost 106 people for the 2nd Sunday in March since last year, St. Anne lost 93, Lourdes lost 63, and Good Shepherd lost 104."

**Tone Deaf**

Likewise, after the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on September 5, 2000 issued *Dominus Iesus*, which stated the obligation of Catholics to accept the teachings of the Church, and reaffirmed that the Church is necessary for salvation, the *Catholic Courier's* Kathleen Schwarz reported how so many in the diocese, both Catholics and Protestants, were dismayed and offended by it.

The document "has caused difficulties," said Sr. Nancy Hawkins, an assistant professor at St. Bernard's Institute.

Fr. Joseph Brennan, a retired priest and professor at the University of Rochester and a member of the diocese's Ecumenical Commission, was quoted as saying the document "raises problems" because of its "negative tone" when speaking of other religions.

The recently deceased Msgr. William Shannon, the diocese's most prominent dissenter since *Humanae Vitae* (except, perhaps, Fr. Charles Curran), described the document as "an indication of the very strong movement in the Church to take Vatican II apart piece by piece. I think it's an unfortunate document."

## Vancouver Archbishop Decries "Dangerous" Assisted Suicide Ruling

VANCOUVER, B.C. (CNA) — Archbishop J. Michael Miller of Vancouver has "strongly" urged the government of British Columbia to appeal a provincial Supreme Court decision that banned physician-assisted suicide.

He said the ruling is "extremely flawed and dangerous," and "sadly reflects a distorted view of equality rights that emphasizes autonomy over human dignity and the value of life."

"We have been down this road many times around the world, and all the safeguards initially put in place wind up either disregarded or eventually dispensed with," the archbishop said June 16.

"The result is euthanasia harms not only those whose lives are taken, but those responsible for taking them."

British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Lynn Smith on June 16 ruled that the law violates the constitutional rights of the three plaintiffs: Gloria Taylor, Lee Carter, and Hollis Johnson.

Plaintiffs Carter and Johnson helped Carter's mother Kay obtain a physician-assisted suicide in Switzerland. Taylor, 64, suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease and has sought a declaration of a right to doctor-assisted suicide.

Justice Smith said the anti-euthanasia law is invalid. However, she suspended the decision for a year to allow Parliament to modify the law to make it constitutional, the

In an August 28, 1997 feature article in the *Catholic Courier*, headlined, "Respectful Divergence: Can Catholics Disagree With the Pope?" Mike Latona presented a variety of opinions on the subject, from Catholic University professor William May to former Catholic theologian Charles Curran, from the then-president of Catholics United for the Faith Leon Suprenant to Fr. Joseph Hart, then a professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

In the article, Clark defended permitting practices that "may not correlate precisely with statements made by Pope John Paul II."

"This deals with the reality that every local church is different. I am not simply a branch manager of the office of the pope," he told Latona.

Latona added:

"Bishop Clark, who has led the Rochester Diocese since 1979, has never been disciplined in any way. Yet he acknowledged that petitions have been sent to the Vatican requesting disciplinary measures against him. . . ."

"I get so frustrated. What makes [my critics] arbiters of my obedience to the Holy Father?" he said. "It would seem that if I am disobedient he'll let me know that, or the pro-nuncio will."

On Sunday, July 15, Bishop Clark will turn 75, and submit his resignation to the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, who knows the situation in the Rochester Diocese well.

The big question is: Whom will the Holy Father appoint to the unenviable position of presiding over this see in the wake of the 33-year reign of Matthew Clark?

British Columbia newspaper *The Times Colonist* reports.

The ruling grants a constitutional exemption to plaintiff Gloria Taylor, who suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease. She can apply to a court for access to physician-assisted suicide if she provides written consent, if her attending physician attests that she is near death with no hope of recovery and if the physician and a psychiatrist testify that she is mentally competent.

Lawyer Jason Gratl represented the Farewell Foundation for the Right to Die, which was an intervener in the case. He said the foundation is prepared to help others apply for a constitutional exemption.

He said he believes the government will appeal the ruling, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* reports.

However, a government spokeswoman said a decision to appeal has not been made.

Julie Di Mambro, spokeswoman for federal Justice Minister Rob Nicholson, said assisted suicide is "an emotional and divisive issue for many Canadians."

"Parliament voted as recently as April 2010 not to change these laws," she said.

Archbishop Miller stressed the need for a true understanding of liberty, which he said includes "the freedom to live one's life secure in the knowledge that those who care for us are dedicated to the service of life, not the taking of life."

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