

Pope, Ratzinger take on American heretics

by Kathleen Klenetsky

On Aug. 18, American Catholic liberals were shaken to their roots by the announcement that Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, had revoked Fr. Charles Curran's license to teach Church theology at Catholic University.

In a letter explaining his decision, Ratzinger wrote that it was not just Curran's particular views, such as his contention, contrary to Church teaching, that abortion does not always constitute a sin, which prompted the action against him. More important in rendering Curran "not suitable nor eligible to teach Catholic theology," Ratzinger stressed, was his insistence that public dissent from the *Magisterium* (the Church's teaching authority) is permissible.

The decision against Curran was not wholly unexpected. Curran had been under the gun for years from more traditional Catholics in the United States, for claiming that homosexuality, pre-marital sex, contraception, abortion—and even bestiality—could be allowed under certain circumstances, as well as for his central role in fomenting much of the dissent that has plagued the American Church since the Second Vatican Council.

Curran had long been a symbol of the "dissenters" within the U.S. Church. He achieved national notoriety in 1968 when he galvanized a group of prominent theologians into publicly attacking Pope Paul VI's encyclical condemning birth control, *Humanae Vitae*, and then supported the drafting of a statement by the U.S. bishops delineating the right to dissent.

The formal action against Curran sent his co-thinkers—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—into a frenzy. The Rev. Xavier Harris, president of the Franciscan School of Theology at Berkeley, charged that the disciplining of Curran represented a "giant step backward."

The move is creating a "scary" climate, he says. "It's the Inquisition all over again."

Father Richard McBrien, chairman of the theology department at the University of Notre Dame, argued that the move would have a "chilling effect" on Church theologians.

Curran himself has vowed to fight the ruling, and is running around claiming that 40 U.S. bishops support him against Rome.

Beneath the bravado, the liberals are "running scared," as one of Curran's colleagues told *EIR*. That reaction is understandable. As recent developments demonstrate, the crackdown on Curran is only the opening broadside in what could be the most momentous intervention by the Holy See in the history of the American Catholic Church.

Shortly after the Curran decision was made public, a top Vatican official told the Associated Press that the move represented "only the beginning." He predicted a "housecleaning" and "corrective steps" against similar trends throughout the American Church. In other words, Ratzinger and Pope John Paul II are deadly serious about cleaning up the American Catholic Church.

Far from a return to the dark days of the Inquisition, as Curran's defenders would have one believe, the decision to discipline Curran is part of a strategy, developed by the Pope and Ratzinger, to create the conditions in which the American Catholic Church can not only be saved from the pagan and Gnostic heresies which have taken root over the last two decades, but can actually be transformed into a powerful force for combating the degraded view of the human being which has permeated American society, as well as the Church here, since the mid-1960s.

There are 50 million American Catholics; enlisting them in the fight against evil, as the Pope wishes to do, will have a profoundly positive impact on the return to traditional Judeo-Christian values which is now beginning to take hold in American society overall. The Pope plans to visit the United States in Fall 1987, and there is every reason to believe he intends to wage an unremitting battle for the soul of the American Church.

The Pope clearly recognizes that to reform the U.S. Church requires taking on the leading lights of the "American heresy" faction which Curran represents. This faction, which has been a continuous, and increasingly powerful voice within the U.S. Church since the last century, has historically maintained that the democratic nature of American society means that the Church in America should become correspondingly more pluralistic.

After Vatican II, this heretical grouping asserted itself with a vengeance. Drawing strength from the rise of the counterculture and other aspects of the consciously Satanic "Age of Aquarius" then being foisted on the United States as a whole, they were soon able to establish themselves as the predominant voice of American Catholicism. Because of the financial power of the U.S. Church, the American heretics were able to virtually blackmail the Vatican by threatening a schism, were Rome to dare to assert its moral and ecclesiastical authority.

Things disintegrated rapidly. As Msgr. George Kelly put it in his 1981 book, *The Battle for the American Church*, the

“guerrilla warfare” which broke out in the Church was “no mere battle over ownership and control of Church machinery,” but “involved the credibility and viability of the Christian message itself.”

Liberal academics and theologians ran amok. Fr. Gregory Baum, a prominent theologian with close ties to Hans Küng, sought the “protestantization” of the hierarchy’s role. Brother Gabriel Moran, one-time provincial of the Long Island-New England Province of the Christian Brothers, proclaimed, “I stand for destruction [of religious orders]. I am against both the existence of the religious order and the parish.” He suggested that future religious communities may resemble hippie communes where men and women live together and raise children.

Rosemary Reuther, a leading Catholic lay theologian who teaches at the Protestant Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Illinois, charged that the “hierarchical-monarchical Church” was not Christ’s invention at all, but Roman imperialism transplanted to the gospel setting; the believing community must not act, she said, as if God had put himself under the control of any institution. In a 1980 symposium, *Consensus in Theology? A Dialog with Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx*, Reuther wrote: “A new consensus could only come about if this traditional power [the hierarchy] could be deposed and the Church restructured on conciliar, democratic lines accountable to the people. . . . This is really what Küng is calling for: that the academy replace the hierarchy as the teaching magisterium. . . . This cannot be accomplished by the academy itself,” Reuther noted. “It entails the equivalent of the French Revolution in the Church, the deposing of a monarchical for a democratic constitution.”

Led by Curran, Notre Dame’s Father Theodore Hesburgh, and others, Church leaders and “scholars” vehemently protested the Vatican’s opposition to contraception, subsequently extending their dissent to a whole range of human relations issues, from homosexuality to euthanasia. Pleas as punch by this internal revolt, representatives of the Malthusian lobby, notably including “population researcher” Stephen Mumford, urged the dissenters to threaten to split from Rome, if the Vatican continued pursuing “pro-natalist” policies.

By the mid-1980s, the situation had degenerated so badly that witchcraft was being openly countenanced by some prominent clergymen and “Catholic” newspapers. For example, the above-cited Rosemary Reuther published a book this summer, *Women-Church: The Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, which includes new liturgies for lesbians and homosexuals. In the one for Halloween, which sounds exactly like ancient pagan ceremonies to the Earth Goddess, women sit around a table with small brazier, corn, apples, and flowering branches, singing: “Sister-woman-sister, can you feel any pain? Have the walls grown up so high that you’ve forgotten how to fly?”

Church institutions themselves are also actively encour-

aging homosexuality and euthanasia. For instance, a group affiliated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore called AGLO (Archdiocesan Gay and Lesbian Outreach) recently published a report on the “positive” aspects of homosexuality, recommending that parishes sponsor get-togethers for homosexual youth.

Conditions in Catholic colleges and seminaries are just as bad. A theologian named Mary Daly, a member of the faculty of the Jesuit-run Boston College, identifies herself as a “Nag-Gnostic” (a pun on agnostic in which the “nag” refers both to witchcraft and to Nag Hammadi, where the heretical Gnostic gospels were found—or invented—in the 1940s), and preaches lesbianism and Satanism. Meantime, estimates on homosexuality among seminarians run as high as 80%.

Remaking the American Church

There is little doubt that John Paul II has long considered reform of the American Church a priority. His appointment several years ago, of two outspoken conservatives, Bernard Law and John O’Connor, to head the archdioceses of Boston and New York, respectively, and his subsequent decision to name them cardinals, were early signs of his commitment to restructuring the American hierarchy. The disciplining of Curran indicates that the Pope and Ratzinger have decided to call the heretics’ bluff once and for all.

That reading is reinforced by other actions the Vatican has taken vis-à-vis the American Church in recent months, including moving against some of its most important liberal hierarchs. In early June, Archbishop Gerety of Newark, who had caused a scandal in his archdiocese when he promoted a licentious sex-education program in the schools, resigned. Although Gerety claimed he was retiring because of illness, sources close to the Vatican say that he was forced out because of his ultraliberal views.

Then, in early September, just a few weeks after the Curran affair broke, the news came out that Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen had been stripped of most of his major responsibilities. Hunthausen, one of the most liberal members of the Church hierarchy, called a press conference Sept. 4 to disclose that the Vatican had stripped him of his major responsibilities, and assigned them to the conservative Auxiliary Bishop, Donald Wuerl.

Hunthausen said he had been told by the Vatican to relinquish to Wuerl complete and final power over the staff and operations of the archdiocesan tribunal, liturgy, clergy formation, seminarians, and the continuing education of priests. Wuerl, who was assigned by the Vatican to the number-two post in the Seattle diocese last December, after a Vatican investigation of Hunthausen which began in 1983, will also assume full responsibility for moral issues, such as birth control and homosexuality.

A well-known figure inside and outside the Church, Hunthausen had become, like Curran, a symbol of dissent against the “authoritarianism” and “regressiveness” of the present

Pope. Hunthausen had taken strong issue with Church teachings on such issues as homosexuality and abortion, and had also opposed U.S. nuclear weapons and refused to pay income tax to protest defense spending.

Obviously, the Vatican is now prepared to move against the highest levels of the American hierarchy, if that is required to bring the Church back in accordance with natural law.

Mobilizing the laity

One of the major battlegrounds on which the Pope is waging his campaign is the laity. The Vatican recently announced that the next worldwide bishops' synod will be held in October 1987, right after the Pope winds up his visit to the United States. Its topic: "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World."

The case of a controversial sex-education series widely used in American Catholic schools indicates that the Vatican is going over the heads of the corrupted elements of the hierarchy, directly to the laity.

Several months ago, a number of Catholic parents wrote to the Vatican, as well as to their local bishops, complaining that the "New Creation" series was too explicit and lacked proper moral guidance. Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, an avowed foe of Ratzinger, defended the series. But Eduard Cardinal Gagnon, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council on the Family, took the unusual step of writing privately to the parents, condemning the series in the Pope's name.

In subsequent remarks published in the Sept. 4 issue of *The Wanderer* newspaper, Gagnon stressed that the Vatican will support lay Catholics against their bishops, if need be. "We do not have the jurisdiction of a Congregation," said Gagnon, "but we write to the Bishops when lay people write to them and are not listened to."

Gagnon pointedly added: "It's a funny country [the United States] where everybody has the right to protest, but not those who are trying to protect the correct teaching of the Faith." He went on to call it a sign of the vitality of the Church in America that lay people were expressing such concern over what is taught their children. "There is supposed to be a preferential option for the poor in the Church," he said, "but there are also the poor in spirit who are being deprived of the truth. The best-placed people to put pressure on the authorities are the parents, who are the first educators of their children. They have our support."

Taking on the 'Catholic' politicians

In early September, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, a liberal Democrat who is constantly parading his Italian Catholicism, came under tough public criticism from the leadership of the New York Roman Catholic archdiocese, for opposing efforts to uphold official Church teachings.

Bishop Joseph T. O'Keefe, the archdiocese's Vicar-Gen-

eral, told the press Sept. 5 that Cuomo was "so smart he would confuse young people," and that, "under no circumstances would I invite him to speak to young people at a graduation."

O'Keefe's harsh words were prompted by Cuomo's reaction to a directive the Vicar-General had sent out a few days earlier to all parish priests in the archdiocese, instructing them to bar those who disagree with Church teachings from speaking in parishes. In a Sept. 4 interview with the *New York Times*, Cuomo charged that O'Keefe's policy could lead to "restraint of intellectual activity."

The Vicar-General returned fire. Informed by the *Times* of Cuomo's comments, a reportedly angry O'Keefe warned that the Governor "is way out on a limb now. . . . Nobody, not myself, or the Cardinal, or the Pope himself will take a position against the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church on abortion."

He also scored a speech Cuomo gave in 1984 at Notre Dame, in which Cuomo had sophistically argued that a Catholic could in good conscience publicly support laws permitting abortion, while personally disagreeing with them. That's "the encyclical by Mario," O'Keefe sarcastically commented.

O'Keefe also took aim at Cuomo's political aspirations, strongly suggesting that Cuomo opposed the directive for political reasons. "He might be trying to distance himself from the official teaching of the Church because his Catholicism will be an issue, as it has been in the past," the Bishop said.

O'Keefe's blast at Cuomo (which is said to have the full backing of O'Keefe's superior, Cardinal O'Connor) suggests the Vatican is preparing to take on some prominent American Catholic laymen, particularly those in political and policy-making arenas, who represent the lay equivalent of Curran's heretical views. Besides Cuomo, others in this camp would include Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Sen. Pat Moynihan (D-N.Y.), as well as self-styled conservative Bill Buckley, who, although he ballyhoos his supposed "traditional Catholicism," supports drug legalization and sodomy.

An open fight between Catholic politicians like Cuomo and the Church could end their political careers. Although it is probably true that a large majority of American Catholics practice contraception, and may agree with Curran on abortion and other issues, the fact is that the Currans and Cuomos of this world, like the rest of the Liberal Establishment, are increasingly out of step with the "average American"—Catholic as well as non-Catholic—who, faced with the wildfire spread of AIDS and drug abuse, the collapse of the family, and the growing military threat posed by Russia, is slowly coming to the realization that the hedonism of the past two decades has brought nothing but personal misery and social disaster.

Thus, in a clash with the Currans, Cuomos, Hunthausens, et al., Pope John Paul II is very likely to emerge the winner.

There is no 'right' to pursue evil

From the Encyclical On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, by Pope John Paul II, issued on May 18, 1986:

. . . The supreme and complete self-revelation of God, accomplished in Christ and witnessed to by the preaching of the Apostles, continues to be manifested in the Church through the mission of the invisible *Counsellor*, the Spirit of truth. . . .

We can say that in its rich variety of teaching, the Second Vatican Council contains precisely all that "the Spirit says to the Churches" with regard to the present phase of history of salvation. . . . In a certain sense, the Council has made the Spirit newly "present" in our difficult age. In the light of this conviction one grasps more clearly the great importance of all the initiatives aimed at implementing the Second Vatican Council, its teaching and its pastoral and ecumenical thrust. . . . This work being done by the Church for the testing and bringing together of the salvific fruits of the Spirit bestowed in the Council is something indispensable. For this purpose one must learn how to "distinguish" them carefully from everything that may instead come originally from the "prince of this world." This discernment in implementing the Council's work is especially necessary in view of the fact that the Council *opened itself widely to the contemporary world*, as is clearly seen from the important Conciliar Constitutions *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. . . .

By convincing the "world" concerning the sin of Golgotha, concerning the death of the innocent Lamb, as happens on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit also convinces of every sin, committed in any place and at any moment in human history:

Cross of Christ. The "convincing" is the demonstration of the evil of sin, of every sin, in relation to the Cross of Christ. Sin, shown in this relationship, *is recognized in the entire dimension of evil* proper to it. . . .

According to the witness concerning the beginning, sin in its original reality takes place in man's will—and conscience—first of all as "disobedience," that is, as opposition of the will of man to the will of God. This original disobedience presupposes a *rejection*, or at least a *turning away from the truth contained in the Word of God*, who creates the world. . . . The rejection expresses itself in practice as "disobedience," in an act committed as an effect of the temptation

which comes from the "father of lies." Therefore, at the root of human sin is the lie which is a radical *rejection of the truth* contained in the Word of the Father, through whom is expressed the loving omnipotence of the Creator. . . .

Man in his own humanity receives as a gift a special "*image and likeness*" to God. This means not only rationality and freedom as constitutive properties of human nature, but also, from the very beginning, the capacity of having a *personal relationship* with God. . . .

The "image of God," consisting in rationality and freedom, expresses the greatness and dignity of the human subject, who is a person. But this *personal subject* is also always a *creature*: in his existence and essence he depends on the Creator. According to the *Book of Genesis*, "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" was to express and constantly remind man of the "limit" impassable for a created being. . . .

"Disobedience" means precisely going beyond the limit, which remains impassable to the will and the freedom of man as a created being. For God the Creator is the one definitive source of the moral order in the world created by Him. Man cannot decide by himself what is good and what is evil—cannot "know good and evil, like God." In the created world *God* indeed remains the first and sovereign source *for deciding about good and evil*, through the intimate truth of being, which is the reflection of *the Word*, the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father. . . . "Disobedience," as the original dimension of sin, means the *rejection of this source*, through man's claim to become an independent and exclusive source for deciding about good and evil. . . .

[God] has revealed to man that, as the "image and likeness" of his Creator, he is *called to participate in truth and love*. . . . Man's disobedience, nevertheless, always means a *turning away from God*, and in a certain sense *the closing up* of human freedom in His regard. It also means a certain opening of this freedom—of the human mind and will—to the one who is the "father of lies." . . .

In spite of all the witness of creation and of the salvific economy inherent in it, the spirit of darkness is capable of showing *God as an enemy* of his own creature, and in the first place as an enemy of man, *as a source of danger and threat to man*. . . .

Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of good. We see this confirmed in the modern age, when the atheistic ideologies seek to *root out religion* on the grounds that religion causes the radical "*alienation*" of man. . . .

"In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience." The conscience therefore is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a *principle of obedience*. . . .

If the conscience is upright, it serves "*to resolve accord-*

ing to truth the moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships"; then "persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct."

A result of an upright conscience is, first of all, to call good and evil by their proper name. . . .

By calling by their proper name the sins that most dishonor man, and by showing that they are a moral evil that weighs negatively on any balance-sheet of human progress, the Council also describes all this as a stage in "a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness," which characterizes "all of human life, whether individual or collective." . . .

In convening the world concerning sin *the Spirit of truth comes into contact with the voice of human consciences.*

By following this path we come to a demonstration of the roots of sin, which are to be found in man's inmost being, as described by the . . . Pastoral Constitution:

the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man. . . .

The *Holy Spirit* "convinces concerning sin" in relation to the mystery of man's origins, showing the fact that man is a *created being*, and therefore in complete ontological and ethical dependence upon the Creator. . . .

Against the background of what has been said so far, certain other words of Jesus, shocking and disturbing ones, become easier to understand. We might call them *the words of "unforgiveness."* They are reported for us by the Synoptics in connection with a particular sin which is called "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." This is how they are reported . . . : *Matthew*: "Whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." . . .

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit . . . is the sin committed by the person who claims to have a "right" to persist in evil—in any sin at all—and who thus rejects Redemption. One closes oneself up in sin. . . . This is a state of spiritual ruin . . . as it were an impenetrability of conscience, a state of mind which could be described as fixed by reason of a free choice. This is what Sacred Scripture usually calls "hardness of heart." In our own time this attitude of mind and heart is perhaps reflected in *the loss of the sense of sin.* . . . Pope Pius XII had already declared that "the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin," and this loss goes hand in hand with the "loss of the sense of God." . . . It is . . . vain to hope that there will take root a sense of sin against man and against human values, if there is no sense of offense against God, namely the true sense of sin." . . .

Unfortunately, the resistance to the Holy Spirit which Saint Paul emphasizes . . . finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its *external dimension*, which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a *philosophical system, an ideology, a program* for action

and for the shaping of human behavior. It reaches its clearest expression in *materialism* . . . which is still recognized as the essential core of Marxism. . . .

It must be added that on the horizon of contemporary civilization—especially in the form that is most developed in the technical and scientific sense—the *signs and symptoms of death* have become particularly present and frequent. One has only to think of the arms race and of . . . death-dealing poverty and famine. It is a question of problems that are not only economic but also and above all ethical. . . . And how can one fail to mention the attacks against human life by terrorism organized even on an international scale? . . .

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin committed by the person who claims to have a "right" to persist in evil—in any sin at all—and who thus rejects Redemption. One closes oneself up in sin. This is a state of spiritual ruin, as it were, an impenetrability of conscience. In our own time, this attitude of mind is perhaps reflected in the loss of the sense of sin.

From The Ratzinger Report, a compendium of interviews conducted with Cardinal Ratzinger by Vittorio Messori, 1985:

After the phase of indiscriminate "openness" [by the Church to the world] it is time that the Christian reacquire the consciousness of belonging to a minority and of often being in opposition to what is obvious, plausible and natural for that mentality which the New Testament calls—and certainly not in a positive sense—the "spirit of the world." It is time to find again the courage of nonconformism, the capacity to oppose many of the trends of the surrounding culture, renouncing a certain euphoric post-conciliar solidarity. . . .

If by "restoration" is meant a turning back [to the pre-Vatican II Church], no restoration of such kind is possible. . . . There is no "restoration" whatsoever in this sense. But if by restoration we understand the search for a new balance after all the exaggerations of an indiscriminate opening to the world, after the overly positive interpretations of *an agnostic and atheistic world*, well then a restoration understood in this sense . . . is altogether desirable and, for that matter, is already in operation in the Church. [Emphasis added]