

This letter to the editor, written in response to a previous submission, appeared in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel on December 27.

Jesus, and Catholic Church, made bishop the boss

A Dec. 21 letter asked, "Who made Catholic bishop boss?" In Roman Catholic ecclesiology, or understanding of the church, it is Jesus Christ himself, through the pope, who makes the bishop "boss." It is the bishop who has the responsibility to teach and govern the people of his diocese, especially regarding matters regarding the Eucharist. I hope this helps to clarify the matter.

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Did Jesus make the bishop the boss or the servant? Actually, did Jesus make the bishop anything?

Welcome to the real meaning of Christmas

Those who knew Benedictine Fr. Godfrey Diekmann (1908-2002) will forgive his Teutonic exuberance regarding the centrality of the Incarnation. His friend, colleague and biographer, Sacred Heart Sr. Kathleen Hughes, tells the story of a dinner conversation in the student dining room at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., where Godfrey got worked up about the key to Christian theology and life: "He startled and silenced a good number of tables around us when he shouted, 'It's not the Resurrection, dammit! It's the Incarnation!' Then, as students slipped away, he continued, 'But we don't believe it. We don't believe we are invited to become the very life of God!' "

Diekmann's lifelong passion, inspired by his mentor, Virgil Michel, founder of the American pastoral liturgical movement as forerunner to the Second Vatican Council, was to unfold the startling implications of what he called "the Gospel of divine life." Salvation is first revealed not in Christ's death on the cross or his resurrection, Diekmann believed, but in his conception and birth. Christmas, not Easter, is the moment of salvation. God's entry into time and history as human revealed human destiny for all of us. Our existence is an invitation to friendship with God; our future is life with God. For Christians, baptism articulates this transformation, but the potential is universal, anthropological. To be human is to be offered divine life. What Jesus had in essence we are given as gift. The Word is made flesh, and from that moment, nature is being perfected by grace toward life in God.

Why should such theological table talk impress us? And why, as Diekmann lamented, is it so hard to believe? Because as Christian doctrine emerged, especially in the West, redemption was emphasized as the result of Jesus'

death on the cross. If such a terrible sacrifice was the price of our salvation, then human sin must have been terrible indeed, a state of degradation so pervasive and hopeless that only a life of penance and vigilance could keep us safe. The church's role was to channel grace to sinners through the sacraments. A fearful laity lived at the edge of damnation, dependent on the parish priest, who held ultimate power. A loving God receded into the distant heavens, while his divine Son sat sternly atop a hierarchy of clergy with the power to grant or withhold forgiveness. Outside the church there was no salvation, so millions of people were consigned automatically to hell.

If this sounds familiar, you are a Catholic of certain age and generation. If the invitation to friendship with God seems too good to believe, even heretical, you might be hearing the Gospel for the first time. If such an adjustment of theological emphasis seems refreshing, even liberating, then now you know why Vatican II was so necessary. Welcome to the real meaning of Christmas. Step out of the shadows into the light. The mystery is here, all of it, and it is not just for Jesus, but, through him, for all of us.

This article appeared in *The National Catholic Reporter*.

Some interesting and challenging discussions are going on at <http://nonviolentjesus.blogspot.com/>. You may want to check out the site.

Thank you, Ed, for your incisive and right-on commentary:

President Obushma ordered U.S. cruise missile attacks on Yemen days before the Northwest Airlines bomber was foiled on the Amsterdam to Detroit flight. The bomber supposedly had contact with al-Qaida in Yemen.

Coincidence? Karma? Blowback? Distraction? (Congress just re-authorized the anti-constitutional Patriot Act, while we were celebrating Christmas).

And when did our Congress declare war on Yemen?

Oh, my bad. Congress no longer needs to declare war on anyone. It just exists to rubberstamp Warmonger Presidents' "requests" to keep funding these undeclared wars of aggression "to kill terrorists."

How many more U.S. bombings of Muslim countries will be "necessary" for Obushma to prove he's serious about fighting The Long War on Terrorism (by using terrorism)?

How many more Muslim civilians "in the vicinity of" suspected al-Qaida members must be blasted to bloody shreds, therefore inciting even more hatred of the U.S. and attempts at retaliation, to continue the endless cycle

and make sure our National Security Warfare State never shuts down its weapons factories with their cushy campaign contributions?

Oh, my bad, again!

So, what's new with Tiger Woods?

Not sure where the following comment came from.

“They (the right-wing mouth-pieces) don't lie for the sake of lying... they lie so that their core audience (whom they have never respected) ends up believing it and then those poor saps show up at Tea Bag rallies and argue against their own interests... which in turn inflates the egos of the right-wing mouth-pieces, strengthens corporations, and weakens democracy.”

Some excerpts from *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* by Richard Rohr as found on

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=19452>

"Joy and mind. Those are not words that you would normally put together, but they inspired the eleventh-century Richard of St. Victor, a Scottish canon teaching in Paris, and became the themes of his two books on the contemplative mind, *Benjamin Major* and *Benjamin Minor*. The titles are taken from one obscure passage from Psalm 68:27, where 'Benjamin' is described as leading a procession into the temple in *mentis excessu*, which was translated as 'with a joyful mind' or 'with an ecstatic mind.' This made me ask:

What might a joyful mind be?

"When your mind does not need to be right.

"When you no longer need to compare yourself with others.

"When you no longer need to compete — not even in your own head.

"When your mind can be creative, but without needing anyone to know.

"When you can live in contentment with whatever the moment offers.

"When you do not need to analyze or judge things in or out, positive or negative.

"When your mind does not need to be in charge, but can serve the moment with gracious and affirming information.

"When your mind follows the intelligent lead of your heart.

"When your mind is curious and interested, not suspicious and interrogating.

"When your mind does not 'brood over injuries.'

"When you do not need to humiliate, critique, or defeat those who have hurt you — not even in your mind.

"When your mind does not need to create self-justifying story lines.

"When your mind does not need the future to be better than today.

"When your mind can let go of obsessive or negative thoughts.

"When your mind can think well of itself, but without needing to.

"When your mind can accept yourself as you are, warts and all.

"When your mind can surrender to what is.

"When your mind does not divide and always condemn one side or group.

"When your mind can find truth on both sides.

"When your mind fills in the gaps with 'the benefit of the doubt' for both friend and enemy.

"When your mind can critique and also detach from the critique.

"When your mind can wait, listen, and learn.

"When your mind can live satisfied without resolution or closure.

"When your mind can forgive and actually 'forget.'

"When your mind can admit it was wrong and change.

"When your mind can stop judging and critiquing itself.

"When you don't need to complain or worry to get motivated.

"When you can observe your mind contracting into self-preservation or self-validation, and then laugh or weep over it.

"When you can actually love with your mind.

"When your mind can find God in all things."

"The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in disorder and imperfection—and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth. "

Finally, thank you, Raymond, for the following article from OSV.com by Russell Shaw:

December 29

2009: A turning point for U.S. bishops?

Was 2009 a turning point for the American bishops, marking a tougher and more realistic approach on their part to the myriad problems, internal and external, besetting the Catholic Church in the United States? It's too soon for final conclusions, but, on the evidence, history may judge the year just past in exactly those terms.

Two episodes in particular suggest as much. One is the remarkable fact that some 80 American bishops, acting on their own, spoke up last spring to protest Notre Dame's invitation to President Barack Obama to receive an honorary degree and deliver the commencement address. Obama makes no bones about backing legalized abortion, and the bishops considered it scandalous for the country's highest-visibility Catholic university to pay gratuitous tribute to him in this way.

The other episode has been the upfront campaign by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to keep public funding of elective abortion out of the health care legislation being pushed by Obama and the congressional leadership and to make the plan more generous in scope. The bishops have sought to influence legislation often before, but it's hard to think of a time when they've put up a fight as strenuous and determined as this one.

In neither case, to be sure, did the bishops prevail. Notre Dame shrugged off the protests and honored Obama while most graduates and faculty cheered. And although the House of Representatives amended its version of health care legislation along the lines the bishops wanted, the Senate adopted a watered-down "compromise" that may end up be in the final version of the bill signed by Obama.

Thus the point being made here isn't that the bishops won. The point is that they put up a serious fight, thereby perhaps reflecting growing awareness that, absent resistance from them, the Church's interests will only continue to take a beating. It's impossible to imagine their predecessors of the 1970s and 1980s doing as much, and the new developments underline the fact that the hierarchy today is greatly different in membership and mindset from the hierarchy of those days.

So do the words and actions in the past of a surprising number of individual bishops.

To mention three by way of example: Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, who roundly denounced The New York Times for overt anti-Catholicism; Archbishop-designate Jerome ListECKI of Milwaukee, who told a group calling itself Young Catholics for Choice that by flouting Church teaching on contraception, abortion and sexuality they were "tragically distancing themselves" from the Church they claimed to belong to; and Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, who took on Rep. Patrick Kennedy — Ted Kennedy's son, no less — for trashing (and misrepresenting) the bishops on abortion and health care.

It's also worth noting that nearly 60 bishops and dioceses provided financial assistance (including \$50,000 each from Philadelphia and Phoenix) to the Diocese of Portland, Maine, for a successful campaign against same-sex marriage.

Perhaps significantly, all this has been happening with Cardinal Francis George of Chicago as president of USCCB. Cardinal George is a tough-minded intellectual who's not afraid to speak his mind publicly — as he did during the year past by criticizing Notre Dame for honoring Obama and by speaking out against health care abortion.

It remains to be seen what the impact on episcopal activism will be if, as seems probable, the bishops next November choose as successor to head USCCB a prelate who generally takes a softer line, more in the manner of the bishops of the '70s and '80s.

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