

Oh, come now! You mean to tell me that:

- The right-wing media lackeys of the corporate establishment supported Bush's fiscal irresponsibility while he squandered the Clinton budgetary cushion with tax breaks to his corporate cronies, and he obliterated any kind of market regulation, but they are going to blame the present administration for the state the economy and the financial markets are in?
- Bush is going to be recognized as a hero of the pro-life movement (having personally presided over numerous executions in Texas, a war he lied us into, his support for unlimited access to guns and his lack of achievement in substantially reducing the number of abortions in this country during his term in office) while the present administration will have only nine months to prove its pro-life bona fides?
- We will allow Bush to brag about how far a C student can get in the world, but we won't let this president speak to our children about the importance of being responsible scholars?
- We will make allowances for a Republican congressman for calling a Democratic president a liar from the floor of the House, but we will go ballistic when a general is accused of "betraying" us and we will fail to indict the liars that drove us into war with Iraq in the first place?
- We will condemn this president for daring to invite Americans to celebrate the anniversary of 9/11 as a day of service (in recognition of those brave men and women who served others as first responders on 9/11), but we will honor those who allowed it to happen on their watch?
- Health care reform is fascism, but extraordinary rendition is not?

Admit it. Anything this president does is suspect from the start. Maureen Dowd offers one possible explanation for this disdain in today's *New York Times*.

Boy, Oh, Boy

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... Surrounded by middle-aged white guys — a sepia snapshot of the days when such pols ran Washington like their own men's club — Joe Wilson yelled "You lie!" at a president who didn't.

But, fair or not, what I heard was an unspoken word in the air: You lie, boy! The outburst was unexpected from a milquetoast Republican backbencher from South Carolina who had attracted little media attention. Now it has made him an overnight right-wing hero, inspiring "You lie!" bumper stickers and T-shirts.

The congressman, we learned, belonged to the Sons of Confederate Veterans, led a 2000 campaign to keep the Confederate flag waving above South Carolina's state Capitol and denounced as a "smear" the true claim of a black woman that she was the daughter of Strom Thurmond, the '48 segregationist candidate for president. Wilson clearly did not like being lectured and even rebuked by the brainy black president presiding over the majestic chamber.

I've been loath to admit that the shrieking lunacy of the summer — the frantic efforts to paint our first black president as the Other, a foreigner, socialist, fascist, Marxist, racist,

Commie, Nazi; a cad who would snuff old people; a snake who would indoctrinate kids — had much to do with race.

I tended to agree with some Obama advisers that Democratic presidents typically have provoked a frothing response from paranoids — from Father Coughlin against F.D.R. to Joe McCarthy against Truman to the John Birchers against J.F.K. and the vast right-wing conspiracy against Bill Clinton.

But Wilson's shocking disrespect for the office of the president — no Democrat ever shouted "liar" at W. when he was hawkng a fake case for war in Iraq — convinced me: Some people just can't believe a black man is president and will never accept it. ...

For the full article, you can go to:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13dowd.html?_r=1

Religion: New approach to molding future priests

Eric Gorski, Associated Press

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The seminarians' wallets are empty, except for driver's licenses and insurance cards. To buy cigarettes or clothes or anything else, they must ask their superiors for money - an exercise in obedience and a reminder that material things aren't important.

They have virtually no time alone, on or off campus, and are required to travel in pairs, "two by two," like Jesus' disciples. They live in a world without cell phones or personal computers, and their evenings end promptly at 10.

No Roman Catholic seminary is a resort. But few men who study for the priesthood endure the sort of rules that govern life at the Redemptoris Mater House of Formation. Redemptoris Mater is a new experiment in molding Catholic priests who are faithful to church teaching and authority and zealous in their desire to lead other Catholics down that same road.

On the one hand, the rules are a throwback to 50 years ago, when would-be priests led regimented existences apart from the rest of the world. But Redemptoris Mater men also teach the faith at parishes and spend two years on mission trips, knocking on doors looking for Catholics in Bronx housing projects or Minneapolis suburbs.

... The Way, an international movement largely run by Catholic laypeople, is controversial; some critics say it is separatist and causes division in parishes, though its defenders deny it.

The group's approach to discipline at the seminaries it operates in the United States (besides Denver, Redemptoris Mater seminaries have opened in Boston; Dallas; Newark, N.J.; and Washington, D.C.) has attracted notice in important places.

When a Vatican office summarized a 2005-06 study of U.S. seminaries seeking answers to the clergy sex abuse scandal, it recommended that seminaries make their rules more

demanding so men shed a "worldly style of life" - and it suggested that Redemptoris Mater seminaries were examples worth following.

The Redemptoris Mater House of Formation sits in a leafy residential neighborhood in southeast Denver, on a Spanish mission-style campus called the John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization. The campus is also home to a larger seminary - St. John Vianney, or SJV - which trains men mostly from Colorado and the Midwest for the Denver archdiocese.

Seminarians from the two institutions receive the same education in the same classes, grounded in reverence for traditional Catholic teaching. Neither is an institution for questioning the church on contraception or the merits of the celibate, male-only priesthood.

But SJV mirrors contemporary seminary life. The men take notes on laptops, carry BlackBerries, live in single rooms, gather for TV watching in a common room, maintain their own blogs and spread news about snow-canceled classes on Facebook. Basically, that's the rule when it comes to contemporary Catholic seminary life in the United States.

The men of Redemptoris Mater - the name is Latin for "Mother of the Redeemer" - take notes on steno pads, must seek permission before hanging anything on their residence hall walls and share everything, down to a single e-mail address on a second-floor computer.

... Most U.S. seminaries loosened their rules after the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, which brought a shift in how the Catholic Church perceived its place in the world, says the Rev. Donald Cozzens, writer in residence and adjunct professor of theology at John Carroll University in Cleveland.

"Before, secular life was looked at with great suspicion," says Cozzens, a former seminary rector. "With the Second Vatican Council, the world is God's creation. So our task then was to train seminarians to be in the world, to know it, but not to be of it any profound secular sense."

Some Catholics, particularly conservatives, believe vocations to the priesthood dropped drastically post-Vatican II, in part because seminaries allowed too much freedom, resulting in dissent and short-lived vocations. Others point to societal changes, including much smaller Catholic families that shrink the candidate pool.

The reasons for decline may be in dispute, but the numbers are not: The number of priests in the United States has dropped from 58,000, in 1965, to 40,000 today. The past decade has seen an uptick in ordinations; this year's class is 472, up from 442 in 2000. But it's still not enough to replenish the priesthood's aging ranks.

Colautti, the Redemptoris Mater vice rector, says the seminary's prohibitions on television, the off-campus buddy system and other rules are meant to foster communion, or togetherness - especially at an international seminary, where structure provides safe harbor for new arrivals, many of whom come from poor countries and suffer culture shock.

"Some people will say, 'You protect them too much,' " says Colautti, who is from Argentina.

"It's important to have a time in your life in which you experience that it's possible to live without TV, that you don't need the Internet. It's possible to overcome temptation, to have a celibate life, a chaste life. The society presents you these things as impossible. So if they're impossible, you don't even fight it, you say, 'What the heck?' The culture is always pressing, pressing."

Some seminarians, ... follow a twisting path to the priesthood. Others seem preordained.

Toledo, ... started dressing like a priest for Halloween when he was 3, growing up in Bridgeport, Conn. He pretended to say Mass at a desk in his room.

Why the priesthood?

"It's really hard to answer," Toledo says. "There is no one reason. When God calls, you know, why not? I'm definitely not in it for the money or because I want to become a bishop. I'm not in it for the popularity because it's not always popular to be a priest. The 'why' is that people are suffering. People need the church, the sacraments. People need to be baptized. The sick need to be visited. There is a need."

For Toledo, that call means teaching people that the faith is not just a matter of attending Mass each week; it means living Catholic tenets on a daily basis.

"The world needs Christians," he says. "The world doesn't need half-baked Catholics. It's got plenty of those."

The rules and structure at Redemptoris Mater become as familiar as the motions of Mass. On a weekday last spring, Toledo was in charge of a team of seminarians assigned to kitchen duty. What most would view as a tedious chore is considered another step toward the priesthood, a lesson in humility and service.

When lunch was over, a seminarian stood to announce that he had a dentist appointment.

"Find someone to go with you," advised the rector, the Rev. Florian Martin-Calama. Cozzens says a rule-bound atmosphere doesn't always breed maturity.

"There's a subtle message of 'We don't trust you,' " he said. "Especially now, seminarians are older. You're relating to adult men like you might boarding school students."

But Redemptoris Mater seminaries aren't cloistered, either. When Cozzens studied for the priesthood, his main contact with the outside world was teaching at a Catholic elementary school one day a week.

Toledo, like the others, spent two years on missions. He was sent to Neocatechumenal Way communities in Gainesville, Ga., and the Minneapolis area. He knocked on doors seeking out Catholics, as the movement is premised on the belief that Catholics stop their religious education at an early age and need more.

Toledo befriended families at a suburban Denver parish, adhering to boundaries taught in seminary. When visiting a home, he'd play a game of Risk with the kids but wouldn't spend time alone with them. If a woman asked him to bless the family house, he would make sure her husband was home first.

On a Saturday morning in late May, Toledo gathered with classmates Garcia and Carlos Wilson Bello, a Colombian who had a career as a chemical engineer before he, too, heard the call.

The setting was the sacristy of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, the equivalent of backstage at the city's towering white Catholic symbol.

... Like children peering around a curtain waiting for their father to home from work, every few minutes the men walk over and peek through a narrow slit of a window at friends, family and seminarians taking their places in the front.

A few weeks earlier, the three men sat in the back of an empty classroom and chose the Gospel reading for this, their ordination Mass.

The unanimous pick was Matthew 9:35-38. It concludes with Jesus telling his disciples: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

It was a fitting choice. Thirteen years into the existence of Redemptoris Mater Denver, this bright morning would usher in the seminary's 11th, 12th and 13th priests, all bound for parishes in Colorado.

Midway through the Mass, the archbishop rested his hands on the men's heads and said a few words of prayer. And with that, these men of Redemptoris Mater were priests.

And this replicates the very seminary formation system that shaped the vast majority of those who were accused of abuse.

Thoughts? Ideas? Criticism? Articles you think others might like to read? Send them to tony@tonyercolano.com