

question is: Will we retain the concept of priesthood as *alter Christus* or settle for ministers?

Looking for something else to attack, something as yet unattacked, we found the great unassailed, at least by us, institution — the Church. The thing we used to swear by became the thing we swore at. A lay member of a seminary recently said, "The seminary is the last bulwark against a patriarchal, hierarchical Church." This is a peculiar description of a seminary. But it is not an altogether unjust description of some who teach in seminaries. Ideologies hostile to the Church have found their way into seminaries.

But the mood of the country is rapidly changing now. People are looking for moral stability. Read — and understand — the signs of the times! Catholics are unhappy with the vapid way their faith is presented in many parishes. Unlike the seminarian of the

late 1960s and early 1970s, today's seminarian is interested in the Church's traditions and what it was like before Vatican II. It is risky to predict the future, but of this much I am certain: Unless many of our seminaries undergo radical changes, they will find themselves unable to provide the path to a real and passionate Catholicism.

There is no need to be ashamed of our mistakes. It is human to err. But the one deadly error is denying that we have ever erred. If we fail in this, we have no future. Many of our seminaries must be rebuilt with Christ at their center. When Christ stood before the disciples in the upper room after the Resurrection, he said, "You are witnesses of these things. You will tell the story and you will tell it perhaps at a cost." There was no other plan. And no better plan has been found in this world grown weary with plans and meetings — and more meetings. ■

A SECULAR RELIGION WITHOUT HOPE

Philip E. Devine

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IS DOOMED

Political correctness (PC) began around 1968, when the American Left yielded to intense neotribalism. PC is also associated with cultural postmodernism and the philosophy of the despairing Enlightenment, according to which it is neither possible to draw sustenance from the past nor overcome its burden.

The Supreme Court contributed to PC in 1973, by its intervention in the abortion dispute, which set the stage for attempts to impose relativism on crucial issues. But it took some time for assaults on traditional conceptions of education to develop a militant

energy: It was in 1988 that Stanford trembled before the chant, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's gotta go." Only in the early 1990s did PC receive its name.

The power of PC in the contemporary academic and cultural world is easily exaggerated. Politically incorrect books and articles get published in distinguished places, and politically incorrect people hold named professorships at distinguished universities. But PC power is real enough, as nontenured academics will inform you, and its milder versions have great influence in places like *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, and the Clinton Administration. PC has also made inroads in the religious world, especially among liberal Protestants and Reform Jews, but to some extent even among Catholics.

Understanding PC requires understanding the social position of its adherents. Yes, one can make too much of the elite credentials of PC people: Pat

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Robertson, like President Clinton, has a law degree from Yale. But PC remains the outlook of those who consider themselves, and to some extent are considered by others, the most sophisticated element in American culture.

PC people are not only an elite, but an extraordinarily disconnected one. They are disconnected, first, from the larger society; second, from the past; and, third, from any hope for the future.

First, PC people hate and fear the majority of Americans. Racial minorities are of course accepted, but only so long as they play their assigned political part. Black people are allowed a greater license than white people — e.g., they are allowed to be moderately serious about their religious beliefs. But a black person whose views are outside the acceptable range will cause PC people to “go ballistic.”

Second, for people who presumably are well-educated, PC people are remarkably hostile to attempts to remedy the historical illiteracy of the rising generation. More importantly, they do not draw on any tradition of even moderate duration. Their intellectual forbears (and sometimes their earlier selves) drew upon a wide range of sources, ranging from Marxism to Social Gospel Protestantism, and including secular progressivism, *Rerum Novarum* Catholicism, and the teachings of the Hebrew prophets. But all of these sources are regarded, in PC circles, as hopelessly “phallogocentric.”

Third, PC people are disconnected from the future. The members of the PC world are more likely than the general population to be childless, though since many of them work in education this does not have as much importance as it would otherwise. More important than literal childlessness is their lack of a way of life that they might hope to transmit. Their position is one of negation: Down with Western culture! Down with Big Daddy in the Sky! But you can't raise your metaphorical children (i.e., your students) on negations, let alone your real children.

All of us live in a rapidly changing world which often seems increasingly difficult to understand. Few there be who propose to make adjustment to change any easier: Even professed conservatives enthusiastically support a capitalist economy whose most conspicuous feature is the promotion of technological change, and whose capacity to disrupt communities by destroying their economic base is well known. For these reasons, the PC constituency has an extraordi-

nary need for affirmation and conformity, for “clinging together against the dark,” in Richard Rorty's phrase — hence their obsession with “insensitivity.” Even the smallest details of life are subject to PC oversight: I know a PC person who objected to calling John Paul II the Pope, on the entirely fanciful ground that Coptic Christians, about whom he knew nothing, might object. Hence the most conspicuous feature of PC people: their fondness for denouncing (and shunning) real or supposed racists, sexists, and homophobes. All religions are to some degree intolerant, but for the PC the hurling of anathemas is a virtual sacrament.

The cultural and intellectual background of PC is a mixture of positivism, which denies cognitive meaning to moral and religious statements, and relativistic historicism, which confines their validity to some historical epoch. As for relativist historicism, PC people believe that the study of the humanities, including philosophy and religion, discovers nothing but contingent social constructions, ones that survive only so long as the tides of history do not destroy them. As early as 1931 the historian Carl Becker articulated the central contention of contemporary postmodernist historiography: There are no facts, only interpretations expressing the outlook of those proposing them.

The outlook and tenuous social situation of the politically correct have given rise to a new religion. It may be defined as militant relativism, sanctimonious and intolerant toward those who deviate from its requirements. Thus the leading PC theorist, Stanley Fish of Duke University, has frankly defended intolerance in both a book and an article, sharing the memorable title “There's No Such Thing as Free Speech...and It's a Good Thing, Too.” The PC above all condemn speech on grounds of “insensitivity”: It is necessary to protect the tender sensibilities of people whose symbolic universe is too delicate to withstand rough treatment.

PC may also be defined as a form of Manichaeism, in which life is defined as a struggle between the forces of good and evil, as discerned by the privileged insights of an enlightened minority. The PC devil is traditional religion and culture.

The three prime sins in the PC religion are racism, sexism, and homophobia, which, for the PC, represent the outlook of the unwashed multitude. Consider racism: Of course it's unjust to judge people by

the color of their skin; but if you're a relativist, sometimes it's not. In fact, the PC do judge people in racial terms: Maya Angelou was invited to speak at the Clinton Inauguration, not as a poet but as a Woman of Color.

The PC god, to whose glory PC people sacrifice the careers of their opponents, is Diversity, the metaphysical embodiment of difference as such. PC people claim to celebrate the endless variety of possible ways of being, but privileged status is reserved for those "marginalized" by traditional culture. The resulting

approach to politics is sometimes expressed in terms of a "Rainbow Coalition" of groups. But PC tolerance for diversity, like everyone else's, has limits: PC academics are not interested in hiring the graduates of, say, Oral Roberts University, though doing so would undoubtedly increase the diversity of most campuses.

While PC may seem to be a powerful religion impervious to reason, those who oppose it can be confident that time is on their side: A group with nothing but relativism to transmit cannot expect to survive from generation to generation. ■

WE FORGOT THE FUTURE & OUR CHILDREN

ZOE DEEN

THE TIME OF RECKONING FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Somewhere in the mid-1960s or early 1970s the women's movement in this country took a wrong turn. We women realized that the jobs traditionally held by men paid higher wages and were accorded higher status than the jobs traditionally held by women — and we quite rightly resented that fact. We were entering colleges in record numbers and having no greater difficulty with the required class work than our brothers and boyfriends. We decided that the solution to the problem of inequality between the sexes was to enter the male-dominated professions.

We could have demanded that the traditional work of women be accorded the respect it deserved, but much to our discredit we joined in denigrating the work of our mothers. We did not realize that helping a child steer a steady course through the tumult of childhood and adolescence to maturity is one of the most rewarding of endeavors. We did not see that building a bridge to span a river and rearing a child to

carry forward the work of civilization have much in common. We bought wholesale into a set of beliefs we should have fought when we set off to blaze our individual paths to glory — and left our children in the dust.

We did not realize that all the small incidents — the few minutes of comfort over a scraped knee, the repetitive disciplinary phrases that lead to a child internalizing acceptable modes of behavior, the answering of seemingly random questions — are part of a whole much larger than the parts. We did not understand how caring, educated, and healthy individuals are raised.

When we decided that the work traditionally accorded to women was less important than the jobs men held, we were operating on inadequate data. Men made money. Mothers did not. It seemed so simple. Money was the source of power and prestige. Control of money would lead to personal freedom, which would allow each of us to develop our own potential fully. We did not think of the children we would one day have. We did not consider the nurturing they would need to develop *their* potential.

Had we only looked at the dynamics of society, we would have seen that most men were not as free

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