

Death comes for the Archbishop

An Appreciation of James Cardinal Hickey

By Bishop Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., STD

The death of James Cardinal Hickey, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, DC is not only a great loss to the Catholic Church in the United States; it is a profound loss and source of deep sorrow for me personally. We have been close friends for over twenty-five years. For five of those years I was a member of his cabinet and met with him regularly. In time we became true friends.

I joined Bishop Hickey's Cleveland staff as Chancellor for Theological Affairs in 1978. I continued in that position as Special Assistant for Theological Affairs when Bishop Hickey was appointed Archbishop of the nation's capital. I remained a member of the Archbishop's staff until 1983 when, at the Archbishop's recommendation, I became Scholar in Residence at the North American College in Rome. In the years that followed we visited often and remained in close contact. When I became a Bishop the Cardinal gave me my crozier, which is ornamented with a griffin, the Hickey family symbol from his coat of arms.

As Chancellor for Theological Affairs I served as the Cardinal's Personal Theologian and assisted him in drafting homilies, pastoral letters, and official statements. I reviewed diocesan documents for theological consistency and I frequently met with him to discuss books and articles on theology. The Cardinal, who had an exceptional knowledge of Canon Law and Church History, particularly wanted me to call to his attention books that might become the topic of theological debate. (We read many different authors including St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Bede the Venerable, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas More, Raymond Brown, SS, Hans Urs Von Balthazar, Bernard Lonergan, SJ, David Tracy, James Cone, Umberto Eco, Alice Walker and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.) This appointment may have been the first time a Bishop in the United States had called upon a systematic theologian to assist him on a full time basis.

I have been deeply influenced by the Cardinal's genuine love for God, Jesus Christ, the Church, the priesthood, the Eucharist, Sacred Scripture, the people he served, and his deep loyalty to the Holy Father. Our late evening conversations about such topics as Ecumenism, Christology, Ecclesiology, (especially documents from the Holy See), Missiology, Mariology and the Second Vatican Council, where he was a *peritus*, over a bowl of *spaghetti alla carbonarra* (prepared by him "al dente" from his favorite recipe) were a unique encounter of Bishop and Theologian. No priest or bishop had a greater impact on my life and ministry than Cardinal Hickey has. He was among the dearest of the dear in my life.

I thank God for the privilege of being associated with the ministry of a Bishop who, in a quiet way, had such a profound influence in the Church in this country. I think especially of his consistent concern for the needs of those who are poor, sick, unemployed, oppressed, or discriminated against.

In 1979 when Bishop Joseph Francis, SVD, Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, NJ was seeking support for the draft of a proposed pastoral letter on racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," he came to then Bishop Hickey in Cleveland. In a lively discussion we considered two possible opening sentences, "Racism is a sin and a heresy which pervades our Church and our country" and "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church." Bishop Hickey reflected on them and commented that the words "sin" and "heresy" have strong theological overtones. But, he asked, might it be more effective if these more theological ideas came later in the text? He also wondered about the word "pervades." He did not question the truth of the statement. Yet, he thought a word like "endures" might convey the same meaning and win greater acceptance by the body of Bishops and the faithful. The final text which he enthusiastically supported begins "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church." The Cardinal was disappointed that the pastoral did not receive the amount of attention given to subsequent pastorals on the danger of nuclear arms and on poverty and economic justice. He used the letter effectively in Cleveland. He would be pleased to know that during our November meeting the Bishops will have a special commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of this landmark document.



James Cardinal Hickey
(Monday, October 11, 1920 - Sunday, October 24, 2004)

The joy of his 1980 promotion to Washington was somewhat muted by events in El Salvador where Cleveland priests and sisters served as missionaries. I recall his profound sorrow upon the assassination of his friend Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador on March 24 and his personal accounts of seeking shelter under the stands when gunshots were fired during Romero's outdoor funeral. Shortly after he left Cleveland for Washington, two Cleveland women missionaries Sr. Dorothy Kazel, OSU and Ms. Jean Donovan (along with Sr. Ita Ford, MM and Sr. Maura Clark, MM) were assaulted and murdered in El Salvador.

I watched his heartbreak when he heard these selfless women called "political activists" and I saw his frustration in the face of the half-hearted investigation of this heinous crime. He kept their pictures on the wall of his private chapel as a daily reminder. I doubt that a day passed when he did not pray for them.

Shortly after Archbishop Hickey's arrival in Washington, Fr. Richard McBrien's two-volume work, *Catholicism* stirred up a great deal of debate. Was it faithful to the magisterium? Was it suitable as a catechetical text? The Doctrine Committee of the Bishop's Conference was discussing it. Happily the Archbishop and I had already studied the work and discussed the problematic nature of some of its content and its methodology which could lead some readers to conclude that the speculations and critical theories of theologians had the same weight as the clear teachings of the Holy Father. When it became evident that the committee might reach strong critical conclusions about the popular work, I suggested to the Archbishop, who chaired the committee, that we inform Fr. McBrien of the committee's concerns about the work and invite him for an informal conversation about these concerns rather than simply publishing a statement of those concerns. While the dialogues that eventually followed did not resolve all concerns in a satisfactory manner (even in a revised edition), it did bring bishops and theologian into a conversation that made it easier for all to realize that, even in the face of irreconcilable differences, the bishops and the theologian loved the Church

and were acting in good faith.

Almost simultaneously new questions arose about the writings of Fr. Charles Curran, a Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America. Many of these questions, largely dealing with issues of human sexuality, and the ultimate departure of Fr. Curran from the faculty, are well known. But at the early stages of the dispute, I asked the Archbishop whether he had ever met Fr. Curran. When he said that he had not, I suggested that we have him for a meal and conversation that would not be part of any type of formal inquiry that might develop. The visit was arranged and the conversation was relaxed and gracious. Both men expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to have such an encounter. They were each able to recognize and respect genuine positive qualities in each other.

The dialogues between the Archbishop and Fr. McBrien and Fr. Curran did not lead to a reconciliation on substantive issues. But the Archbishop's openness to having these meetings was deeply appreciated. They made it easier for the participants to recognize more clearly the fact that the person with whom they had enormous differences about important matters of Catholic theology, doctrine, and discipline was still a fellow Christian and a fellow priest.

Cardinal Hickey enjoyed music very much, as I do. He favored the Classical symphonies of Mozart and I preferred the Romantic symphonies of Beethoven. One of the reasons for his preference was that it was easier to listen to Mozart while reading. He did not have a great knowledge of or interest in popular music. But he was certainly aware of the Beatles and their enormous impact on popular culture. When John Lennon was assassinated on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1980, he was very aware of the impact of his death on young people. We spoke of two of his songs with which he was familiar. He was puzzled by the lyrics of "Imagine" ("Imagine there's no heaven, no religion too.") But he was taken by the lyrics of "All You Need is Love." He observed that if admirers of the Beatles could flesh that idea out and realize that all you need is love of God, love of neighbor, love for people of different races, love for human life in the womb, and the elderly in nursing homes, that would be a powerful force for good.

One evening in Washington I took him to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts for an encore performance of Leonard Bernstein's "Mass" - a theater piece for singers, players, and dancers, composed for the dedication of the Center. Since he was not familiar with the work I explained that it was not a traditional setting of the Mass in the manner of Bach or Mozart. It is a contemporary questioning, dialogical work dramatizing a secular world attempting to discern the meaning of this most sacred of rites. He did not think it was a completely successful work ("too many kinds of music, too much going on onstage"). However, he found one of the opening sections very moving. "Sing God a simple song. Lauda, Laude. Sing like you like to sing. God loves all simple things. For God is the simplest of all."

The last time I visited the Cardinal, in the gracious care of the Little Sisters of the Poor, was only a few weeks ago. I knew that I probably would never see him again. I blessed him and thanked him for all he had given me and the Church. Though he no longer recognized me, I knew he recognized God, perhaps more clearly than ever, "for God is the simplest of all." I was not surprised when Msgr. Barry Knestout, his faithful secretary, called me Saturday night and said that dear James Aloysius (as we affectionately called him) had pneumonia and would not be with us much longer. As I prayed for him in my chapel, I thought of the simple white and blue chasuble and miter (in honor of the Mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom he was devoted) that he wore on the day he was ordained a Bishop, April 14, 1967. He wore it when he was installed as Bishop of Cleveland. He wore it when he was installed as Archbishop of Washington. He will be buried in it and wear it into eternity to greet the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he loved so much and served so well.

"Now cracks a noble heart.
Good night sweet Prince.
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

(Hamlet, Act V, Scene II)

Third Sunday of Advent

When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way



before you.' Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John

the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:2-11

World Day For Consecrated Life set

WASHINGTON — The U.S. celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life will be held Sunday, Feb. 6, across the nation.

The Vatican-sponsored event is marked on Feb. 2 in Rome. Pope John Paul II instituted this annual event in 1997.

Aiding in events of the day is The National Coalition for Church Vocations, a

partnership of the: National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, National Religious Vocation Conference, J. S. Paluch Company, Inc., Priests of the Sacred Heart, Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus, USA Council of Serra International.

It exists for the purpose of promoting Catholic Church vocations.

Catholics' public life can't be split from Faith, warns Pope

VATICAN CITY - While acknowledging the "legitimate separation of church and state," John Paul II says there should be no division between the faith of Catholics and their professional, political and cultural life.

The Pope explained this when receiving a group of U.S. bishops from the ecclesiastical provinces of Louisville, Mobile and New Orleans, including the Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Lake Charles during the bishops' ad limina visit to Rome.

The Holy Father said that "each bishop is called to acknowledge the essential and irreplaceable role of the laity in the Church's mission and to enable them to carry out their proper apostolate."

Catholics in social and public life must be "encouraged to combine the two harmoniously, recognizing that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by their Christian conscience, since there is no human activity — even of the temporal order — that can be withdrawn from God's dominion," he said.

"A clear and authoritative affirmation of these fundamental principles of the lay apostolate will help to overcome the serious pastoral

problems created by a growing failure to understand the Church's binding obligation to remind the faithful of their duty in conscience to act in accordance with her authoritative teaching," John Paul II continued.

"There is urgent need for a comprehensive catechesis on the lay apostolate which will necessarily highlight the importance of a properly formed conscience, the intrinsic relationship between freedom and moral truth, and the grave duty incumbent upon each Christian to work to renew and perfect

the temporal order in accordance with the values of God's Kingdom," the Pope indicated.

"While fully respecting the legitimate separation of church and state in

American life, such a catechesis must also make clear that for the faithful Christian there can be no separation between the faith which is to be believed and put into practice and a commitment to full and responsible participation in professional, political and cultural life," he added.

Advent reflection with Bishop Braxton Dec. 19

LAKE CHARLES — The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton will offer an informal Advent reflection on the Scripture readings of the season from 2 to 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, December 19, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

The gathering will allow

those who participate with the opportunity to learn more about the Bible and to discuss questions they may have about the Church and the Catholic Faith with Bishop Braxton.

Everyone is invited to attend and participate, Catholics as well as members of other faith traditions.

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