

lationship. No: I mention Weakland because of an article he wrote (before his fall) in *Commonweal*, in which he acknowledged that “the Second Vatican Council’s reforms have been implemented with mixed results,” and attacked a group he identified as “restorationists”—those who want to restore what has been lost, rather than rework what is new and has been found wanting.

Unfortunately for his argument, the very publication of his article is evidence that the reforms he would improve upon are beyond hope. Every few months—sometimes more often—the English Catholic press is filled with letters to the editor from people parroting half-digested paragraphs from the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Some will quote lines that can only reasonably be construed as requiring the preservation of the ancient language, rites, and practices of the Church; others, equally convincingly, cite texts that call for the introduction of the vernacular and liturgical change. Such fruitless correspondences invariably include a censorious, self-important and heavy-handed put-down of those daring to express discontent at the *status quo* by the likes of Bishop Hugh Lindsay, whose observations in the March 16, 2001, issue of *The Tablet* are made with “my sharply observant bishop’s eye.” (Sharply observant? *My eye!* If his eye were even half as sharp as his tongue, that would really be something to brag about.) These tedious and iterative arguments 40 years after Vatican II simply wouldn’t be happening if the reform had even halfway worked.

One of Weakland’s principle points is that “restorationists” have effectively disqualified themselves from contributing to liturgical progress because they reject contemporary culture and art, which he believes capable of sustaining the transcendent. For good measure, he attributes to the “restorationist” movement a selective appreciation of the common artistic and cultural inheritance: He mocks them for forgetting that Mozart was influenced by the Enlightenment (though he fails to score the obvious Freemasonry point) and for having a “pick-and-choose” approach to the past. (“Seldom do they speak of Renaissance religious paintings or the saccharin devotional compositions of the French Romantics.”)

In nearly 30 years of association with various aspects of what might be called the “Catholic traditionalist movement,” I

have never encountered anyone corresponding to this type. Had I done so, I would have not found much sympathy with them: They might be almost as boorish as Weakland himself. He appears to know as little about people as he knows about culture—contemporary or otherwise. I have, however, met many folks who have remained doggedly devoted to the Mass of their forefathers, for any number of combinations of reasons. I have met those who cling to a simple, penny-catechism understanding of their faith and find that contemporary liturgy fails adequately to express it. I have met others whose devotion to the old Mass is motivated by aesthetics. I have met intelligent and cultivated people who would laugh to scorn the naive and simplistic value judgments implicit in Archbishop Weakland’s arguments, take issue with his lightweight reference to Renaissance painting, and point out that one of the most universally admired and uplifting requiem Masses was written by a French romantic, Gabriel Fauré, who was hardly an exemplary Catholic. I have known devotees of traditional liturgy who are tone deaf, who have written music for it, who follow football (the definitive European contemporary subculture) or who write devotional or secular poetry. I have met lovers of the old liturgy who I guess might be bad, and people I can more confidently say are like saints. I have met those for whom attendance at the old Latin low Mass first thing in the morning, muttered or mumbled in the half-light, is the highest of spiritual experiences. (I agree with them.) And I have met some thoroughly decent folk who are quite fond of the contemporary liturgy they have encountered, and even more, just as decent, who are indifferent.

My trip through France took me to many more churches, but any prayers that I said in them were private. In a wood miles from anywhere in the Limousin, I came across a tiny Norman chapel that resembled a barn. Sunlight leaked through the imperfect roof, and there were feathers and bird mess on the floor, but a vase of fresh flowers stood before the altar, which had been left in its original place. I had Limoges Cathedral almost to myself, and I lit a candle to the Virgin before wandering about to admire it. In the middle of the nave, I saw a young man of about 25, carefully reading a sign describing the building’s history. He looked Middle Eastern; poorly dressed, he had his hands in his pockets,

and wore a tight-fitting woolen hat on his head. I dismissed an uncharitable judgment that began to form in my mind, avoided his eye, and carried on my visit. Later, while I was admiring the stained glass in the apse, I sensed that somebody was standing beside me. It was the young man. I thought he was going to ask me for money—or even, perhaps, to demand it. But he didn’t. He just wanted to share his exultation at the inexpressible beauty of the building. After we had spoken a little, he took me by the arm and led me to a handsome tomb from which the detail had been hacked by revolutionary zealots in the past. “How could anyone destroy something so beautiful?” he asked. And there were tears in his eyes as he spoke.

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Letter From the Countryside

by Mary Berry Smith

Educating for Jeopardy



In 1986, I enrolled my oldest daughter in the same public school that my husband and I had attended. I knew from my experience in public education that there were problems, but I was hopeful that, with our participation in her schooling, she would be fine. During the next few years, I went from being an interested, excited parent and taxpayer to a disillusioned and, finally, angry parent and taxpayer.

Our daughter, Katie, went all the way through public school and is now a sophomore in a small, independent liberal-arts college, finally out of the system. Our second daughter, Virginia, is 16. She finished the second grade in public school and is now homeschooled. Tanya, who is 11, has never attended public school. The idea of, and faith in, public education is hard to give up, but we’ve come to the conclusion that there is no choice for us but to get out.

How long can a failed bureaucracy continue? It is clear to me that the educational system in Kentucky exists to serve itself and the marketplace. And, be-

cause our educational system has become so heavily vocational, it now serves corporations by supplying them with workers. Our public-education system has become as dishonest as our land-grant universities, by serving the people they are mandated to serve last—or not at all. Because, I suppose, we need some kind of public education, I know that, in challenging the only existing system, I should be able to provide some answers that I can't provide. The questions must be asked, however, or this appalling situation won't change.

Besides my experience with my own children, I have tutored public-school students for 20 years in my home, kids who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, some by doctors and some by the school system itself. (The fact that nearly all of these children are being medicated to improve their performance is a problem to be addressed another time.) I also work with kids whose parents think they need some kind of "enrichment." Except for a couple in high school, all of my students make A's and B's. Most of these children are interesting and lively until they start on their schoolwork. Then, they disappear and a completely passive child takes the place of the interesting one. They simply wait for the "answer" to be handed over. Most of them have learned that there is a system and that they can beat it by waiting. I have made it a habit in the last few years to ask each child what he studied that day. I have yet to get a specific answer from one child. Lest it be thought that these children are trying to be difficult, let me make it clear that these kids want to please and long to know the answers to my questions. They simply don't know what they studied that day! They don't have the vocabulary to tell me.

A great fraud is being perpetrated on them. Most of my students come to me with notes from their teachers instructing the parents to ask them about Paris, or Indians, or bears, or whatever the tidbit of the day was. And so I, and I suppose the parents, ask them. Even with this much prompting, I have yet to get a real answer involving nouns, and I have yet to see a note saying, "Wait a minute, back up, let's go over that again." This is why these kids are learning nothing while making A's and B's. No one expects them to learn anything. Of course, that list of things I used as examples of subjects studied illustrates one of the biggest problems in our educational system. Our kids are

introduced to a little of this and then a little of that, as if their goal in life is to be a *Jeopardy* contestant.

Perhaps the most puzzling part of this mess is the amount of time the schools spend every day teaching hygiene and what they call "life skills." (Reading, writing, and arithmetic are evidently not life skills.) When she was in the second grade, my daughter Virginia had two weeks of study on how to brush her teeth. Tolstoy didn't use as many pieces of paper writing *War and Peace* as our state government did on "How to Brush Your Teeth" handouts. (They are still handed out.) The ultimate irony is that, as soon as these kids reach junior high and high school, they will have nearly unlimited access to soft drinks in the school building. They will be encouraged to replace milk and water with these drinks by the same system that worked so hard to ensure their dental health in elementary school.

One of my students is an intelligent 11-year-old boy, the son of a third-generation dairy farmer here in Henry County. He wants to be the fourth to farm his family's place. He is one of those students who can't tell me what he's done in school that day when he comes to my house afterward. After several years of tutoring, he can, however, write an excellent paragraph about how to raise a buck-et calf, or rake a field of hay, or prepare a calf to show at the state fair. This great kid gets in trouble about once a week—but only when he and his buddies are in the "How to get along with others" class. They are *bored* in this class, and so, in the grand tradition of little boys, they act up. Why shouldn't they? This boy has a great family and cultural life. He needs to know how to read well, to use mathematics, to understand the science of how things work, and he needs to know where

he is. What he needs to know to be a good farmer is, by any standard I honor, a great education. This, of course, would never occur to the powers-that-be who run our state school system. This boy doesn't need hours wasted learning how to be nice to other people based on some *Sesame Street* idea of political correctness.

I mentioned earlier that raising these kinds of questions requires at least attempting to find answers, and while I see no good answers for a huge, failing public-school system, I have found an answer for my children. Two days a week, my daughters attend a cottage school in Louisville called the Highlands Latin School. Cottage schools are little schools put together to support homeschooling families. The Highlands Latin School was founded by an amazing woman named Cheryl Lowe, a former public-school chemistry teacher. Mrs. Lowe is a self-taught Latin scholar, a writer of Latin textbooks, and one of the most inspiring teachers I've ever seen. Besides Latin, our school offers logic, classical history, mathematics, English, literature, and, this past semester, a course for high-schoolers on three of Shakespeare's plays. This school does what schools are intended to do: It puts students together with teachers who have mastered a discipline. As Mrs. Lowe says, "You can't solve all the problems first; you simply must start somewhere."

Americans are uncomfortable with the idea of a saving remnant, but I am afraid that is what we've come to. We must be true conservatives who conserve what is worth saving—starting with our children.

Mary Berry Smith and her family raise cattle, chickens, organic vegetables, tobacco, and grapes on their farm in New Castle, Kentucky.

LIBERAL ARTS

COMPLEX DISCRIMINATION EMANATIONS

"I hate crimes continue to ravage human landscape [*sic*] in multiple ways. Prejudice and discrimination emanating from many forms of stereotype is a frequent reality.

"Notwithstanding, it is self-evident that humans are born impressionable and full of love. The bigoted identities that many display are often products of persistent societal conditioning. Thus, it is paramount to examine the complex process of transforming innately loving beings into perpetrators of social injustices against fellow humans. . . .

"Humans have the same amount of melanin. Climactic adaptation, however, dictates the amount of melanin contained on the surface and consequently, skin color. . . .

"John Kambutu, Ph.D. . . . uses multicultural research and personal passion to educate and inspire his audience in workshops and keynote speeches."

—from the April 27, 2002, issue of the Caspar (WY) Star-Tribune

by Srdja Trifkovic

Transatlantic Rifts

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, Europe was closer to America, politically and emotionally, than at any time since World War II. For a moment, the threat of Islamic terrorism had rekindled a dormant awareness on both sides of the Atlantic of just how much the Old Continent and the New World have in common. Only seven months later, however, as President Bush completed his four-nation European tour, transatlantic relations were more strained than at any time since the Cold War. The editorialist for the conservative German daily *Saarbruecker Zeitung* summed it up on May 23 by noting that, since the fall of the Wall, “the United States became more American, and Europe more European: differences of opinion came into the foreground that had always existed but have never played a prominent role.”

While a few thousand leftist demonstrators chanting abuse from the curbs of Berlin and Paris could be dismissed as irrelevant and unrepresentative, the sense of disenchantment with Washington felt by the members of Europe’s political and economic mainstream—including America’s friends and reliable fellow Cold Warriors of yore—cannot be disregarded.

U.S. Middle East policy, because of its pro-Israeli bias, is perceived throughout Europe as a hindrance to the quest for peace. President Bush’s unwillingness or, worse still, inability to put any real pressure on Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon is seen in European capitals as puzzling and counterproductive. According to Bronwen Maddox, the foreign affairs editor of the *Times* of London, such views prompt some Americans to respond by accusing Europe of being anti-semitic. Jonathan Steele noted in the *Guardian* (“New York is starting to feel like Brezhnev’s Moscow,” May 16) that the debate on such issues in America suffers from “a stifling conformity which muzzles public discourse on US foreign policy, the war on terrorism and Israel”:

“If people knew I held these views, I wouldn’t be able to stay in this job,” an old college friend confided as I passed through the city for a few days last week . . . His subver-

sive views on the Middle East, if uttered in Europe, would raise no eyebrows: Ariel Sharon has no vision or strategy; his tactics on the West Bank are counter-productive; the American media are failing to report adequately on the suffering of innocent Palestinians in cities ransacked by Israeli troops . . . Listening to these anguished but private complaints suddenly reminded me of the Soviet Union of the Brezhnev era when lower-level officials, journalists and other fringe members of the regime sat around their kitchen tables, expressing their true views only to family and close friends . . . To enforce this abandonment of reasoned argument in the name of a witch-hunt against terrorists, a strange alliance of evangelical Christians in Congress has come together with the leaders of American Jewish organizations who normally support the Democratic party . . . To judge from the east coast today, the middle-aged liberal intelligentsia is letting itself be intimidated into taking the wrong side.

In France, *Les Echos* commented that “Europe regrets that America’s pressure on Israel is not more forceful,” while *Le Figaro* noted that, “in the U.S., any criticism of Ariel Sharon is immediately equated with anti-Semitism.”

Regarding Iraq, America’s friends and allies—including the ever-pliant Tony Blair—simply do not agree that Saddam Hussein is a threat to the rest of the world. As Jean-Jacques Mevel pointed out in *Le Figaro* on May 24, European leaders remain “equally unconvinced about President Bush’s tie-in between the ‘axis of evil’ and the September 11 attacks.” Italy’s *Corriere della Sera* resentfully opined on May 23 that “the apostle of the war on terrorism is dumping on Europe America’s fears and his desire to attack Iraq.”

Some Europeans suspected—but did not say publicly—that the zeal in Washington for the random broadening of the “war against terrorism” beyond the verifiable culprits for September 11 has more



to do with America’s “passionate attachment” in the Middle East than with a sober assessment of Western security and political interests. Robert Fisk, writing in the *Independent* on May 25, was one of the few commentators to say so openly:

So now Osama bin Laden is Hitler. And Saddam Hussein is Hitler. And George Bush is fighting the Nazis. Not since Menachem Begin fantasised to President Reagan that he felt he was attacking Hitler in Berlin . . . have we had to listen to claptrap like this. But the fact that we Europeans had to do so in the Bundestag—and, for the most part, in respectful silence—was extraordinary . . . “He’s a dictator who gassed his own people,” Mr Bush reminded us for the two thousandth time, omitting as always to mention that the Kurds whom Saddam viciously gassed were fighting for Iran and that the United States, at the time, was on Saddam’s side . . . In the United States, the Bush administration is busy terrorising Americans. There will be nuclear attacks, bombs in high-rise apartment blocks, on the Brooklyn bridge, men with exploding belts—note how carefully the ruthless Palestinian war against Israeli colonisation of the West Bank is being strapped to America’s ever weirder “war on terror”—and yet more aircraft suiciders. If you read the words of President Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney and the ridiculous national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice . . . you’ll find they’ve issued more threats against Americans than Mr bin Laden.

But the key point, according to Fisk, is