

Bishop Sullivan's Opponents Are Getting Desperate

By FRANK MORRISS

The quality, as well as the state of insecurity, of the opposition to Bishop Joseph Sullivan of Baton Rouge is shown in a sophomoric attempt at satire. Circulated to all priests in the Diocese is a sheet called "The Catholic Uncommontator" (translate *Commentator*, the diocesan paper), described as "a local edition of the Wandering" (translate *Wanderer*).

The juvenile quality of the "humor" in the sheet would indicate youngsters had produced it. But there are terms and references indicating that clergy or those knowledgeable of Church terminology were involved (e.g., "celebrets"). No sense of discretion or prudence likely dictated the anonymity of the producers of the sheet — the juvenile quality of its "humor" would move adults not to care to be associated with it. (E.g., "Bishop Sullen's" coat of arms has a dunce cap and the motto "Obedience, Not Intelligence.")

Though the idea is that this sheet is by Bishop Sullivan and his minions, it clearly reflects the contempt of its authors for things ranging from Eucharistic piety to episcopal authority. Since the Daughters of St. Paul who conduct the diocesan bookstore come in for considerable "fun" (as "Madames of St. Fall,") for overstocking on portraits of Pope John Paul I, and Bishop Sullivan's orders for respect for the Blessed Sacrament are ridiculed ("Bishop Sullen" provides a fifth chapel of the Most Blessed Sacrament in the diocesan center), it can also be concluded that the "fun" poked at Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans is the true opinion of these "humorists."

Archbishop Hannan comes out as "Pontius Cannon" who obtained secret evidence despite efforts of "Bishop Sullen's" aides. A recommended "book" is *From Pontius Pilate to Cardinal Archbishop*. Though the reference is to one loyalist priest's alleged reference to the Archbishop as Pilate, there seems to be

something Freudian in its use. I can't help wondering if the authors of the sheet aren't really worried inside about the Metropolitan Archbishop, who evidently was relied upon to prevent the termination of the Claretian services at the diocesan student chapel at Louisiana State University.

Another target of the sheet's "humor," is Tom Barbarie ("Tomes Barbarian"). The "humorists" don't spare his family, which is referred to as "expanding." The Barbaries are expecting their fourth child. A cheap shot, at best!

The sheet implies economic chaos in the Diocese, though the figures show differently. A headline reads, "Diocese in Excellent Financial Shape in Spite of Bankruptcies."

Never does the humor get above the level of that a class of high school freshmen or sophomores might attempt. Catholic "Daughters-in-law" have as a monthly project "crocheting Sacred Head Badges and armbands for the African missions;" "Msgr. Loadman, director of the Whole Childhoodlum Assoc." will take kindegarden (sic) students on a Holy Land tour; several references are made to the annual vacation taken in Hawaii by Bishop Sullivan (his only time off), etc., etc.

The satire may not reflect all who are in revolt against the Bishop. But it does indicate a subjective element involved — the distortions, outright untruths, bitterness, anti-clericalism, flippancy and general contempt for decency that confronts Church authority in the Diocese and that would afflict any bishop who was not utterly "permissive."

What is worse, however, is the pretense to love, benignity, openness that sustains the revolt in Baton Rouge. Though the opposition like to quote St. Paul, it does not take to heart his insistence on the qualities of charity, particularly that of not being puffed up.