



LEE PELLEGRINI

CATHOLIC CONTROVERSY

Technically, his professional address remains a cramped basement office at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. But psychologically, ever since the Vatican barred him from teaching last August because he differed with established church doctrine, theologian Charles Curran has been in a place that's even more distinctly Catholic: limbo. "I hope for the best and expect the worst," says Father Curran, who is planning to fight for reinstatement as a tenured professor in forthcoming hearings. In assorted intellectual forums, the Curran case has raised two questions that are inextricably bound: Can there be true academic freedom in an institution with strong ties to an authoritarian church? And, in the context of 1986, what is a Catholic university?



STEVE MORIARTY—NOTRE DAME UNIV.
Concerned: *Hesburgh*

George Bernard Shaw, with his usual acidity, supposedly declared that a Catholic university is "a contradiction in terms." Today the oxymoron is clearly inapposite. The 235 Catholic institutions of higher learning in the United States have undergone enormous, if uneven, changes since Vatican II. They're now marked by increasing independence from orthodoxy, heightening academic re-

No tremors:

Commencement at Boston College, whose ties to the church are less binding than Catholic University's

pute and the diversification of student bodies far beyond the immigrant youths most were founded to serve. Total enrollment is near 600,000, up 32 percent since 1970. Many of these schools have become more secular, and among their students the censure of Curran has provoked concern and debate.

It's awful what happened to Reverend Curran. I think the Catholic Church and the pope are old-fashioned, and this crackdown threatens our academic freedom.

—Boston College sophomore
Pamela Szufnarowski

I'm wondering why it took so many years . . . to finally stop Curran from teaching. It's pretty obvious that what he was teaching is not Catholic stuff.

—Catholic U. grad student Joe Konczal

What Curran taught was scarcely radical: that birth control can be necessary for responsible parenthood, that abortion can be justified to save the life of the mother, that divorce, premarital sex and homosexuality are not *always* immoral. But sexual morality, more than any other area, reveals the chasm between the teachings of Rome and the practices of the American Catholic majority. Pope John Paul II has vowed to quell doctrinal dissent wherever it surfaces—in the United States no less than in the Netherlands. "Obviously, it's broader than my case," says Curran.

Father Curran—"Charlie" to most students—is no stranger to controversy. In 1967 CU did not renew his contract. Students and faculty responded by boycotting classes, and the popular priest was rehired and promoted. This time Curran's situation has sparked national interest; supporters have collected 20,000 signatures in favor of keeping him on staff.

At the center of Georgetown University an unobtrusive cross rises high above the clock tower of the Healy building—focal point of the campus and seat of its Jesuit administration. In 1983, faced with a Catholic enrollment that dwindled as the school's popularity surged, the university provost proposed to the admissions director that applicants of the founding faith be given an edge. Two months later, after protests that such a policy was discriminatory, administrators dropped the idea. This year only 58 percent of Georgetown undergraduates are Catholic, and the university is probably best known for its academic achievements—and its