

Father Smith Goes to Washington:

An Interview With Robert F. Drinan

On Sunday afternoon, January 20, the eve of the opening of the second session of the 93rd Congress, our Washington contributing editor, Edward Glynn, S.J., sat down with Congressman Robert F. Drinan of the Massachusetts 4th Congressional District. Representative Drinan is also a Jesuit priest and well-known to AMERICA readers through the many articles he contributed over the years he served as our Boston correspondent—ED.

Father Drinan, you have now been in Congress for three years. Have you changed your mind at all about your role as a Congressman and about the things you hope to accomplish?

I think that the overwhelming impression that one has after even three years reflects the enormous difficulty of changing anything in the Congress. I knew that the Congress was slow, was generally behind the people. But it still is a depressing fact that the Congress seems never to move forward as it should, for example, in the area of civil liberties. In the area of wiretapping, eavesdropping and violations of the Fourth Amendment, everyone knows that we must protect privacy. Yet the Congress, despite my prodding and the prodding of other people involved in this area, seems not to make any progress at all.

Likewise, with regard to the gun control. It is almost self-evident that we need very firm, strong federal laws to control at least handguns. Yet the Congress is reluctant to move. The only reason to explain this is the

vociferous opposition of the National Rifle Association.

What have been some of the most unexpected aspects of your experience during these past three years?

I must say that despite all of the evil I knew was in the government, I never anticipated that after three years in the Congress I would come upon the most corrupt Administration in the history of the Republic, with unprecedented evil and secrecy and surveillance of civilians going on. I must say this was a surprise. I'm sure it's a surprise to all of the people in the nation. But, as my constituents and others tell me regularly, the presence of a person with a broad moral background in government is now more necessary than ever before.

What do you see ahead as some of the more important tasks now confronting Congress?

I think the essential one is to restore some credibility to government. In the January, 1974 recess, I think that all incumbents, Democrats and Republicans, understood with a new intensity the depths of the alienation of the ordinary person from the government. The people blame the energy crisis on the oil companies, on the Nixon Administration, on Congress or on all three. They have a right to be disillusioned, because pension reform, the increase in the minimum wage, greater benefits for social security recipients, a rational foreign policy and consumer protection are just some of the issues

on which the Congress has not in fact acted effectively.

In the light of your experience how would you respond to the classical question about conflict in a man who lives with his personal conscience and responds to the will of his constituency?

In the very first Congress of the United States, that precise question was discussed and decided. And the vote that was taken in that year by the representatives of the original 13 colonies held categorically that a member of Congress is expected to follow his own convictions and his conscience. He is by no means the rubber stamp of his constituency. It seems to me that this very principle is very clear. At the same time, since every member of Congress deals with complex questions, he must, as I do regularly, have a sophisticated questionnaire sent to all of his constituents. If one's constituents are overwhelmingly in favor of a particular proposition, the member of Congress has to think about it a second time.

At the same time, no one would suggest that the member of Congress should change his own convictions or his conscience. The short—very short—two-year term for members of Congress was placed in the Constitution by the Founding Fathers precisely for this reason: that a member of Congress was to follow what he felt was right for his country. If the constituents that he represented disagreed with this, they had the right of recall every two years.

Your experience as a Congressman is unique because of the fact that you are a priest. What have been some of the reactions—not only from your constituents but also from your peers in Congress—to the fact that you are a priest, now that they've grown accustomed to you?

I would say first of all that my being in Congress is not that unique. Some 97 Protestant ministers have been in Congress. Four members of the 435-member House of Representatives are now ministers of religion. I think this is merely an extension of what the Jesuits have sought to do, that we have

sought to enter and teach in the areas of education, business, trade unions and the halls of government where, for example, social welfare policies are ironed out. So that being in elected politics is really no different from what Jesuits have sought to do when they go on to some beachhead where moral principles are not clearly understood or followed.

In relation to this, some whose views differ as widely as, for example, a Cardinal John Krol and a Father Daniel Berrigan, have expressed the opinion that it is not a good thing for a priest to hold political office.

Without any particular reference to those two individuals, I think that some of the reaction that expresses misgivings about a priest in politics comes from the very profound and pervasive feeling that people have against politicians.

When people—a very few people now—raise that question with me, I sometimes ask them whether they would like to have their son in politics. Almost invariably, these people say that they do not want their children or their son to be a politician. It's understandable, I suppose, that they are turned off and alienated from politicians, but at the same time they are, I think, more and more resolving the apparent dilemma that a priest who is ordained, and to some extent separated from the world, should nonetheless be in the world.

I am inclined to think that all of the feeling about a priest being out of place in politics derives in the ultimate analysis from the concept that all politicians must compromise and must do something unworthy of a Christian.

Just following that up, I suspect that some of those people who wonder about the value of a priest in politics think that you lose some of your freedom and the possibility of exercising a prophetic role in the community as a priest.

Well, they may or may not say that. But frankly I have not found any antagonism or any opposition from priests or ministers or rabbis who give it any thought at all. In fact, I get

overwhelming support from clergymen and from nuns from all types of backgrounds. Sometimes the question is raised about a priest in politics because they happen to disagree with the particular priest in question.

A lot of people in my constituency were not opposed to the war in Vietnam as I was. They were sheepish about defending that war at any stage of it, and, as a result, they used the argument that a priest should not be involved in politics. They actually were resisting the prophetic role of the priest, or at least they were trying by some type of rationalization to disguise their failure to oppose the war.

You were one of the House leaders in the opposition to American involvement in the war in Southeast Asia. Have you received much objection to the fact—at least what some people would judge to be the fact—that you are also pro-Israel? Do you see your positions regarding Southeast Asia and the Middle East to be inconsistent?

I really don't think there is any contradiction or even any ambiguity. The intervention of the United States in South Vietnam was not merely illegal and unconstitutional from our point of view and from the viewpoint of domestic law, but it was also indefensible by reason of international law. We failed in the United States to observe the Geneva Accords. We did not want the reunion of South and North Vietnam. Through a long series of mistakes that are outlined in the Pentagon Papers the United States came to the position that it should intervene and protect this nation, or so-called nation, of South Vietnam, under the dictatorship of President Thieu.

On the other hand, since 1948, by an unspoken or unwritten treaty of friendship, the United States has sought to assist Israel. The right appellation for my position, however, is not pro-Israel, because that suggests some antagonism toward the Arabs, and I don't have that at all.

I think the present predicament indicates that we simply must induce the Soviet Union to leave the Middle East. If Russia and its satellites had not commenced to aid Egypt back in

1955 with sophisticated military hardware, I am inclined to think that the Arabs and Israelis would have come to some compromise settlement concerning the Palestinian refugees in the borders of Israel. But the intervention of Russia and the apparent start of the October, 1973 war by Russia itself in Syria and Egypt indicates that the United States is in a confrontation in the Middle East, not merely to preserve the territorial integrity of Israel, but also to prevent the domination of that entire area by the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, the United States will never be asked to supply men to Israel. Israel has said that on many occasions. All that the United States has been asked to do through the years is to allow Israel to purchase sophisticated military hardware in the United States by which it could be ready to resist its highly armed Arab neighbors who receive this hardware from Russia. Up until 1973, Israel had received only \$430 million by way of grant—in the 25 years of its existence—from the United States. The \$2.2-billion grant overwhelmingly passed by Congress in December of 1973 was the first substantial grant, and not sale, to Israel during these 25 years.

You are on one of the more important committees in Congress, the House Judiciary Committee. Your committee was handling the Agnew affair before the Vice President resigned. Your committee held the hearings on Congressman Gerald R. Ford when he was nominated to the Vice Presidency, and now the Judiciary Committee is charged with exploring the possible impeachment of President Nixon. Do you have any reflections on your work on that committee?

Before I get into the more visible issues that we handle, let me just briefly touch upon some of the less visible, but nonetheless very important, issues that my two subcommittees of the Judiciary Committee handle every single day.

We have, for example, the ever more important question of privacy. We were seeking to enact a law that would prevent the FBI and other law enforcement agencies from divulging the background of a particular indi-

vidual who may have been arrested but not convicted: Only 25 percent of all arrests eventuate in conviction. But right now the FBI collects and disseminates all types of information about the arrests of individuals by federal, state and local police officials. They divulge this information, not merely to law enforcement agencies, but also to the civil service commission and even to banks and to commercial outlets. This is obviously a gross violation of the privacy of the individuals and is something we have been asking the FBI directors to change, without success.

Similarly, this particular subcommittee is involved in specialized areas such as this: can we cut down on the number of three-judge federal courts? These three-judge federal courts have been enormously important in connection with the freedom movement and the civil rights movement. Without this type of tribunal, I feel quite certain that the gains in civil rights would never have come about. Right now, the federal courts are congested, and there is a very important proposal that we modify or even terminate most three-judge courts. Hearings have been conducted on that and further hearings will be scheduled. It is a very difficult issue to settle.

You introduced last July 31 a measure to impeach President Nixon. Do you have any comments on that now in light of subsequent events, and do you have any anticipation of what the future outcome will be?

After I filed that, I learned, not to my surprise, that not everyone agreed with that particular proposal. At the same time, they did not say that it was preposterous. They simply said that it was "premature." I took premature to mean that it was just a bit ahead of schedule, like a premature child. And it turned out that that appellation of premature was in fact prophetic.

I formulated that resolution, not on the Watergate scandals at all, but on the subversion of the Constitution that, in my judgment, was involved in such acts as the clandestine bombings of Cambodia. On April 30, 1970, the President told the nation that we were sending ground forces into Cambodia.

But at the same time, the President said categorically that this nation had respected the neutrality of Cambodia over the past five years. At the very time he said that, he knew that he personally, without the knowledge or consent of Congress, had authorized B-52's going over Cambodia and dropping hundreds of thousands of bombs over a period of 14 months. This escapade cost \$130 million, was done in violation of international law and without the consent of any appropriate agency in the United States. That, it seems to me, is the type of subversion of the Constitution that impeachment is designed to reach.

What do you anticipate will be the outcome of the committee's investigation of grounds for impeachment and the reaction to that in the House?

At this particular moment in time, I would predict that the odds are 50-50 in the House, and I would think that the chances are lower in the Senate, where a two-thirds vote would be required for conviction. At the same time, new revelations keep coming out, and the task of the Judiciary Committee is to piece together everything that has come out in the Watergate Senate proceedings, in the office of the Special Prosecutor, whatever may be subpoenaed from the White House and other agencies—to put all this together in a way that will give to us a list of impeachable offences. I think that with all the revelations that are emerging a case, a solid case, can in due course be made.

Right now you are, I believe, in the midst of writing a new book? What's its topic?

The title tentatively is *Congress and a Nation's Morality*. It may be that we'll have to alter that title to make it a bit more comprehensible. But, in essence, it tells the story of how a citizen's caucus came to me in January of 1970 and asked me to be their candidate for Congress. The story goes on to recount that I talked with all my religious and academic superiors and with my colleagues in and out of the Jesuit order. No one would discourage me from this particular invitation. As a result, I ran

and got elected. The story goes on to indicate some of the procedural hang-ups that Congress has by which tax reforms and other reforms are impeded.

I try to explain, as far as I can, how a Christian and a Jesuit ministry in the Congress of the United States is, at least at this time, in my judgment very worthwhile and very fruitful.

You came into politics with a background as a Jesuit, a priest and also an academic person. The last three years must have provided you with a great deal of experience that stimulated reflection on man, on society, on the possibilities of both, on democracy and the like. Would you care to mention some of these reflections?

The overwhelming impression that one has is that the American people, despite the fact that we are proud to be a democracy of the people, by the people and for the people, really don't want to participate, it seems, in American politics. Even the young people did not vote on the first occasion that they had the right to do so. In November, 1972, only 55 percent of all the people voted and only 45 percent of the age group 18-21 actually went to the polls.

There is no simple remedy to cure this profound repugnance—if you will—to political life that Americans have. All I can say is there has to be a vast program of explaining government to the people and inviting them, in inducing them—to participate. The moment that people participate in any significant way and numbers, everything changes. After the "Saturday Night Massacre," when Elliot Richardson resigned and Archibald Cox was fired, three million citizens wrote to their Congressmen. This was a deluge of protest never experienced before in the history of the Republic.

If the people only knew their power, they could rectify all the great injustices by which, right now, the American government, to an astonishing extent, is the protector of the large corporate interests. The people know that, and the people claim that they are voiceless and powerless. I want to show them that there is a way by which they can participate. I am the

living example of the fact that people do have power, that a group of amateurs, with no political machine, but just with the instincts to stop the war and change the American government, elected a person who had never run for office before.

Why do you think there is so little participation? What is the cause of the inertia?

Although everybody is to blame, I think that Catholics may be to blame in an especially significant way. Catholics have participated in the legal profession and in the medical profession on a par with non-Catholics in this country. For a time, they did not enter into academic life in the same proportion, but right now I would think that young Catholics seeking the Ph.D. or other terminal degrees and entering into academia are certainly equal to, if not superior to, their non-Catholic colleagues in this country.

Many Catholics have entered into political life. But I keep wondering where are the superior Catholic lawyers and Catholic professors and Catholic professional men and women. Why haven't they entered into political life? Why have they left this activity in most of the cities and states of America to less educated, less motivated, less respected Catholics.

This is a profound question for which I don't have the answer. All I know is that in greater Boston, in greater New York, in every major city of this country, there are highly educated, enormously respected Catholic professional men and women who will not go into politics because they think that this is beneath their dignity.

I think that this particular attitude is a disease that is causing the American government to lack the talents of these individuals, that erodes the motivation of younger people, that deserves—it seems to me—the intense inquiry that everyone should give to it. If we cannot efface that attitude, if we cannot induce the best possible people in America to enter into political life, then I'm afraid we are always going to have a mediocre government from which most of the people will be alienated. ■

MARY CATHERINE VUKMANIC

Church Life, Country Life

Waiting alone near the small country parsonage,
I felt the strength of rural faith rising around me

As the only woman, and the first Roman Catholic nun, enrolled in the graduate school of theology of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, back in the late 1960's, I was frequently invited to speak in Baptist churches. For me, the experience involved a growing understanding of different emphases in our ministries and a deepening appreciation of the strength of the rural Church. The experience has stood me in good stead now that I am again a "seminary sister" — though this time teaching in a Roman Catholic seminary, St. Mary's College, Kentucky.

My Baptist "preaching" assignments frequently entailed my taking my minister friend to Mass before his congregation's "sacred hour" of 11 a.m., since at that time Saturday evening Masses were not common, at least in the out-of-the-way rural areas where I went. These occasions were both an adventure and a cause of some apprehension, for I never knew beforehand what kind of liturgy I had to explain, or explain away, afterwards.

On one such occasion, my Baptist friend and I attended a "vocation Mass." Through the tedious sermon we heard all about the joys of celibate (i.e., for him, rectory) life delivered by a very unjoyous pastor. I began an *apologia pro homilia* but my friend interrupted. "Don't apologize, Sister," he said quietly. "There are a lot of our preachers that I wouldn't want you to hear either. But if he was going to talk on religious life, why didn't he have you do it?"

On a more fortuitous occasion, my minister friend and the celebrating Father Mike instantly clicked. With his

hair shoulder-length and his smile warm and ready, Father Mike practiced the hymns with his congregation before Mass, made a procession of one down the middle aisle and preached a sermon on Jesus Christ, center of our faith, that, as my Baptist friend whispered to me, "a lot of Protestants could stand to hear."

After Mass, Father Mike invited us to the rectory for coffee, or rather, to the rectory kitchen for coffee. "Typical," I thought as we entered through the back door: laundry piled on one of the kitchen chairs, groceries still unpacked on the table and instant coffee. Never mind! Father Mike and Preacher John instantly clicked. They were soon exchanging notes on ministry and service. I soon learned why the young priest was bubbling. The aged pastor had been hospitalized for several months now, and on the young assistant's shoulders was placed the "burden" of all the Masses, sick calls, school business (it was graduation week) and catechetics — he was loving it. For too long he had been an "unemployed" assistant answering the telephone. He's happy because he is needed, I thought, and heard my Baptist friend say: "We'd love to have you come for dinner sometime. Could you?"

"Sure thing!" was the warm reply.

"Oh-oh," I found myself thinking. John's well-kept home, his beautiful wife, two lovely daughters — will Father Mike find out what he's missing?

The answer to that question I never learned, but this much I did. The day following my talk in his church, my Baptist friend shared on an un-

