

US bishops from a better time

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The death of Williams Borders, retired archbishop of Baltimore, this past April at age 96 has dramatized the acute change in the composition of the U.S. hierarchy over the past 30 years, that is, since the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 and the departure of Archbishop Jean Jadot, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, in 1980.

So marked and long-lasting has the change been that many Catholics today, clergy, religious, and laity alike, tend to view many, if not most, bishops as ciphers at best, hopeless reactionaries at worst. To such Catholics, bishops are irrelevant to the life and mission of the church, and to their own lives as well.

This week's column offers a reminder that this was not always the case.

Taking the various U.S. dioceses in alphabetical order, here is a representative sample of retired or deceased bishops, many of whom have served the church in America with uncommon pastoral zeal and who are fondly and gratefully remembered by many in their dioceses.

The following list, of course, could be much longer, and some readers may wonder why their favorite bishop did not make the list and why others did. The list is not intended to be complete.

On the other hand, I may have unknowingly included a few bishops who do not belong on any such list. The charitable will write them off as products of innocence or just plain ignorance.

Leroy Matthieson, Amarillo, Texas, 1980-97; Francis Hurley, archbishop of Anchorage, Alaska, 1976-2001; John McCarthy, Austin, Texas, 1986-2001.

Richard Cushing, cardinal-archbishop of Boston, 1944-70; Lawrence Shehan, cardinal-archbishop of Baltimore, 1961-74; William Borders, archbishop of Baltimore, 1974-89.

Francis Mugavero, Brooklyn, 1968-90; Albert Meyer, cardinal-archbishop of Chicago, 1958-65; Joseph Bernardin, cardinal-archbishop of Chicago, 1982-96.

William Hughes, Covington, Ky, 1979-95; Victor Balke, Crookston Minn., 1976-2007; Maurice Dingman, Des Moines, Iowa, 1968-86.

John Dearden, cardinal-archbishop of Detroit, 1958-80; William McManus, Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., 1976-85; Donald Pelotte, S.S.S., Gallup, N.M., 1990-2008.

Lawrence McNamara, Grand Island, Nebr., 1978-2004; Joseph Breitenbeck, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1969-89; Joseph Imesh, Joliet, Ill., 1979-2006.

Michael Kenny, Juneau, Alaska, 1979-95; Thomas Kelly, O.P., archbishop of Louisville, 1982-2007; Cletus O'Donnell, Madison, Wis., 1967-92.

Rembert Weakland, archbishop of Milwaukee, 1977-2002; Peter Gerety, archbishop of Newark, 1974-86; Raymond Lucker, New Ulm, Minn., 1975-2000.

Terence Cooke, cardinal-archbishop of New York, 1968-83; John Cummins, Oakland, Calif., 1977-2003; Victor Reed, Oklahoma City, Okla., 1958-71.

John McRaith, Owensboro, Ky., 1982-2009; Charles Buswell, Pueblo, Colo., 1959-79; F. Joseph Gossman, Raleigh, N.C., 1975-2006.

Walter Sullivan, Richmond, Va., 1974-2003; Francis Quinn, Sacramento, Calif., 1979-93; Kenneth Untener, Saginaw, Mich., 1980-2004.

John May, archbishop of St. Louis, 1980-92; John Roach, archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis, 1975-95; Patrick Flores, archbishop of San Antonio, Texas, 1979-2004.

John R. Quinn, archbishop of San Francisco, 1977-95; Raymond Hunthausen, archbishop of Seattle Wash., 1975-91; Bernard Topel, Spokane, Wash., 1955-78.

John Leibrecht, Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., 1984-2008; Frank Harrison, Syracuse, NY, 1976-87; Bernard Flanagan, Worcester, Mass., 1959-83; and James Malone, Youngstown, Ohio, 1968-95.

There were other retired or deceased bishops who might also have made the main list above, and for very different reasons, such as Robert Joyce, Burlington, Vt., 1957-71; Paul Leibold, archbishop of Cincinnati, 1969-72; James Casey, archbishop of Denver, 1967-86; and my former archbishop John Whealon, Hartford, Conn., 1969-91.

Then there were the three bishops of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., whose good work the incumbent has done so much to undo: Charles Helmsing, 1962-77, John J. Sullivan, 1977-93, and Raymond Boland, 1993-2005.

Ernest Primeau, Manchester, N.H., 1960-74; Carroll Dozier, Memphis, Tenn., 1971-82; Thomas Grady, Orlando, Fla., 1974-89; John Snyder, St. Augustine, Fla., 1979-2000.

Thomas Murphy, archbishop of Seattle, 1991-97; William Friend, Shreveport, La., 1986-2006; Joseph Maguire, Springfield, Mass., 1977-91; and John Nevins, Venice, Fla., 1984-2007.

Even with these additional names, the list serves only as a sample of good-to-outstanding bishops of past years.

If anyone wants to know why there has been so much hemorrhaging from the Catholic church in recent years (the Pew Study of U.S. religions has put the number at 3 in 10) and why there is so much demoralization among those who have thus far remained, we need look no further than the general pattern of appointments to, and promotions within, the U.S. hierarchy over the past three decades.

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