

Better Luck with Koko

By Neal J. Conway

Years ago, at one of the workplaces I so fondly remember, I overheard some coworkers discussing some religious subject, probably sexual morality. I forget. One woman proposed that the Holy Father and Catholic clergy are, well, (expletive deleted). The others agreed.

"Oh-ho," I thought, fully aware of the centuries of sacrifice, suffering and martyrdom that our religious men and women have undergone at the hands of people like this. "Time to roll up a paper and smack some noses for The One True Faith."

But, just as quickly, I recalled The Prime Directive, administered to me by my mother when I was a little child: never volunteer your religious or political affiliations to anybody!

I had to learn why and did so when a publisher, all ready to hire me as an editor, got to the writing sample that dealt with a Catholic topic. Suddenly, it was: Don't call us, we'll call you.

In addition to discrimination in hiring and promotion, arm-band Catholics in the workplace are also subject to being stuck with putting up the office Christmas tree, maybe several such if the branch offices start whining. "WAAAHH! They get a Christmas tree and we don't! WAAAHH!"

Reaching a compromise between my

urge and The Prime Directive, I didn't say a word to these sneerers at celibacy, but I typed up and sneaked an anonymous memo onto all the office bulletin boards. It was an uncommonly civil bit of writing for me, suggesting that people hold their opinions about religions and, to cover my tracks, nationalities and ethnic groups because one really can't tell what those around one are merely by looking at them. The office, for example, employed a blue-eyed Apache and a blond Arab. My temper having cooled, I even ended the memo with a little good-natured humor: Watch what you say or you might

find somebody dumping a pot of coffee on your head.

These memos lasted longer than I thought they would. Upper management even overlapped them with their own notices. Then, somebody actually took the time to read.

Well, what do you think happened? There was a hue and cry but, was it about some intolerant religious fanatic, some ethnocentric zealot, some abortion-clinic bombing nutso, some foe of free speech lurking in the office? Not at all. They got upset because somebody's threatening to dump coffee on people's heads!

Suffice it to say, I was glad I had remained anonymous in observance of The Prime Directive.

Some, specifically those who have nice jobs and nice coworkers, would agree that I should have explained our

sacrificing priesthood to these people in a Christian and evangelizing manner. Yeah, and let's talk about The Hypostatic Union while we're at it. Truly, I'd have had better luck with Koko the gorilla.

I couldn't top what I'm tempted to think God did, anyway. The woman who said that the pope and priests are (expletive deleted) shortly lost her bathing-suit top in the water while swimming at the beach. Her mouthy buddies made sure everybody in the office heard about it.

Maybe what I did had some positive effect. As long I worked in that place, the handicapped were ridiculed, people out sick for a week were said to have AIDS, but nobody ever said anything about anybody's religion again. At least, not around the coffee pots.

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"Better Luck With Koko" by Neal J. Conway was first published in the January 28, 1996 issue of *Our Parish Times*. Neal Conway is the author of *Tales From Old Bethesda* and lives in Washington, DC. See nealjconway.com. Subject: Humorous article about anti-Catholicism in the workplace.