

# Sins of Omission

by Roger D. McGrath

## Black Sheep One

“Thou shalt not honor a white man,” says the first commandment of the politically correct—unless, of course, the white man in question is hastening the destruction of Western civilization or, perhaps, preserving the habitat of the pupfish. A recent example of dishonoring an American hero occurred at the University of Washington, when a student senator, Andrew Everett, proposed that a memorial be erected on campus in memory of Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, a graduate of the University of Washington and a Medal of Honor recipient.

Most of the student senate had never heard of Boyington. When Everett described the famous Marine ace, several senators were horrified. “Is it appropriate to honor a person who killed other people?” cried sophomore Jill Edwards. Furthermore, she “didn’t believe a member of the Marine Corps was an example of the sort of person the University of Washington wanted to produce.” Senior Ashley Miller added that “many monuments at the University of Washington already commemorate rich white men.”

Andrew Everett and his supporters argued in vain that Boyington’s accomplishments and decorations demanded an individual monument in his honor. The student senate found time before the session was adjourned, however, for the following announcements: The GBLTC (Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender Commission) was having auditions for the drag show; the Innocence Project Northwest was having a screening at the Burke Museum on the death penalty; the annual Human Rights Film Festival would be running the following week; and tickets for the *Vagina Monologues* were currently on sale at the Husky Union Building ticket office.

When Everett e-mailed word about the debate to a local radio talk-show host, reporters were soon on campus interviewing Huskies about the proposed monument to Boyington. Most revealing, and most disheartening, was the common refrain, “Who’s Pappy Boyington?” After dozens of students seemed bewildered when questioned about the Medal of Honor alumnus of their school, one reporter finally located an ROTC student who said that Boyington was a flier but

could offer nothing more. At least Boyington and the monument became a topic of discussion on campus.

That Pappy Boyington has disappeared down the memory hole is especially surprising because he was not only one of America’s most famous World War II heroes and the author of a best-selling autobiography but the subject of a television series, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, which ran for two seasons during the mid-1970’s. Starring Bob Conrad as Pappy Boyington, the series had its moments, especially during the first season, when most of the episodes were based on actual events and missions of VMF 214. Pappy Boyington himself served as consultant and technical advisor for the program.

Boyington may have been white, but he certainly wasn’t rich. He never knew his real father, a dentist who divorced Boyington’s mother when he was still an infant. His stepfather and his mother were heavy drinkers who never made more than modest incomes. Boyington liked to say that he was mostly Irish with a little Sioux Indian on his mother’s side, so his own alcoholism was a genetic inevitability. When the recent flap at the University of Washington erupted, several Boyington supporters mentioned that he was part-Sioux, and one even called him a Sioux Indian, evidently hoping to elicit some p.c. sympathy. However, Boyington’s biographer, Bruce Gamble, in a scholarly, comprehensive, and thoroughly documented work, *Black Sheep One* (2000), could find no evidence of Sioux or any other Indian blood.

More importantly, though, as a warrior, Boyington was second to none. After working his way through the University of Washington, living hand-to-mouth, he took his degree in aeronautical engineering to Boeing and got a job as a draftsman. While there, he was accepted into the Marines’ aviation-cadet program. He got through the program with a less than remarkable record, even failing and having to repeat more than one check ride. What no one could test for, though, is what he had in spades—a killer instinct and an uncanny ability to size up an opponent quickly. He had been the Pacific Northwest middleweight wrestling



champion in college and was known for instantly identifying and exploiting weaknesses in opponents with a vicious ferocity. He would soon be doing so in the skies over Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Boyington first saw combat flying a P-40 with the Flying Tigers. He returned home with six kills, but it took him several months of letter writing and finagling to get himself reinstated in the Marine Corps without losing rank or seniority, as had been promised those who had resigned to serve with the Flying Tigers. By September 1943, he was commanding VMF 214, a squadron of Corsairs based in the Solomons. Since he was in his early 30’s and most of his boys, in their early 20’s, he was “Pappy.” Several favored naming the squadron “Boyington’s Bastards,” but “Black Sheep” was eventually chosen as more appropriate for press releases.

Boyington’s experience, skill, courage, and fraternal relationship with his pilots made him a leader his aviators would follow anywhere. He picked off Japanese planes by the twos and threes and was decorated with the Navy Cross. By January 1944, his squadron had gunned down more than 100 enemy aircraft, and Boyington was on the verge of breaking Joe Foss’s record of 26. Boyington got the record and added a 28th kill before he was shot down in a furious fight with two-dozen Zeros. Picked up by a Japanese submarine, he was eventually taken to Japan, where he endured interrogations, beatings, and torture until the end of the war. When he finally returned home, President Truman hung the Medal of Honor around his neck. The Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross, the leading ace in Marine Corps history, a survivor of a Japanese torture camp, and the author of a best-selling autobiography—but that was not enough (or perhaps too much) for the august student senate at the University of Washington. ©

# The Perpetual Family

From Rome to Las Vegas to Blackheath and Back

by Hugh Barbour, O.Praem.

*“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve;  
because she was the mother of all living.”*

—Genesis 3:20

The first time I ever visited Saint Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican, it was in the company of a pretty Irish-American girl from Massachusetts named Evelyn. Her father was some kind of Democratic politician back home. She and I were just beginning a semester abroad. She was art history; I was classics. We were both only 19. All the way over, as we walked down on a sweltering August afternoon from Monteverde Vecchio through the Janiculum park, she had been arguing with me about contraception and population control and not wanting children. Her ideas were definitely not papal. As we were about to enter the vestibule, I told her that I really would rather not hear her contradicting our Faith just here, and to wait till we were in a bar. She laughed agreeably and said that it seemed a little sacrilegious to her, too. Silently, then, we walked up toward the *confessio*. When I went over to kiss the foot of Saint Peter’s image, she said, “I guess you would like to be alone; I’ll meet you on the roof.” *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him* (Genesis 2:18).

When we met later, we stood side by side, admiring the view of the City. She opened her canvas bag and brought out an apple and offered it to me with an ironic little smile. Mercifully, I caught the joke in time and gave it back to her, as I quipped, “This son of Adam is not going to take an apple from a girl named Evelyn.” She was duly charmed and said “*touché*.” The rest of the semester she kept up the debate, made all the more urgent when she found out that I wanted to be a priest.

In December, we were all invited to the house of some nice Italian Jewish kids, who were also classics students, for a party. The house had a kind of lurid basement disco complete with black-velvet walls and a strobe light. As the song “Upside Down (You Turn Me)” was booming, she told me, “Someday I hope you have some little children of your own just like you.” *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth* (Genesis 1:28). My confessor, a wily, witty, and sometimes severe Franciscan, chuckled when he heard the story of the sweet girl’s circumstantial conversion to procreation and added, “I guess contraception and population control are trumped for the young lady by celibacy. Perhaps she is making some slow spiritual progress. At least she now sees the good of nature.”

Why is it that Christian culture has always promoted with

equal zeal fruitful families and vowed virginity? And what does this tell us about the politicians and their barren offspring who worked first for contraception (such as Prescott Bush, first treasurer of Planned Parenthood), and then no-fault divorce (such as Ronald Reagan, as governor of California), and now “civil unions”? The answers to these questions take us back to the essence of our existence, to concerns that are more primal than political, more final than fiscal.

Aquinas, in his lesser *Summa contra Gentiles*, points out, following Aristotle, that corruptible things, beings that wear out and die, that pass away, can exist forever only by generation, by reproducing their kind. Perpetual existence is the purpose of human procreation, the union of man and woman. Saint Thomas points out that, at present, this perpetuity is threefold: *perpetuitas speciei*, the continuation of our kind; *perpetuitas populi*, the continuation of a people in a state; and *perpetuitas ecclesiae*, the continuation of the society of the faithful. In this way, matrimony fulfills a duty of nature, of polity, and of grace. Thus, the family precedes the state as its foundation, constitutes the state as its subject, and transcends it as a living sign of union with God, an espousal which does not end in death.

Adam and Evelyn on their outings, created from the beginning male and female, inhabitants of eternal Rome, Christians willingly or unwillingly, are a cautionary parable of these three perpetuities. I have never been to Las Vegas, except to change planes at the airport, but I could imagine—but not too vividly, of course—a contrary parable (perhaps taking place at Caesar’s Palace) of three merely temporary arrangements: fruitless sex by the hour, monitored by the health department; weddings dissolvable at will with the next day’s hangover; and all payable in chips symbolic of very fleeting fortune—and all of this brought to you by the “laws” of the “state” of Nevada. What do these symbolize in less garish terms? Contraception, divorce, and economic materialism endorsed and promoted by government.

These are equivocal uses of words, lying paradoxes, clean contrary to their real meanings, doublespeak: “sex” that has nothing to do with being male or female; “marriage” and “family” impermanent and indifferent of offspring; “happiness” in corruptible things; and a “republic” that promotes not the common good but only individual economic empowerment to obtain all these. Here is the hermeneutic of Humpty Dumpty, as our own Queen Mother Barbara told the Grand Old Party in 1992: “Family means to us whatever it means to you.” Votes,

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in Trabuco Canyon, California.*