

Local Laymen Offer 'Forum' for Issues

Lay organizations in our diocese seeking to publicize worthy goals in order to seek active members and open constructive channels for thought and action in parish life are most welcome in the COURIER-JOURNAL. The Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen, described here by one of its founding members, promises to "provide a forum where all matters of Christian concern can be discussed, evaluated and acted upon." —The Editor

In this era of radical change, violent controversy, unexpected and unsettling events, many Catholics are bewildered by developments within the church and their confusion is compounded when one leading Catholic theologian will publicly contradict a fellow theologian of equal stature. If there is no place where various points of view can be discussed and evaluated by reasonable and dedicated lay people?

Others are restless, and feel within themselves a compelling urge to vitalize the church by implementing the principles so eloquently proclaimed in Vatican II. Is there no place where the energies of dynamic laymen can be pooled into a powerful river of vitality and life?

And still other Catholics are deeply concerned with the pressing social problems and seek some avenue of expression. Isn't it strange that the God we worship is called the Prince of Peace while we drop napalm on innocent children? And while thousands starve to death every day in Biafra our cupboards are bulging with unused food!

Surely our stewardship is being called into question. Is there no group we can join that will concern itself with the needs of our neighbor?

And what about our separated brothers? Surely the heart of Christ beats with equal love for them, and what greater service can we render to Him than to embrace them with all charity and to ask their forgiveness for our coldness in the past?

To fill the needs of concerned Catholics who can no longer sit contentedly with folded hands, the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen has been formed and its membership is open to any Catholic lay person 18 or older who is willing to subscribe to its constitution. The purposes are described as follows:

The Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen is an autonomous organization of Catholic lay people speaking to the Church from within

the Church. It provides the membership with a forum where all matters of Christian concern can be discussed, evaluated, and acted upon. The focus is placed on the layman's right and responsibility to speak out on all vital issues to fellow laymen, to the hierarchy, and to the whole church.

The objectives include:

- To redefine continually the position of the layman in our changing Church.
- To stimulate a free and responsible lay voice in the Church.
- To establish democratic lay participation in parochial and diocesan administration.
- To accelerate liturgical renewal.
- To promote religious education which is based on the needs and priorities of all the people of God.
- To communicate the role of the individual conscience regarding marriage and family life.
- To assist in the growth of genuine ecumenism.
- To stimulate the individual layman and the institutional Church to promote the dignity and human rights of all individuals.
- To stimulate the individual layman and the institutional Church to work for peace among men and nations.

The principal business of the association is being conducted through nine commissions, each devoted to the accomplishment of one of the objectives of the constitution. Each member is urged, but not required, to participate in the deliberations and activities of at least one of the commissions.

Readers interested in learning more about the association should address their inquiries to: R. A. C. L., 360 San Gabriel Dr., Rochester, N.Y., 14610.

—S. R. Vidlinghoff
St Thomas the Apostle Parish

NOW HEAR THIS . . . Everyone Considered Except Baby

By Father Richard Torney

An Episcopal Bishop stated firmly that abortion should be legalized because "in many circumstances it is the greater good and the lesser evil".

A Buffalo physician declared that there was "no moral difference between removing an appendix and ending a pregnancy by abortion."

A medical school professor admitted that some doctors have become "scoundrels," performing illegal abortions in Rochester hospitals "for reasons which the doctors judge valid although the words of the law do not."

These were samples of testimony offered in Rochester last week in a public hearing before visiting Group of New York State legislators. The joint legislative committee from the Albany Senate and Assembly was seeking local opinion on proposed reforms to the state's abortion laws.

Sitting through the day-long hearing which offered 22 speakers a democratic right to influence future legislation, it was hard to gauge how the legislative committee was reacting and what it would report to Albany colleagues about moral and scientific views from Western New York. Doctors, clergymen and mothers gave expert but strenuously contradictory evidence.

Speakers in favor of sweeping changes in the present law (which allows competent physicians to use abortion only when proven medically necessary to save the mother's life) constantly emphasized the "mother's rights", several going so far as to say "Permit abortion on demand".

I had the mental image of a pregnant woman dropping into the hospital for womb-surgery as though she was having her tonsils removed. But it couldn't be that easy on the mind or the body of any woman.

There was universal concern in the abortion-promoters that a precious living child is involved. They argued that because theologians and biologists dispute about when the human life, a human person, begins in the woman's body, the law need not concern itself with such nebulous rights as the "globe of matter called a fetus" allegedly possesses.

A woman physician pleading for abolition of all restriction on abortion, said that the woman's rights were so paramount that she would advise an abortion for a patient even if the husband did not give his consent.



EPISCOPAL BISHOP GEORGE BARRETT SPEAKS AT HEARING

This brought sharp questioning from the panel of Albany legislators, who surely as husbands and fathers believed that the male must have some rights in the result of conception.

Guesses introduced by the liberalizers detailing the thousands of women killed or mutilated by quacks performing illegal abortions were shown to be grossly exaggerated. But they piled on further scare stories about psychological horrors suffered by women who bore unwanted children because an abortion cost too much.

There was some emphasis during the hearing that the increase in

the number of abortions for "psychiatric reasons" was founded on "highly debatable points" looking only to the woman's interests: fear of social criticism for having a child, shame for infidelity and indiscretion, simply not wanting another child or hating the drudgery of another long pregnancy.

It was hard for a male listener not to sympathize with every facet of the woman's problems which the abortion-side so passionately claimed would be corrected with abolition of the current law.

But the liberalizers were even more frightening in their casual air

about destroying life. They had no hesitation about destroying all the sacred potentialities of what genius and value might come to our society from the snuffed-out unborn.

This is a century which has grown callous of life, has sanctified violence, has waged history's most destructive wars. But it is also an era when human rights, — those of the poor, the black people, the politically oppressed, the underprivileged, — have been worried over and fought for with greater zeal than ever before.

This well-organized challenge against defenseless, unborn children must be opposed, not simply on religious or private morality grounds, but because the rights to human life are inviolable. The life in question has no voice if we do not speak.

The solution of the abortion question does not lie in making it legal or semi-legal but in making it unnecessary. The social, economic and psychological reasons that have led to increase in this evil should be attacked directly.

As medical indications for abortion to save life have almost been erased by medical progress in recent years, so social reasons which make abortion seem like the only sure solution to human problems must be solved.

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

All Want Peace; Few Court It

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Being definite and direct has its good-points and its weaknesses. But most men are more secure in soul and emotions when they know just where they stand. There is an old saying: "Hanging isn't so bad. It's the waiting for it that's the hardest."

Probably that's why so many children are emotionally insecure. They don't know how far they can go. Parents are often inconsistent in dealing with them, to their harm.

One of the wisest fathers I have known has two fine, mature sons in their twenties. Once I asked him: "What did you do to bring up your sons to be such good men?" (I am more impressed with the influence of fathers than mothers. Not that mothers are less important. They give the warmth and tenderness that's needed. But fathers seem to shape the character.)

He smiled. "Thank you for thinking so well of my sons. I think they are fine, but of course, I'm their father. When the boys were very little, my wife and I taught them that

'no' means 'no', and 'yes' means 'yes'. I think if children know where they stand, they will develop properly. They will be contented."

As the boys matured, they lived in a home where their father and mother are devoted to one another. Their life is centered around their children, and to a lesser degree around their relatives, then the community.

Today the sons have an easy, devoted, good-natured relationship with their parents. They discuss their projects with them — and know that they will have interested listeners. They listen to their parents' opinions with respect. They regard their father and mother with an affectionate reverence.

One day I joked to one of the boys: "Don't you find your life dull? No picketing of the University, no destruction of property, no assaulting the police. Do you think you are fulfilling yourself properly?"

He grinned: "The catechism taught me: 'God can do all things.' I'm not

God. I think my vocation is my own job. That's involved enough. It requires my full time if I'm to do it honestly."

So it would seem to me that from this we come to a matter of values. This reminds me of a joke told by the elder, retired Msgr. John Duffy. Two Irishmen were lost in a snowstorm in Switzerland. They struggled to find a village, but to no avail. So they commended their souls to God, and relaxed to await the end. Suddenly a great St. Bernard dog loomed before them with the traditional little cask of brandy. Pat said to Mike: "Look! Man's best friend is here!" Mike glowed back: "And a beautiful dog with it!"

Normal men want peace. But peace comes from adjusting to the realities of our own situations—including the accepting the good and bad in the world, and bowing to the Divine Will which is often inscrutable. The "imitation of Christ" offers this gem: "No man lives without trouble. All men desire peace, but few desire the things that make the peace . . ."



COMMENTARY

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CHURCH AND THE CITY

The Decentralization Issue

By Father P. David Finks

A number of perceptive writers are saying that the struggle of minority group parents to control decentralized school districts will initiate the real "war on poverty." Since tremors of a decentralization struggle are being felt locally it may be helpful to begin to sort out the issues.

It would be well worth your time to read carefully Martin Mayer's gargantuan account of the New York City teachers' strikes of 1968 (New York Times Magazine, Feb. 1, 1969). Issues and emotions were intertwined to an unbelievable degree in the New York City crisis.

Hopefully Rochesterians have benefited sufficiently from our several years experience of organized social change by the FIGHT organization to face serious reform of the city's school system in a rational manner.

The struggle is not between teachers and parents. Both groups know from first hand experience the weaknesses of the city's school system. Teachers and parents know the frustrations of a general, "too little, too late" educational process which becomes tragic in inner city schools where human needs are much more evident.

Many critics of local education, black and white, see school administrators offering small-scale experimental programs, open enrollment

and "busing" rather than serious planning with principals, teachers and parents for a phased overhaul of the school system.

School administrators like all bureaucratic officials will respond to criticism by investigations and minor concessions. But only organized long term pressure by coalitions of teachers, parents and community organizations will bring about a better educational situation for our children.

The FIGHT organization is carrying out a planned research of city school records to discover actual levels of inner city children. The Education Committee of FIGHT, chaired by the dynamic Mrs. Alberta Cason, will carefully build a vehicle for a decentralization of the city wide school district.

Alternate plans will be offered for smaller districts with elected school boards, more responsive to parents, children and teachers and more able to give direction to school administrators.

A local "Ocean Hill-Brownsville" must be avoided at all costs. In New York City a creative community effort became bogged down in a nihilist struggle between teachers union and parents with no winners.

Poor people want the same as suburban residents. Many people move to the towns to build and maintain a better school system. In an

age of complexity and large unresponsive school bureaucracies, ghetto parents want school boards and administrators who represent the best interest of their children.

Parents will not control teachers, but they will have a say in setting up more modern teachers standards through their elected representatives. Unit administrators with a reasonable size school district can be more sensitive to community organizations and teachers unions.

Vandalism and behavior problems in the schools will be handled through a coalition of the parents and school administrators.

The alternatives to serious negotiations toward decentralization will be bickering, police patrols, proliferation of educational gimmicks.

Citizens groups interested in community control should join with the FIGHT organization and the teachers unions in working out plans with the Board of Education. Splitter groups from Black Panthers to Soul Brothers will do little on their own but muddy the waters.

Minority group parents want a school system more responsive to their wishes in the education of their children. They know that education is not a specialized or narrowly professional problem. They see public education for what it is, the nature and destiny of American society.

ST. PAUL AND LENT

Have Confidence in God

(The author of the following article, the second in a series of seven Lenten meditations, has taught as a scholastic in New York City high schools, and currently is in second theology at Woodstock.)

By Peter Schieller, S.J.

"Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give." —Romans, 8: 32.

TIME magazine, looking recently at the task facing President Nixon, summed up the 1960s as follows: "A decade that began with a quest for moral grandeur seemed to be ending on the defensive, tired in the sheer effort to keep society from exploding."

As we approach the celebration of Easter, we must ask what light this feast sheds on the troubled times we live in. The apostle Paul can help with the answer. His letter to the Christians at Rome presented his view of the hope and salvation of fear all men in Christ Jesus. The

love of God, manifested in the death and resurrection of his Son, has freed man from sin, death, and human weakness. The Christian's life is now surrounded by the love of God, a love which guarantees us a share in his own life.

In the midst of our joys and sufferings, we are confident that God will not abandon us, since he has given his Son as proof of his love. In the Old Testament, the supreme manifestation of God's love was the Exodus when he freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. As Christ's death and resurrection give us today a basis of confidence and hope, so it was the God of the Exodus in whom the Israelites trusted.

Thus it was most fitting that Martin Luther King Jr., could preach on the eve of his tragic death that "I have seen the Promised Land. I'm happy tonight. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

Dr. King's faith in the power of the risen Lord gave him the confi-

dence which Paul speaks of. His life of reconciliation was a response to the love of God manifested in Christ. Thus he was free from fear of suffering, imprisonment, and even death. The power of God enabled him to love to the point of death. Rather than despair of the nation's progress in achieving social justice and peace, King's Christian faith and confidence enabled him to love and serve his fellow man with added strength and deeper concern.

The message of Christ's resurrection does not solve the problems of crime, poverty and race, but it should enable us to dedicate ourselves to their eradication with increased energy and motivation.

As Paul assures the Romans, we now can work with the conviction that nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8: 35, 39).



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