

## Fr. Charles Curran:

### 'Sin Has Lost . . . Its Cosmic Dimension'

By FATHER RICHARD  
TORMEY

Father Charles Curran, Rochester diocesan priest who teaches at Catholic University and is president of the American Theological Society, told the Priests' Association of Rochester this week that there must be "a change in our understanding of the nature of sinfulness and in the format of using the Sacrament of Penance."

Arguing that the priests should judge sin in the "relationship of man to God and to his neighbor rather than in some isolated external action," Father Curran insisted that "mortal sin is a very rare occurrence."

Subsequently he advised that a new ritual for confession of non-mortal sins was needed in parish life because the frequency of confession has fallen off and the laity have lost a proper concept of sin.

"Mortal sin properly understood in terms of a broken relationship of love is the culmination of a gradual development lasting over a long period of time," he declared. "The external act is always ambiguous and not expressive of a man's internal relationships."

Father Curran's address on "The Penance Thing" before about 85 priests who belong to the 165-member association highlighted the 3rd annual plenary session of the PAR at the Trenholm East Inn on Tuesday, April 28.

Father Daniel Brent, diocesan superintendent of schools, and Father John Herpel, diocesan director of the Office of Human Concern, led a discussion on the issues in Rochester's problem of "quality integrated education."

Msgr. Charles Boyle, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church, Rochester, was general chairman of the session. Father John G. Skvorak is president of the PAR. Membership is voluntary and includes only a portion of the nearly 500 active diocesan and religious priests serving in the diocese.

The priests present passed resolutions calling for:

- the establishment of a diocesan pastoral council;
- the formation of parish councils in every parish of the diocese;
- investigation of the "Feast-

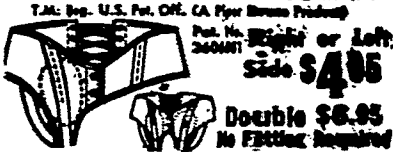
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bility of limited tenure for pastors, specialized ministries and voice given to the laity regarding the acceptability of the clergy assigned to them";

- support for the efforts of Rochester's Citizens for Quality Integrated Education;

- study of a procedure "for the selection of bishops" shared by the clergy and laity of the diocese;

- support of Washington priests suspended since 1968 for their position on artificial contraceptives.

Father Curran based his opinions on the urgency of a renewal of the Sacrament of Penance on Sacred Scripture, historical developments and "the contemporary experience of Christians."

Acknowledging that the issue of sin was too juridical and legalistic in past centuries, he asserted that today "sin has lost its intensely personal meaning to say nothing of its social and cosmic dimension."

"True penance must mean a change of heart toward God and neighbor, a realization that we must seek a reconciliation and adopt a continuing harmony with the Creator and our neighbor."

Too often, he implied, the penitent's concern over the external evil actions of the past made him forget that his sinful condition required a "continual conversion" bringing him back to faithful love of God.

Regretting that the U.S. Bishops have permitted no experimentation with formats for the penance ritual which will be "more meaningful for the laity" than the present discipline, the theologian hoped that "changes will come from the bottom up, not from the top down".

"A new format for confession will not be a panacea for the

problems of our sinfulness. We need a whole new teaching on sin, God's love for us, the social dimensions of our lives. But I believe we need to develop a plurality of rites which in their entirety try to express and celebrate the full mystery of forgiveness and conversion."

Father Curran held that communal penance services without individual confession are truly sacramental but warned that priests celebrating these rites "must exercise great prudence".

"There are theological and psychological values in the format of our specific auricular confession, but there remains a need," he claimed, "to develop other rites of the sacrament which emphasize more important values."

#### Governor Holds Meeting on Drugs

Diocesan representatives participated in an Interfaith Convocation on Drug Abuse convened by Gov. Rockefeller yesterday at the Thruway Hyatt House in Albany.

Gov. Rockefeller and Terence Cardinal Cooke of New York were among the speakers.

State leaders told religious representatives that only the church can properly emphasize the spiritual values needed to cope with the dangerous growth of drug problems especially among youth.

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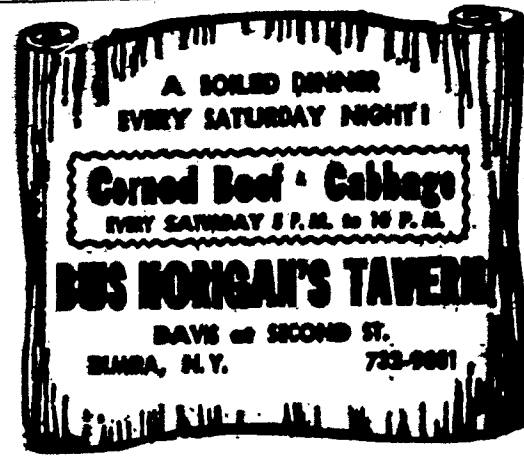
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