

Father Charles Curran Analyzes Citizenship

By JOHN DASH

Father Charles Curran, nationally known moral theologian, is perhaps best known for his analysis of the moral character of human sexuality.

Recently, however, the Washington, D.C., based priest has been exploring the moral implications of citizenship in the United States.

Here to visit his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Curran, of Rochester, Father Curran spoke with the Courier-Journal on his findings.

He discussed the growing concern of the U.S. bishops for recognition of the selective conscientious objector to war. The selective objector, while not at variance with national efforts in all war situations, finds that fighting in a particular war is repugnant to his moral sensibilities.

Selective Service law does not at this time recognize such a position.

"Traditionally, Catholic theology always has to make room for both the total pacifist position and the just war position. But the just war position, by its very nature, always said that the decision had to be made by the individual with regard to the specific war. Selective conscientious objection really follows the Catholic just war theory.

"The idea behind it is that one has to judge in each individual case whether a war is just, therefore it's totally in keeping with the notion of

selective conscientious objection.

"The argument comes back it's a political question. If you're against some wars it's a political question and not a moral question.

"Well, it seems to me it has to be a moral question. Too often there has been a dichotomy between saying it's just a political or just a social question and not a moral question.

"In just war theory we always saw it as such. The individual person has to weigh it in advance to see whether or not the war is justified and has a right to resist.

"I think the whole notion of selective conscientious objection should follow from just war teaching."

The topic of conversation then shifted to the relationship of the individual to the state. "In general, Roman Catholic theology always had room for civil disobedience," he said.

"I really tend to think that from the Christian viewpoint the problem is not the difference between violence and non-violence. The problem is in the difference between resistance and nonresistance.

"You take the Sermon on the Mount . . . it's against any form of resistance, really.

"Therefore, I tend to think people at times make too much of the absolute distinction between violence and nonviolence. To me they're both forms of

resistance. From the Christian viewpoint the first hurdle you've got to get over is just the question of resistance, because you'll have to admit the Sermon on the Mount, (the Beatitudes) for example, tends to go against resistance.

"But then one has to understand the Sermon on the Mount in terms of the whole eschatological coloring of it and realize the fact that it only sees each man's relationship with one other individual.

"But we live in a complex world where we have many and varied relationships; and sometimes my love for this person demands that I have to resist and maybe resist violently this other person over here.

"This has always been the problem in the whole history of Christianity. Many Christians have said you can't have anything to do with either war or violence precisely because of the Sermon on the Mount and command of Jesus.

"But my point is that the Sermon on the Mount generally is understood, it seems to me, in terms of one person vis-a-vis one other person; but in the complexity of human existence we realize there are many relationships and sometimes, therefore, precisely, love for this person might demand we violently resist this other person.

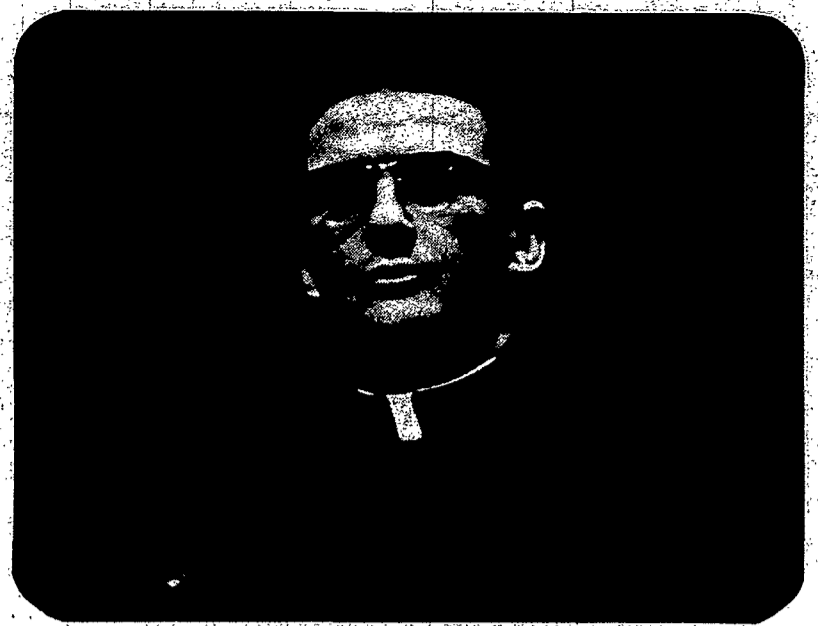
"From a theological viewpoint, it's interesting to note that once you've justified war, you admit the fact that violence sometimes is necessary, you automatically have to go back and admit everything in regard to civil disobedience.

"Now in the Catholic Tradition, civil disobedience had, because of our teaching on the natural law, always been admitted as a possibility.

"Thomas Aquinas said there's no problem to civil disobedience, because if your whole theoretical construct is that there is a law of God in which man should use his reason, which is natural law, and then positive law, which specifies the natural law, right away you have the natural law as a judgment and a criterion on the positive law; so that if a positive law goes against a natural law, you don't have to obey it.

"And this has been an accepted part of Roman Catholic Tradition.

"The difference between the concept of state in Catholic theology and Protestant theology is that in Catholic theology the state was the natural society. It was natural for people to join together to achieve things they couldn't achieve otherwise. But, in Protestant theology, the primary reason for the existence of the state was the sinfulness



FATHER CHARLES CURRAN

of man: the whole purpose of the state was just to prevent chaos and to be a dike against sin. Where the Catholic notion saw it primarily in terms of justice, a strict Lutheran theology saw it in terms of order.

"Interestingly enough, too

often we (Catholics) have come up with a law and order mentality which is not in the best of our own theological tradition. We should see the state primarily in terms of justice and of the goodness of man and not in terms of order and the sinfulness of man."

More Training in Moral Issues Advocated for Professionals

New York—(RNS)—Twenty experts who participated in a symposium on moral problems posed by developments in biology, genetics and medicine have issued a statement calling for greatly increased study in the area.

The group advocated that doctors, lawyers and other professionals be given more training in the field of moral issues during their graduate education, and that Congress allocate funds "for research on the social and ethical consequences of scientific decisions."

"We need concerted inquiry," the statement said, "and the growth of a body of informed discourse, to which people from many different fields contribute. But we need much more—

a change in education and in public attitudes."

The one-day symposium, which attracted some 1,200 people was held in Washington, D.C., under sponsorship of the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. Leaders of the symposium picked the group of 20 from the speakers, panelists and other participants in the program, and they worked out their statement the following day.

They said that as a group they had no plans to promote their recommendations further.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy is president of the sponsoring foundation, which concentrates primarily on the problem of mental retardation, and his sister, Mrs. Eunice Shriver, is executive vice president.

Our Parish COUNCIL by Bernard Lyons

A priest on a university campus wanted to make himself available to more students . . . so he set up a "wooden psychiatrist's stand" in the manner of Lucy in the "Peanuts" comics and offered to counsel students for 5 cents.

In the Pittsburgh area, Jane Mall wanted to teach her freshmen religion class about Christ's parable of the laborers . . . so she offered bags of candy to students who arrived early if they would help her rearrange the classroom. When the other students came, she gave candy to everyone.

A teacher in Iowa, deeply moved by the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., wanted to teach her grade school class what prejudice does to people . . . so she segregated the students by the color of their eyes to give them a living demonstration.

Any number of teachers have told their students that Christianity has to be lived. Brother Terrence Haas, of Notre Dame High School in Sherman Oaks, Cal., has 125 boys doing volunteer work in convalescent homes, hospitals, schools and community centers in poor areas as part of their religion class.

Monsignor Andre Tournier, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Eureka, Cal., wanted to get to know his parishioners better . . . so he devised a series of "getting to know you" meetings in the rectory.

Following a Sunday evening Mass, six to 10 couples gather in the rectory for supper. On the following Sunday these

couples act as hosts and hostesses, including fixing the meal, for the next group of couples.

Couples are invited in alphabetical order to insure a cross section of all walks of life at each gathering. The program has worked so well that two other neighboring parishes are undertaking similar suppers.

All of these true cases have something in common — they involved people using their imagination to get a message across or a task accomplished.


Is your parish council beginning to develop this imaginative approach to communications, issues and to others?

The joyful, creative touch comes from the realization that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Concern.

It may be best described in the story about the man who died and discovered that heaven and hell were nearly exactly alike — each was a gigantic banquet!

Both parties had all the ingredients — people, wine, music, food-laden tables. There was a problem common to both heaven and hell — each person at the banquets was equipped with a fork so big that he could not properly raise the food to his mouth.

The problem caused great anguish in hell. In heaven, however, there were shouts of surprise, laughter, and happiness for there the persons had discovered they could use forks quietly neatly if they reached across the table to their neighbors and fed each other.



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