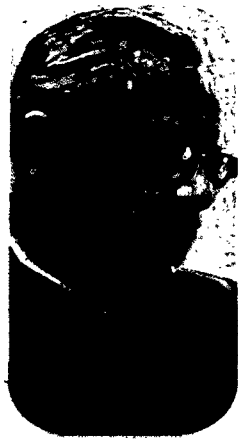


The Church—Rock and River

PART I

Scripture uses many images for faith, the Church, the Kingdom of God. Jesus told many parables to illustrate these subjects, which at their root are really one. He said the Kingdom of God is a seed, a net of fish, yeast — all of which are images teeming with life, growth, action. St. Paul said the Church is a body, the very risen body of Jesus, growing, suffering, diverse, ministering, rejoicing. There are two images of the Church from Scripture which at first hearing may seem to be contradictory — the rock and the river.



The psalms and the prophets long before Jesus often called God "my rock and my fortress" and the faith of ancient Israel was built "upon Zion" the solid rock from which the light and might of God's truth would shine out ultimately to the whole world. Jesus Himself later likened His new Israel to a people whose faith is also built on a solid rock — (Mt. 16: 18) — "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." He told the parable of two

men, one whose house of faith was built on sand and in the time of storm and turmoil, it was washed away, but another man built his house of faith on rock and it withstood the storm. So faith, church, kingdom are meant to be rock-like: firm, stable, enduring.

But then, seemingly so contrary, the image of a river — and there is a striking parallel between the first pages of the Bible's first book, Genesis, and the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse or Book of Revelations. For there is mention of a river — one the river to water the garden of Eden, and the other the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Ezekiel, in his 47th chapter, also describes a river he once saw in a vision. This is the way he describes it:

The Lord God's messenger brought me "to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east . . . and he measured the water . . . and led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep; and he measured it (farther downstream) and led me through the water, and it was up to my hips; and again he measured it (very far downstream) and it was a river

that I could not pass through, for the water had risen, it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through."

Rock and river — constant and ever-changing, we have need of both of these elements in our faith, our Church today, God's kingdom on earth. For the past several centuries, I think the image of the rock was especially apt. Our faith and our Church was that one unchanging institution in a society very much in flux. Today, I think, God proposes we see in the river the symbol of what our Church should also be.

There are, of course, hazards in a river-church, the hazard of shipwreck, of sinking, of our being personally drowned, even as the disciples feared when they too were in a boat threatened by that storm on the Sea of Galilee. And even as the book of Genesis hints — the river of Eden soon "divided." We are witnesses and heirs of that event four centuries ago when our blessed Lord's river-church "divided" and divided again, and again, and again — to the point that we were but a swampy delta of innumerable muddy trickles of a once mighty stream of faith, love, worship and mercy.

(to be continued)

The Slot Man

We Love those Letters to the Editor

By Carmen Viglucchi

There is very little doubt that the "Letters to the Editor" page is one of the most popular departments in any newspaper.



The reasons for this are obvious:

- It affords the reader the chance to express himself on current topics (in this connection it should be noted there is some rule of thumb that each letter represents the opinion of some hundreds of other people).

- It also provides the space for observations that, though not strictly tied to specific current issues are nonetheless interesting.

In short, and speaking just of the benefit to the newspaper, they definitely improve the product.

For instance, during the four editions of February, the Courier-Journal printed 27 letters on a variety of topics ranging from collecting coupons to helping retarded children to school aid; television, books, abortions and nuns' habits.

We are sure that most of our readers would agree that the page is a necessity.

But, as with all good things, limiting factors must be involved. First, with all the other activities this paper must report, space is limited for any one department. Thus we must insist that readers limit their letters to 1½ pages, typewritten double-spaced. If nothing else this constitutes a simple act of courtesy to others.

Then, too, letters, like any other matter written for the Courier-Journal are subject to editing. Some readers seem to regard this as censorship, but it's the same treatment Courier staffers themselves face. In-

deed, it could be pointed out that letters are subject to the same libel laws that everything in the paper is, and that the writer and paper share responsibility.

But libel is not generally a concern if letter-writers remember to use good taste. This also applies in getting a point across. A letter is far more effective when it discusses issues and refrains from attacks either on opposite viewpoints or on the people expressing them.

Then if statistical facts are used, quote sources. We cannot take the chance of passing on mistakes to our readers.

Finally letters must be signed. If they aren't they are suspect and are quickly tossed out.

So keep the letters coming, they truly constitute a public forum which gives all viewpoints a place in the sun. And this paper is the better for them.

Editorial

A Greater Church Role for Women

Extreme stands taken by some spokesmen for women's liberation have probably cast a cloud over the meritorious aspects of the movement.

More than half of the citizens of the United States are women and it can be assumed that a like proportion exists among Catholics. And although many people may protest that a woman's role is motherhood this isn't so in all cases.

Bearing children is not a vocation for a great many women, Catholic nuns being the prime example. In addition, many women can fulfill the responsibilities of motherhood and still find time to offer help outside the family.

At a time when the Church can use all its resources it may be folly to gloss over the roles women can play. True,

vocations to the sisterhood have fallen off and many nuns have left their orders. The reasons are complex. One, however, is a personal feeling among many nuns and those aspiring in that direction that Church authority is man-oriented and that women are second-class.

In this diocese, women have honored any number of pulpits but this apparently is not the case throughout the country. Recently, Sister Honor Murphy, OP, told a Detroit conference that she sees "no reason why a competent woman should not be in the pulpit. I see no reason why a competent woman cannot be a bishop. I certainly see no reason why a woman cannot be a minister of the Eucharist. Laws are one thing. What we are before Jesus is another."

Sister Honor's remarks may be pro-

phetic but even she probably realizes that the Church is not ready for female bishops. Even the possibility of women priests is remote. But perhaps the diaconate is the place to start; other religions have done so.

Vocation Sunday is here. May we respectfully suggest that one way to make the sisterhood more attractive and to strengthen the resolve of those already serving the Church as Sisters is to offer those who want it a share of the responsibility.

In any case, women form a class, like black Catholics, which is seeking far more responsibility within the Church at the very time when the Church, particularly in its teaching and social concern fields, needs help. Could not the Holy Spirit be trying to make ends meet?