

Editorials

Thread of Hope

The reign of Pope John Paul was too short to have any historical impact. There are no great encyclicals or programs bearing his name and style. He will not be identified with any great Church teaching. Sadly but truly, his reign probably will be remembered only for its brevity.

Yet in his short time as supreme pastor, he did remind a tired world of certain basics. A sunny manner goes a long way, simplicity is a balm, and the world's leading Christian can manage to be informal and open and effective all at the same time.

It has been said that the greatest aid to producing religious vocations is a priest obviously happy in his role. If that is so, then there is no telling to what lengths Pope John Paul would have reached as an evangelizer.

In restudying the very recent Aug. 9 Courier-Journal covering the death of Pope Paul VI, one realizes that the multitude of stories will be missing this time - efforts for peace, Humanae Vitae, three visits to the United States, meetings with the world's greats, completion of Vatican II.

No, Albino Luciani's first days as Pope turned out to be his last. There is little to cover. But there is something to remember - at all costs we must hang onto that elusive thread of hope he seemed to offer the world. It is the stuff that heaven is made of.

and Opinions

Theologians Are Translators

Editor:

It would seem that my remarks (Courier-Journal, Aug. 23) on original sin have fallen on hostile (some would prefer to say, orthodox) ears. I have been variously accused of (1) misrepresenting the Council of Trent and (2) having an interest (apparently dangerous and illegitimate) in presenting the teachings of theologians.

It would take a letter longer than the editor would be willing to accept to detail the reasons why some contemporary theologians are trying to rethink the meaning of original sin. Suffice it to say that these theologians are not attacking the doctrine of original sin; they are simply trying to clarify what original sin means in terms of human experience.

It does no good for us to give mere intellectual assent to doctrines, if they have no meaning in terms of our daily effort to live the Christian Gospel. Cardinal Newman over a century ago distinguished between notional knowledge and real knowledge. Notional knowledge is knowledge we receive into our minds, but which has no effect on our Christian living or our moral decision-making. Real knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge that a person has appropriated and made his own, so that it has repercussions in the way he lives his life. Too many people have notional knowledge of Catholic doctrine that is never translated into Christian living. It is easy to draw up a long list of doctrines and say: "I believe in these", without their playing any real part in our actual living of the Christian life.

The task of the theologian is to help people to understand their experience in living the Gospel. The task of the theologian is to help people experience in their lives the doctrines that are taught by the Church.

The theologian does little service to the Christian community if he simply repeats the language of the Council of Trent or for that matter of any Council. His task is the difficult one of trying to translate into contemporary language what the Church experiences, what the Church believes,

what the Church teaches. He tries, in other words, to help people move from notional knowledge of Christian faith to real knowledge.

Most theologians I know are loyal to the Teaching Church; at the same time they are trying to be faithful to the particular charism that is theirs, namely, to help the community of God's people come to a living and dynamic understanding of what the Gospel says and what the Church teaches. This is a difficult task, because the reality of Christian faith is always much more profound than any human words can express, whether these words come from a Council or from a theologian.

Several years ago the Paulist Press published a booklet entitled "Doctrines Do Grow". Indeed they do. It is the task of theologians, as well as the Magisterium of the Church, to monitor that growth.

Msgr. William H. Shannon
4245 East Ave.
Rochester, N.Y. 14610

Has Rightwing Usurped Page?

Editor:

Bishop Hogan's call for continuing education (C-J, 9-20) was aptly complemented by your report on Father Appelby's talk to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. His contention that "illiteracy in regard to faith" is one of the five major problems facing the church is amply supported by a regular reading of the Opinion page.

Each week we see denunciations of "unorthodox" views - denunciations flowing from a simplistic notion of an unchanging church. Any deviation from the familiar forms and vocabulary of the church of the recent past is seen as heresy. Bishop Hogan uses the time-honored expression "Eucharistic Liturgy" instead of "the sacrifice of the Mass" and he is seen as Protestantizing the church.

The church has always experienced division and controversy in her efforts to balance the demands of change and continuity. It is certainly legitimate to contend that change has been emphasized at the

expense of continuity in recent years. This view, however, is not well-served by strident expressions of ignorance, which appear with such regularity in both the religious and secular press. Even more disquieting is the lack of Christian charity so often reflected in the misrepresentation of others' positions and motives.

I do not expect that my words will change any of this, but the Opinion page has been the preserve of the extreme right long enough. Perhaps we should pray God to give each of us the gifts of listening to and trying to understand each other even if we do not always agree.

John J. Dealy
411 Laurelton Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14609

Msgr. Shannon Inspirational

Editor:

I wish to comment on two letters that appeared in your Sept. 6 issue; both were in response to thoughts and opinions expressed by Msgr. W. H. Shannon.

The first letter written by Father Vanston said the people within the Catholic Church are more concerned "in what the official Roman Catholic Church teaches" as opposed to what "many theologians are saying." I wish to point out to Rev. Vanston that the people should be concerned with what the theologians are saying or has he forgotten St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas, just to name two theologians that the official Roman Catholic Church has listened to in the past.

In the second letter, William Morgan Sr. disagreed with Msgr. Shannon on original sin. The comment that I wish to take issue with in that letter is Mr. Morgan's accusation that Msgr. Shannon did not think.

As a student of Nazareth College where Father Shannon teaches and one who has taken a number of courses from him (including one in which he presented his views about original sin) as well as getting to know him personally outside the classroom as a friend, I would have to disagree with you, Mr. Morgan.

I find that if there is one thing that Msgr. Shannon does and does well it is think. His preparations for presentation of classroom material is thoroughly

researched and thought out ahead of time; even those positions that are totally opposed to his position.

Msgr. Shannon is an asset not only to the Nazareth College community but to the Roman Catholic Church. He is for me a source of academic and Christian inspiration.

Mr. Morgan has the right to his views concerning original sin and Msgr. Shannon but I would suggest the latter deserves more research and thought.

Lucien L. Cayer
52 Arch St.
Rochester, N.Y. 14609

ERA, Abortion Connected

Editor:

Anyone who takes a good look at the women's liberation movement and its leaders will soon be able to discover that their ultimate goals are selfish grabs for power, money, and full control of their own bodies. Such thinking is in direct opposition to that of Christ Himself when He pointed out what is of real importance and value in our lives - whether we be men or women. Certainly, since the emergence of the women's movement, we have seen no improvement in the moral fiber of our country, church, or even individual families.

As Catholics, whose Church has taken a firm stand against abortion as the killing of a human life, we must also take a look at its tie-in with the Equal Rights Amendment. There are some in our midst who refuse to believe that there is a connection and who would prefer to believe the denials of a great atheist leader such as Betty Friedan. They seem to have almost no problem in being able to handle on of their "MS-guided" quotes (from a fund-raising letter for the NOW organization) - "The ERA has become both symbol and substance for the whole of modern women's movement for equality... I am convinced if we lose this struggle we will have little hope in our own lifetime of saving our right to abortion..."

The issues of abortion and the ERA are seldom separated by the feminists. Yet, some are blind to that fact - so much so that we have supposedly credible people, such as nuns, being used as image-makers to be imitated. They have even formed a lobbying group called "Network"

which was highlighted in an article appearing in our local evening newspaper on July 22. The headline read "They march for ERA in God's Name." As "Catholic" women they are unable to admit that the ERA and abortion are NOT separate issues and, as feminists, they did not march in God's name but only for THEMSELVES.

Mary L. Greisen
6283 Pittsford-Palmyra Road
Fairport, N.Y. 14450

No Mention Of Heaven

Editor:

What is missing from all the sermons these days is motivation. I can't remember the last time I heard a sermon on Heaven.

All we hear today is "involvement" and

"ecumenism." We don't hear anything about the 10 Commandments, or reward or punishment.

All that I know about grace and Heaven and hell is what I have found out for myself from reading spiritual books.

So now, when I am depressed or scared I remind myself about the incredible joys of a never-ending Heaven and I regain my perspective and my fears, depression and heartache are greatly mitigated.

It certainly would help if we were reminded from time to time about why we were born, what is expected of us, how short life is, and the unending, unimaginable joys of Heaven.

Arlene O'Connor
214 Haddon Road
Rochester, N.Y.



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Expressions of opinions should be brief, no longer than 1 1/2 pages, typed, double-spaced, with names and addresses.

We reserve the right to edit as to length, offensive words, libelous statements, or to reject altogether. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made and letters will reflect the writer's own style.

We encourage readers to submit opinions but since we try to print letters from as many different contributors as possible we will publish no more than one letter a month from the same individual.