

Editorial

Why Worry About Baha'is?

Some time ago a well-meaning reader telephoned this newspaper and complained that we were wasting space by printing news and editorials concerning the persecution of the Baha'i Faith in Iran.

Why, this reader wanted to know, would a Roman Catholic newspaper want to get involved in the concerns of another religion when "we" had so many problems of our own?

To be sure, the answer given this reader was not an easy one. In some respects, it is true that there are enough "Catholic issues" to easily fill the space in these pages. So then why go out of the way to take on the cause of others?

Though the reason is not easy, it is simple. There is no choice. When there is flagrant abuse of the rights of anyone it is incumbent for all to speak out. And the persecution of the Baha'is by the Iranian government is among the most dastardly of history.

Even if the Baha'is were strictly an alien group, a people living in remote and isolated spheres, they should be defended. But the fact is that practitioners of this religion are active in the United States and some indeed are our own diocesan neighbors.

What do these people do to merit the extreme displeasure of the Ayatollah Khomeini and his cohorts?

To understand the answer to this question, we must first look at the charges laid down by the Islamic government. The ayatollah claims that the Baha'i Faith is "a political entity created and nourished by anti-Islamic and Colonial Powers" ... with "a very sophisticated and systematic espionage network."

The fact is that the Baha'is prohibit totally any involvement in partisan politics — they are non-political, non-partisan and peaceful. They are opposed to all kinds of prejudice, whether based on class, race, religion or nationality. They oppose extremes of wealth and poverty. They believe in equality of the sexes. They believe in free choice of religion.

For these beliefs they are anathema in Iran. Even though persecuted under the guise of politicism, its

members are often freed if they recant their religious beliefs.

In addition, given the paranoia of the ayatollah, because the Baha'is do not oppose Jews, they are labeled Zionist, whether seriously or because it serves an ulterior motive is beside the point.

The fact is that a large body of pacifist religionists are being exterminated, through oppression and execution in this very world today.

For anyone to avoid coming to the defense of the Baha'is would be tantamount to those who turned their backs on the Holocaust 40 years ago. Yes, the numbers are fewer; yes, the field is more restrictive, and undoubtedly if we cover our eyes and close our ears, we might easily avoid any account of the persecution.

And perhaps because of that very last reason, this newspaper continues to continue to make readers aware and alert to this 1980s' holocaust. We must all work to call attention to the Iranian "final solution" and blunt it. Else we are countertancing religious persecution whenever and wherever, past, present and future.

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Happiness Is Trust In the Lord

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 6/17, 20-26. (R1) Jer. 17/5-8. (R2) 1 Cor. 15/12, 16-20.

Happiness is an elusive concept, but everybody wants it — and rightly so. The media suggest all the thousands of ways one can get happiness. All of them can be reduced to either persons or things.

Sunday's readings speak about happiness. But they say that the path to happiness is just the very opposite of the one to which the world points. Jeremiah said, "Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings," and Jesus said, "Woe to you rich" — who trust in things. For the eye is not filled with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Did not the wise man write: "I built myself houses ... made gardens and parks ... acquired male and female slaves ... amassed silver and gold and wealth of kings ... all human luxuries ... nothing my eyes desired did I deny ... behold! All was vanity." (Eccles. 2/4-11)

St. Augustine, who drank from broken cisterns all the way from Carthage to Milan, began his "Confessions," "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

For the heart is triangular and the world is round and so cannot fill the corners of the triangular heart — only the true God can!

And that is what the Sunday Scripture readings are saying. "Happy is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is in the Lord." (R1) And "Woe to you rich, for your consolation is now." (R3)

What both Jeremiah and Jesus were saying is that if one sets his heart and bends all his energies on getting the things the world values, he'll probably get them — but that, very likely, is all he'll ever get. He's had it!

But if, on the other hand, one sets his heart on trying to do God's will, he'll run into all kinds of trouble. Because he is honest, the sharks of this world will feed on him and he'll probably be poor. Because he is gentle and kind, the ruthless, who will think he is weak, will step all over him and he will weep. Because the standards he lives by reproach the worldly, they'll persecute him. But still he'll be happy here and eventually hereafter.

One of the merriest men in England at the time of Henry VIII was not Henry with all his wives, power and pelf. It was St. Thomas More. Even when writing so serious a book as the ideal state — a Christian version, so to speak, of Plato's "Republic" — he titled it "Utopia," the Greek word for "no place."

The greatest men of Europe in the 16th century, men like Erasmus, loved to wine and dine at More's table, because of the merriment of his home.

In 1535 when More refused to put his trust in princes but only in God, he was condemned to die by beheading. On the way up the stairs to the scaffold, he said merrily to the Lieutenant of the Tower, "These stairs are pretty shaky; they ought to be repaired for someone could get hurt going up them. I pray you, Sir, see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself." And just before the axeman wielded the death-blow, Thomas stopped him for a moment to move his beard from off the chopping block, explaining that it had never committed treason, "why should it be cut?"

And so he died with merriment in his heart and a joke on his lips.

Those who live by Christ's teachings are always happy and their life story ends happily. In his last letter to his beloved daughter Meg, More wrote: "... heartily pray for me that we may yet hereafter all meet together in heaven merrily."

and Opinions

Will Boycott Hepburn Films

Editor:

Recently I received a letter from Katharine Hepburn and the American Federation of Planned Parenthood. The letter was a plea from Miss Hepburn for money to support the "pro choice" movement.

I answered her letter with another letter, rather than money. Until I received her plea, I've never gotten involved in this issue. Although I had definite feelings, I sat idle. I do believe in pro choice, but I differ on when the choice should occur. In short, the choice should occur before the sexual act takes place.

When I look at my two girls, my heart bleeds for those who've been wasted by abortion. I suggest all who are pro-life to use your rights as Americans and be counted. Write to your congressman, governor and president. And as a symbol of unity and support for pro-life, I suggest we boycott all of Miss Hepburn's movies. Let's be heard!

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Was Column Condensing?

Editor:

My reading of "Liturgy of the Eucharist" (Insights in Liturgy by Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, 1-19) left a hollow feeling in me. From the title of the article, a clear message should have come through, but was not stated: THE REAL PRESENCE.

There appeared to be a certain condensation in the statement "Eucharist, of course, is not a magic moment when suddenly Christ ... present in bread and wine like an invader from outer space awaiting the command to descend."

The Mass is a sacrifice, during which, through the words of a priest, the bread and wine become the Body

and Blood of Jesus Christ. When the consecrated Host is raised and I pray, "My Lord and My God," I acknowledge this privately. Through this letter, I acknowledge this publicly.

Is the absence of affirmation in the article a lack of faith? An accidental omission? What it is not, is good theology. The whole truth of the Eucharist was missing from this article.

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Priests Were Missed

Editor:

Where were the Roman clergy?

During the week of Jan. 23-26, the local churches of Elmira sponsored an Ecumenical Preaching Mission. Ms. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a Roman Catholic laywoman from Rochester, was guest speaker.

The apparent lack of presence on the part of our Roman clergy not only saddened many but I felt was lacking in the spirit of openness and hospitality during a week designed to foster unity.

Ada's theme was "Thirst for Justice and You Will See God."

Many parishes were listed as contributing money but it appears to fall short when it is not backed by presence and participation.

As our Roman clergy so often challenge us to conversion, may they also accept the challenge to instruct not only in word but also by action and presence.

Margie Flynn
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The Reflection Of Violence

Editor:

The datelines were thousands of miles apart but the rejection of violence joined the continents on Jan. 16 (Elmira Sunday Telegram, Page 10A).



Christian and Moslem religious leaders, meeting in Vienna to examine nuclear arms from a standpoint of faith and morals, called for an end to the arms race that cannot be "morally justified" — producing ever more "sophisticated agents of annihilation at enormous costs and diverting resources that could feed, clothe, house and cure millions of people."

Reflecting on abortion, Cardinal Cooke called for a rededication to the sanctity of human life and protection for every human being at every moment of existence.

In a speech to the Vatican diplomatic corps, Pope John Paul II spoke out against capital punishment, asking world governments to grant clemency to the prisoners on death

row. The pope, calling dialogue the only road to peace, urged the United States and the Soviet Union to disarm simultaneously and said that "foreign interference in Central America aggravates the tension there."

The three separate articles appearing together on one page, whether planned by the Elmira Star Gazette or coincidental, reveal the extent to which violence has become part of our society, violent situations all linked by a tragic disregard for human life.

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Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writer's signature, full address and telephone number. They should be sent to Opinion, Courier-Journal, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, no longer than 1 1/2 pages.

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

Because submitted opinions exceed the space for letters, we publish only original letters addressed to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent elsewhere. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.