

Editorials

ERA . . . Again

It is unfortunate that Gov. Mario Cuomo has reintroduced the Equal Rights Amendment into the state political arena. The financial cost of the looming repeat battle will be immense. But that is not the point.

It is unfortunate that the ERA battle will be resumed because it will revive old divisiveness. But even that is not the point.

Many people, men included, want to secure the basic justice of equal rights for all Americans regardless of sex. Many do not see ERA as the route to such justice. But neither is that the point.

The point is that ERA, instead of securing such rights, may actually be a Pandora's box of unknown proportion. The ERA language is so simple that it seems above controversy -- "This bill would amend the state constitution to provide that the equality of rights under law shall not be denied or abridged by the state or any subdivision on account of sex." Simple. Too simple.

Our neighboring state of Pennsylvania has just such an amendment and early in March a judge took those simple words and used them as basis to remove limits on Medicaid funding of abortions. The case will be appealed, but once and for all time, unfortunately, the purity of ERA has been tainted and its language opened to manipulation. That is the point.

Many who have favored the ERA in the past now have reservations.

Church officials in the diocese of Portland, Maine, (which covers the whole state) who formerly were strong ERA adherents have reversed position now, because of the Pennsylvania decision.

And Washington just last Friday, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops went on record as

opposing ERA unless it includes language which does not guarantee abortion on demand or its funding. In Albany, two state legislators -- Sen. John Marchi and Assemblyman Gary Proud (of Rochester) -- have quickly introduced an amendment to ERA excluding abortion as a guaranteed right. The State Catholic Committee will not support ERA without that alteration.

Even sadder, the Pennsylvania decision has opened doubts on other scores. For instance, concerning nonpublic schools -- will a court somewhere decide that all-girl or all-boy schools are unconstitutional?

Many who opposed ERA from the beginning saw it as unleashing unknown forces into society. Those who saw the terse phraseology of ERA as preventing such excursions scoffed at such fears as old wives' tales. But already in Pennsylvania, one of those tales, the one connecting abortion to ERA, has become real.

The governor will not support the amendment excluding abortion from ERA. He seems stubbornly determined to revive the ERA fight, thus reintroducing more divisiveness into an already fractured society.

The governor belongs to the "I am opposed to abortion but will not impose my opinion on others club." Too bad for unborn children! Obviously, such a hiding place for a governmental leader is ridiculous. There is hardly a political issue where adherents of one side or the other don't try to legalize their opinions. Indeed, the governor does just that when he vetoes, and properly so, capital punishment despite its obvious popularity. He does it when he re-introduces ERA despite the dire consequence it portends not only on the immediate legislative battlefield but also as inflaming the already hot war over legalized abortion.

Because of the political double standard many politicians espouse on abortion, this fragmenting issue roars on and on. Now it has polluted the ERA;

it has become something unintended by its original sponsors.

A spokesman for the State Catholic Conference said that it is unlikely that ERA will come up in the legislative immediately mostly because it is in recess until May 1. However, those who fear the connection between the amendment and abortion should start now to make opinions known to state legislators. The Proud bill is A10732; the Marchi bill S849.

Crossroads II

One of the basic ideas of the highly successful Crossroads II, which is composed primarily of Bishop Matthew H. Clark's journeys through the diocese, is that neither it nor the spirit engendered should fade with the passing of Easter Sunday.

Far from it. The journey will continue right up to Pentecost Sunday, June 10, when the Church returns to "ordinary" time. Bishop Clark will stay the course with confirmations, RCIA functions, deacon ordinations and other episcopal duties keeping him on the go.

Another facet of this year's Crossroads is the focus on the challenge of peace in light of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter, the first anniversary of which is nearing. The journey indeed continues.

While Easter commemorates and repeats the greatest happening in all history, so, too, should the days following reflect the times of the early Church when the disciples of Jesus Christ began to spread out over the world taking the Gospel message with them. In that same spirit, the 1984 disciples of Jesus right here in the Rochester diocese should continue the pilgrimage, basking in the warmth of the inheritance of that first Easter and armed with the vigor of the last, to take forth the Good News.

The journey continues, not only for Bishop Clark but for all who would keep up with Jesus Christ.

and Opinions

Mystifying Credentials

EDITOR:

With consuming interest, I've read Father Hohman's column of 4-4-84. In it, he includes a letter from an anonymous M.C., whom he identifies only as "a good friend and perhaps wiser head." That "friend," in pellucid prose worthy of royalty, assumes to himself a certain authority and competence unexplained as he expatiates at length on the subject of Onanism.

The letter's author, M.C., is left anonymous throughout and his identity has puzzled this veteran reader. The first name that occurred to me was that of Maurice Chevalier, the famous French authority on amatory erotica. I dismissed him when I recalled that he is deceased. World War II Gen. Mark Clark also fell under the same rejection. Alas, who could it be? It must, I reasoned, be some rock-solid reactionary, of very rigid moral persuasion; for the letter to Father Hohman almost took on the tone of an avuncular censure. (Miniver Cheever? Mr. Chesterton?)

I wanted to write something to assure Father Hohman that I, for one, had never understood him to be approving of the practice in question, but only in a Christian and American way, to be probing "mitigating circumstances." Bill Buckley would do as much! After all, to set forth causes in a temperate way is not necessarily to sanction practices, or I learned another logic. (Mike Connolly?)

Nor do I want to seem in any way to endorse this insidious solitary sin so emotionally condemned by the Church, as M.C. insists. It should be obvious to the reader that, in submitting this

inquiry, I have evinced an unsubtle abhorrence of the very term commonly used to name the act in question, although both F.H. and M.C. use it; I have opted for the euphonious biblical euphemism.

(It couldn't be Mother Cabrini!)

Still, like Andy Rooney, I'm bothered by some things. Take for instance, inconsistency . . . especially in the Church; that bothers me. I can understand the heavy indictment of the evil of the self-abusive practice focused upon by Father Hohman and the "better head" of his enigmatic synecdoche. What bothers me is the total ignorability by the "ex cathedra" advisers of another heinous offense, equally rampant in our unholy time. I speak of smoking, smoking of cigarettes and all the other leafy carcinogens.

(Mr. Christian, in the log of HMS Bounty?)

I want to ask M.C. to expatiate on that silence. Why is this now firmly established violation of the Fifth Amendment, authenticated in its malefaction by no less a secular authority than the surgeon general as an instrument of both suicide and murder in intolerable numbers annually, not condemned as specifically and severely as is Onanism, patently a more private and limited social infraction, however repulsive.

(The movie star, Michael Caine? Tennis: Maureen Connolly?)

This writer believes both practices are reprehensible, and both, to Father Hohman's credit, are undoubtedly psychologically aberrant, inspired by some defect of imbalance in emotional security. It's the inequity of the several indictments that befuddles the thoughtful and good-willed

Catholic looking for consistency of teaching, and scandalizes the searching schismatic.

Isn't it time the Church looked to a more catholic compatibility of indictment, lest it be accused of yielding principle to the widespread popularity of smoking . . . "Why, even priests smoke!" Surely, when there is carcinogenic smoke, there is fire no less searing than in the flames of fleshly passion. One might wonder if this abuse -- in a new Sodom and Gomorrah -- rather than the feared nuclear holocaust, will be the more apocalyptic "fire next time," doomed to destroy mankind. M.C. and God forbid!

(Mama Cass . . . ? Mario Carlomagna of the Vatican Secretariat of State? That must be it!)

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Editor's Note: We assumed that reader Amann assumed the wrong identity of the M.C. of Father Hohman's column and informed him so. Reader Amann replied that he still thought the opinion should be published "to show, if nothing else, the several follies involved: 1. that of assuming a cryptic anonymity; 2. that of citing authorities only by initials which may be misinterpreted; and 3. the correspondent's folly of assuming with a certain presumptuous certainty."

Let Nature Do Its Work

EDITOR:

Two very important facts have been overlooked in designing the modern insect control programs. The first is that the really effective control of insects is that applied by nature, not by man. Populations of bugs are kept in check by something the

ecologists call the resistance of the environment. And this has been so since the first life was created. The amount of food available, weather and climate conditions, the presence of competing or predatory species, all are very important.

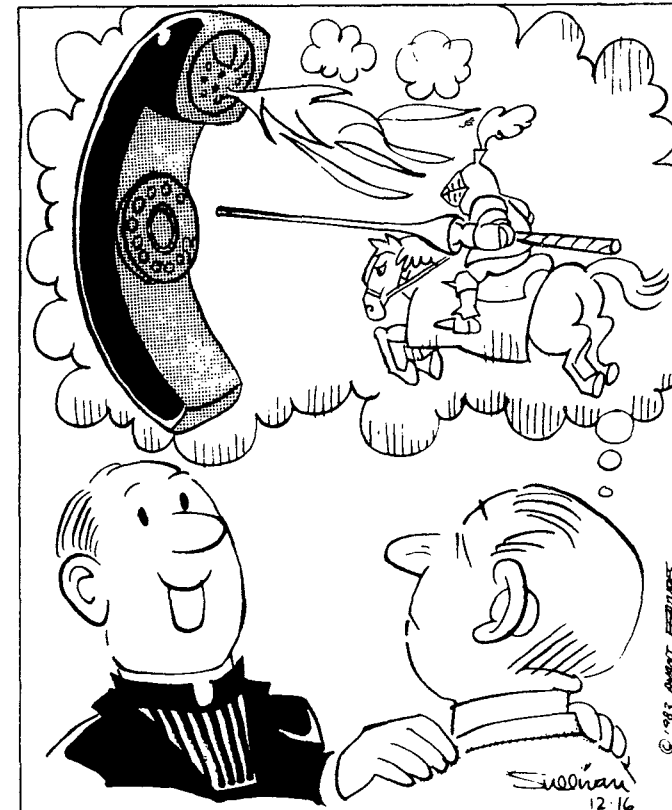
"The greatest single factor in preventing insects from overwhelming the rest of the world is the internecine warfare they carry out among themselves," said the entomologist Robert Metcalf. Yet most of the chemicals now used kill all insects, our friends and enemies alike.

The second neglected fact is the truly explosive power of a species to reproduce once the resistance of the environment has been weakened. The fertility of many forms of life is almost beyond our power to imagine. I remember from student days the miracle that could be wrought in a jar containing a simple mixture of hay and water merely by adding to it a few drops of material from a mature culture of protozoa. With a few days, the jar would contain a whole galaxy of whirling, darting life -- uncontrollable trillions of the slipper Paramecium, each small as a grain of dust, all multiplying without restraint in the temporary Eden of favorable temperatures, abundant food and lack of enemies.

We see the miracle of nature's control at work when the cod move through the winter seas to their spawning grounds, where each female deposits several million eggs. The sea does not become a solid mass of cod as it would surely do if all the progeny of all the cod were to survive.

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More Letters
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"HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT PHONING SOME PEOPLE FOR OUR BUILDING FUND DRIVE?"

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.