

## When there's no two ways about it

By Katharine Bird  
NC News Service

### Case 1.

The young husband and wife were deeply worried as they looked hopefully ahead to having a baby. In their family history a relative had died of Gaucher's disease, a relatively rare genetic disorder. The disease prevents lipids, or fats, from being eliminated from the body.

Hoping to better understand this, they consulted a genetic counseling team at a medical facility. What they learned both dismayed and tantalized them.

A geneticist told them that scientists had just succeeded in cloning (genetically duplicating) the gene for an enzyme that causes Gaucher's disease. This could pave the way for fixing or replacing the defective gene in the cells of victims, she explained.

The bad news was that the procedure probably wouldn't be available for at least 10 years.

### Case 2.

Since birth the child had suffered from a diseased liver. The toll was high, keeping the child's physical development far below that of others her age. When 2 years old she had a liver transplant. For a short time it looked as if the operation was a success.

Then, despite round-the-clock medical care, the child's condition began to deteriorate badly. The doctors informed the parents that a second liver transplant was her only hope.

While the call went out across the country for a donor, the anguished parents puzzled over the decision: Should they OK another traumatic operation for their little girl.

Both case histories are fictional. Both could be fact. For today technology is making available medical possibilities undreamed of previously.

But the possibilities also bring giant-sized problems. In the medical area, individuals are called on to make decisions at a time when "so many things come crashing in on them," said Father Kevin McCoy. "And there are no easy answers."

A priest of the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, Father McCoy is studying genetic counseling and Catholic health care at the Alphonsian Academy in Rome.

Decision making can be complicated because people jump to the conclusion that "if we can do something, we must," Father McCoy observed during a recent interview. There is a tendency to

"look at the end consequence and judge all by it."

Because of technological marvels, Father McCoy pointed out, "what is medically ordinary today is different from what it used to be." He thinks that sometimes "what is medically ordinary today could be considered extraordinary from a moral aspect."

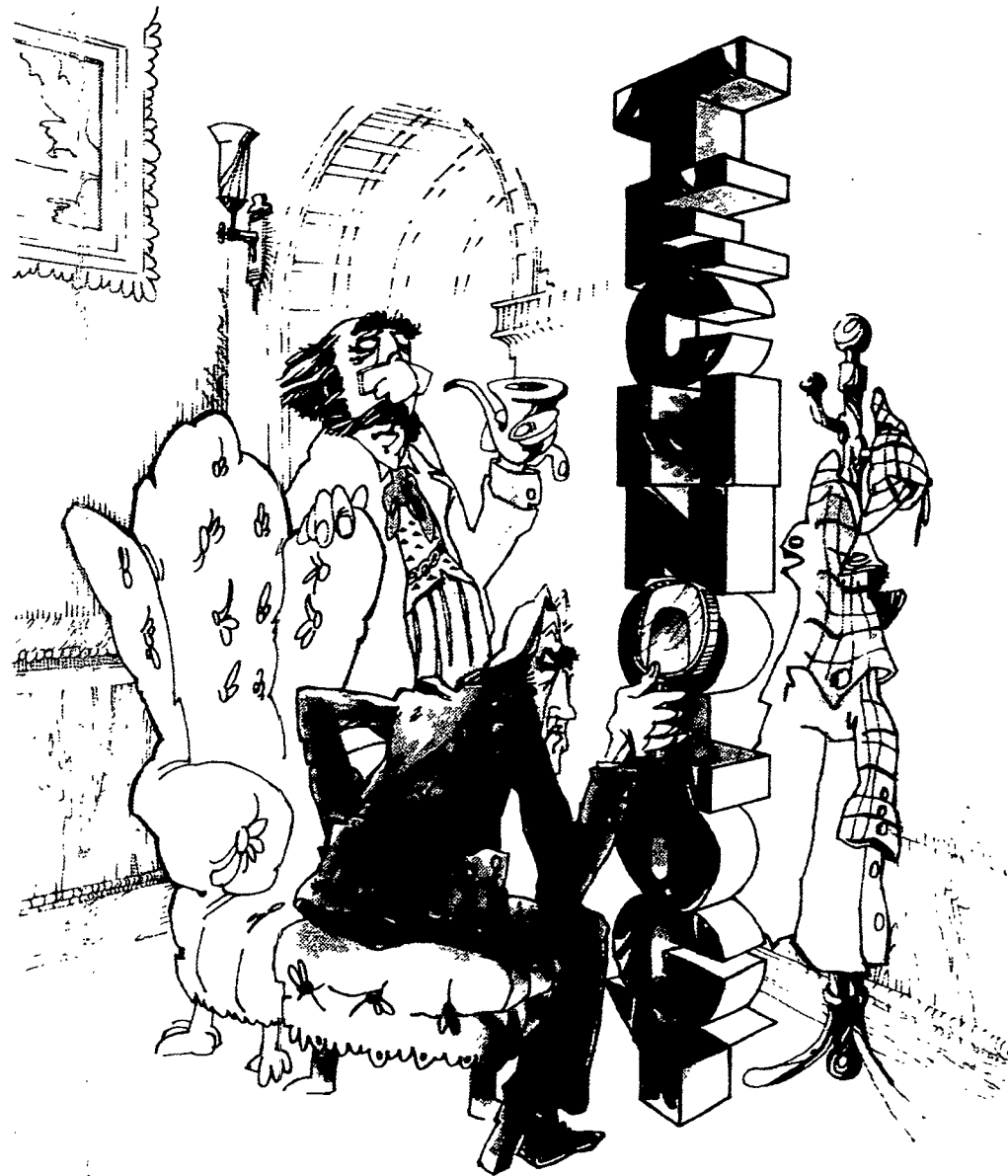
Asked about the ethical issues involved in a child needing a second organ transplant, Father McCoy stressed that the parents would have to make the final decision. The parents need "to do all that is possible" for the child, he said. But they may have to face up to the fact that "a certain point comes when you can do no more."

He explained that he chose his field "in hopes of being of help to people" as they make medical-care decisions.

In counseling and supporting people, Father McCoy works with certain key points. For instance, a "fundamental concern in medical ethics is the dignity of the human person," he said.

Keeping respect for human dignity foremost in mind can help people as they wrestle with difficult decisions. Father McCoy indicated. It can aid them as they try to balance the abilities of technology with the most profound needs of the human person.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)



## Freedom — not an absolute v

By Father John Castelot  
NC News Service

St. Paul's converts at Corinth were a troublesome lot. Like most communities, they represented many levels of society: free citizens and slaves, rich and poor, men and women, Jews and gentiles, simple and sophisticated.

It was the sophisticated who caused most of the trouble. The Corinthians of 2,000 years ago got as excited about philosophies as many people do today about sports. The Corinthians fancied themselves to be very intellectual.

In fact, though they were intelligent, immature pride blinded them to the weaknesses in their pet theories. Once the Corinthians subscribed to a fascinating idea, they judged everything against its background. This led to distortions of the truth.

Paul, for instance, had insisted

on the principle of Christian freedom: That salvation is a free gift from God, not something we earn. He put his case in a nutshell in Galatians 5:1: "It was for liberty that Christ freed us."

Like children with a new toy, some Corinthians were fascinated. Seeing and hearing nothing else, responsible freedom degenerated into unbridled license.

School was out! No more classes, no more homework, no more restrictions. The Corinthians could eat and drink what they wanted, sleep with whomever they wanted.

Not even the ordinary conventions of social decency bound them. One man married his stepmother and considered this quite smart, a protest against the strictures of social morality.

If some fellow Christians had serious misgivings about the propriety of buying meat used in pagan sacrifices, the Corinthians

did not. After all, they knew that idols were a fiction. So what difference did it make?

In all of this, the Corinthians forgot something very important: Freedom can never be absolute. As long as even just two people live together, the freedom of one is limited by the rights of the other.

As for eating meat already sacrificed to idols, Paul admitted the Corinthians were right. The fact that food is used in pagan sacrifice does not taint it.

But some Christians thought it did, Paul observed. He warned against parading freedom in such a way that others, who thought it wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols, were tempted to do what they believed was sinful.

We have obligations to our brothers and sisters, and those obligations limit our freedom.

People with an axe to grind love slogans and the Corinthians had