

Editorial

A lesson from a disbeliever

A recent discussion with a self-described agnostic sparked some thoughts on God's plan and our role in effecting it.

The discussion centered on various world crises — the Ethiopian famine, the earthquake in Mexico City, poverty, etc. How can these circumstances be allowed by a benevolent God? What can be gained by the death from starvation of an innocent child?

The argument is an old one, but one that still has no answers for many. The answer for believers is an old one, too: God did not create those circumstances, natural phenomena or human indifference did. And it is God's intention that we — each and every one of us — do what we can to help resolve the situations and to prevent them from occurring again.

But what can one individual do to help starving children in Ethiopia, the "agnostic" asked. What can the dollar he dropped in a poor box accomplish? Again the answer is simple: very little, alone. But together with the efforts of many other caring individuals, that contribution is great.

But again, he queried, how will helping the famine victims of today help those who will face starvation tomorrow, when the television cameras have been removed from Ethiopia and the world has forgotten?

That answer is not so simple. It requires of us as Christians a constant effort, one more difficult than dropping a dollar in a collection basket. It requires constant attention to world affairs, an awareness of the reasons for such calamities and a determination to work for the good of all the world's people.

The famine in Ethiopia did not happen overnight, as the media blitz may suggest. It was the product of a long drought, one experts warned of for some time before the great light of the television cameras shone on the situation. Similarly, the 1973 Supreme Court abortion ruling in Roe vs. Wade did not fall from the sky.

These situations came to be because we — a people of faith — were asleep. Now — after the fact — we must fight an uphill battle to aid famine victims and to fight for the rights of the unborn.

Apathy; the notion that individual efforts have no effect; the belief that someone else will do what is needed; and a complacent attitude about world affairs are the enemies in the battle to improve the lives of all humanity, whether born or unborn. Slapping a bandage on a crisis is not good enough; we must work to change the social and economic forces that produce the crisis. We must, as Jesus told us, be constantly vigilant.

Writer voices support of women's ordination

To the Editor:

The issue of the ordination of women has recently received much attention in the Courier-Journal. I was prompted to write by the quote Helen Hull Hitchcock included in a September 25 article ("Bishops' committee hears concerns of women, plans pastoral response," C-J, Page 6). She refers to those who support the ordination of women as a "disaffected minority," the implication being that, since they are a minority, they can be ignored.

It seems as though Mrs. Hitchcock fails to realize that the Catholic Church is not the United States of America, and it (the Church) is not governed by a Republican or Democratic government in which the majority rules.

The Church is governed by the truth. Doctrine in the Church is theoretically determined by what is true, which means that, if a minority speaks the truth, they cannot be ignored, regardless of how small they are.

In addition, I feel it is important to consider that perhaps it is not a minority of people who have no problem with the ordination of women. Perhaps the minority are those who are vocal about (opposing) it. I

know of many people who would support such a change in tradition but who are not activist about it, myself included.

In closing, when I look into the future, I see a Roman Catholic Church that ordains women, perhaps, and hopefully, within my lifetime. And in two or three hundred years, if civilization still exists, I think there will be many people who will look back in wonderment at the existence of a tradition that excluded women from ordination — just as I look back in wonderment, even bewildered,

at the Inquisition and the unjust treatment of Galileo.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: In the article cited above, Helen Hull Hitchcock, founder of Women for Faith and Family, referred to the idea that women as a group are alienated from the Church — or the rest of society — as a reflection of "the bias of a vocal, disaffected minority." Hitchcock was not singling out those who support the ordination of women, although she does mention later in the article their "loud voices of dissent" on such issues as the ordination of women.

Replacements suggested for 'Faith Today'

To the Editor:

I understand your decision to drop "Faith Today." I hope many readers will offer suggestions to fill the void.

Many of the Courier-Journal's news items have helped people from all walks of life to be aware of major events throughout the diocese, e.g., the Diocesan Leadership Conference, the diocesan forums on women, the missionary communities in Mexico and Chile, the adult education efforts to reach more of us, and the Activities Around the Diocese, which keep us informed. Your personal account of the Mexican quake was unusual.

Yet how people cope with the changing Church and with social problems is varied throughout our diocese. The problems of the elderly, of the unemployed and of the Church in reaching the unchurched are all underreported. Certainly people throughout the diocese can address these concerns.

Would the Courier-Journal consider having a roving reporter sound out communities on problems affecting us, so that we may better understand and, hopefully, serve those who have a marginal effect on the major events you so carefully report to us?

Would you respond to the Diocesan Leadership Conference findings that "52 percent of parishioners participate in no parish activity," by inviting more reflection and coverage of the lay ministries — not only those that are official but also those that deal with the problems mentioned by readers in letters to the editor (e.g., abortion, pornography, nuclear weapons, abuse in homes, divorce, and youth alienation)? These topics belong in the C-J, too.

Help us to know Christ in others.

Matthew Carney
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And opinions

Opinion column: forum for letters, chance for editorial clarification

To the Editor:

I have for many years been voicing my opinions in various newspapers, but this is the first time that one of my letters has been attacked and torn apart word by word. I thought that the purpose of the editors' notes was to briefly clarify, not to act as total rebuttal as if in debate. The editorial page is the place where one should be able to express one's opinion freely. In subsequent weeks, I would expect to see opposing views, but I think it is inappropriate for an editor to respond in the manner in which you did. It would seem as if you took my remarks on religious dress rather personally. At the risk of incurring another reply, I feel that I must clarify my statement.

In my first draft, I had given explicit details on how the pastoral assistant was dressed that day, but decided against using such description. I didn't intend for my statement to be a personal attack on her, and I wasn't questioning her faith, but used the story only as an introduction to point out what had fueled my thoughts. Along with presuming I had overstated the case, you perceived it as a personal attack.

The editor's note accuses me of being "caught up in concern over the things of this world — the garments now worn by religious." You agree, then, that they are worldly. Many of us who are responsible for fulfilling the temporal needs of husband and children are prey to materialism. That is why symbols are important to us; we need these visible reminders to focus our attention on God's kingdom, as we are frail human beings who all too often get caught up in the busy-ness of everyday life. Our Church is one rich in symbolism. The pouring of the water at baptism, the anointing with holy oils, the laying on of hands are only a few. What is the big objection to the religious wearing a symbol of their commitment?

The editor's note claims that modification is an attempt to eliminate concentration on worldly matters. I ask for whom? I was taught that the habit did that for the sisters. They didn't have to worry about what they were to put on. That left them time for their religious life. However, my complaint is not with the modification of the habit. It is with its total elimination. You chose to avoid my remarks on public servants' uniforms. They do not "take on the appearance of those they serve."

Mrs. Gerald Cala
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, the writer correctly assumes that her clarification will require another editorial reply. First of all, the editorial page is certainly a forum in

Writer decries acquisitive values of capitalist system

To the Editor:

What is the cause of the reduction in religious vocations? The clang of the cash register has been so loud that God's call can't be heard.

When you meet a new acquaintance, the first question you ask is, "What do you do?" And if he replies that he is a professional or businessman, his standing with you will be much higher than if he said that he was a clerk or factory worker. That is because our present acquisitive society rates people by the amount of money they make.

This materialist set of values is spawned by our capitalist economic system. We install as heroes people who make millions of dollars a year, such as rock stars, movie stars, TV personalities, athletes and their employers, who make even more money. In contrast, we see nurses and school teachers, who spend time and money on an education and are among those who contribute far more toward

the welfare of society, denied even decent wages by you and me, who vote down school bond issues and complain about working people who are striking for the decent wages that they deserve.

Our priorities place increasing armaments and financing foreign revolutions above the needs of the poor. Since our children observe our support of the acquisitive value system of capitalism, how can we expect them to become nurses, teachers, priests or nuns?

Walter O'Hagan
7 Sherman St.
Auburn

Perhaps Mrs. Cala is correct and the sisters wrong. Perhaps the sisters are right and Mrs. Cala is misinformed. Perhaps they are both right or both wrong. Who is to say? The Courier-Journal certainly does not wish to place itself in the position of moral arbiter, but we must "clarify" statements so that all readers can form the best-informed opinions possible.

Again, this editor's note does not express a judgment on the part of the Courier-Journal staff, but a clarification of the issue at hand. If we criticize a decision made by a given group, we must be certain that we understand why the members of that group came to the decision. We must also place ourselves in their shoes, and consider how we would respond under the circumstances.

Perhaps Mrs. Cala is correct and the sisters wrong. Perhaps the sisters are right and Mrs. Cala is misinformed. Perhaps they are both right or both wrong. Who is to say? The Courier-Journal certainly does not wish to place itself in the position of moral arbiter, but we must "clarify" statements so that all readers can form the best-informed opinions possible.

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Walter O'Hagan
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'On-duty' religious should appear publicly 'in uniform'

To the Editor:

I read with interest Mrs. Gerald Cala's letter (C-J, Sept. 25). I also read your response. However, Mrs. Cala's point is more than well taken — particularly the sentence in which she states: "But the Church decries the lack of vocations today."

Clothes may or may not "make the man," or lady in this case, but I agree wholeheartedly with Mrs. Cala. Sport or street clothes may have their place during "off-duty" hours, but certainly not during those times when the professional leadership of our religious is most importantly needed and required.

My question to the editor is, why then do all the vocational ads and literature discussing vocations to the priesthood or sisterhood show, very conspicuously, men and women of the religious orders and institutions "in uniform?"

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No disappointment in heaven

To the Editor:

May I refute a statement made in a letter that appeared in the edition of Sept. 25 (Opinion: "Mary's Birthday ignored")?

On Sept. 8, I was privileged to be present at the 10 a.m. Mass at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, of which I am a communicant. The entire congregation did, indeed, sing a hymn of praise in honor of the Blessed Virgin on the occasion of her birthday. I, for one, believe that there was no disappointment in heaven, but rather, only joy and gladness.

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