

Bishop's statement

Censuring Fr. Curran would threaten theological dialogue

I am aware that Father Charles E. Curran, a priest of the Diocese of Rochester and Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America, visited the offices of the Congregation for Doctrine and Faith on Saturday, March 8, 1986. I have communicated with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on this matter, to share with him some of my reflections about Father Curran, about the developments which have led up to this meeting, and about some of the pastoral implications which I foresee may result.

I speak now as Father Curran's bishop and friend, as a pastor having the care of the local Church of Rochester and as one who, with the College of Bishops, shares in solicitude for the entire Church.

Father Curran is a priest whose personal life could well be called exemplary. He lives simply and has a remarkable ability to combine a life of serious scholarship with a generous availability to a great variety of persons. My personal observation, supported by the testimony of many, is that Father

Curran is a man deeply committed to the spiritual life. I am personally aware of his commitment and know by the testimony of others that he is a respected spiritual guide for people who seek counsel in their journeys of faith.

As a theologian, Father Curran enjoys considerable respect, not only in our diocese, but across the country. He is unfailingly thorough and respectful in his exposition of the teaching of the Church. Indeed, I have heard it said that few theologians have a better grasp of or express more clearly the fullness of the Catholic moral tradition. In instances when Father Curran offers theological views which appear to be at variance with the current official statements of the Church, he always does so in a responsible manner. He is respectful of authority in the Church, treating and referring to persons in authority in a most Christian manner.

Some members of the Catholic Church have occasionally depicted Father Curran as

irreverent, disrespectful, disloyal and unprofessional. I believe he is none of these. Such judgments of this good priest are sometimes written by those in the Church who do not understand the probing and testing nature of the theological enterprise. This will remain a problem in our age of instant communication, wherein theologians have no quiet corner in which to attempt to deepen their understanding of our faith. Our concern for this persistent difficulty should not grow out of proportion, allowing fear of confusion to end the necessary growth of theology.

It is, I believe, commonly accepted in the Roman Catholic theological community that Father Curran is a moral theologian of notable competence whose work locates him very much at the center of that community and not at all on the fringe. I believe that perception is true.

If Father Curran's status as a Roman Catholic theologian is brought into question, I fear a serious setback to Catholic education and pastoral life in this country. That could happen in two ways. Theologians may stop exploring the challenging questions of the day in a creative, healthy way because they fear actions which may prematurely end their teaching careers.

Moreover, able theologians may abandon Catholic institutions altogether in order to avoid embarrassing confrontation with Church authority. Circumstances of this sort would seriously undermine the standing of Catholic scholarship in this nation, isolate our theological community, and weaken our Catholic institutions of higher education.

Alteration of Father Curran's mandate to teach as a Roman Catholic theologian would be an extremely painful experience for all of

us, and doubly so because the pain would be born of a common and intense love for the Church and a desire to be fully loyal to the Holy See.

The Church in the United States is a church which is struggling mightily to meet the challenge of Vatican Council II. Our bishops, priests, religious and other laity have shown a wonderful generosity and reverence for the Church's life and have given themselves unstintingly to her call for renewal. I believe that the vitality, creativity and genuine good-heartedness of our communities is a sure sign that this is true.

We have our faults, to be sure, and there have been false starts and mistakes, but we are a faithful people and we will continue to serve God's kingdom in the Church with generosity.

My hope is that together we can find better ways to recognize and be faithful to the nature of the particular churches and the communion they form with Rome as their center, and that the Holy See will regard the bishops of our country as ones who can appropriately and ably communicate to the Holy See the shape of and challenges to pastoral life in our particular churches.

My further hope is that an agreement will be reached which will allow Father Curran to continue serving the Church as a theologian and will promote resolution of theological differences through the normal channels of writing and debate.

I ask all who read these words to pray that God will guide and bring peace to those who are working to resolve this matter in the best interests of the Church.

And opinions

Sisters of Mercy urge support for U.S. test ban

To the Editor:

In their 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace, the United States Catholic Bishops called for an "early and successful conclusion of negotiations of a comprehensive test ban treaty." Such a test ban on nuclear weapons would contribute much to reducing the arms race.

During the past year, many proposals about nuclear arms have been made by the United States and the Soviet Union in relation to the Geneva Summit. One of these proposals, a verifiable, comprehensive test ban, has been adopted unilaterally by the Soviet Union.

August 6, 1985 -- the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima -- the Soviets stopped all nuclear weapons testing until January 1, 1986, as a way to invite the United States to join the moratorium. They then extended the time to March 31, 1986. The United States has refused to join.

Since the Soviets have accepted verifica-

tion measures, including on-site inspections; a test ban is technically possible. Now what is lacking is our moral will to stop the arms race.

This is the time for all of us to proclaim what is the best in our religious tradition: the peace that Jesus came to bring, refusing to use violence even in the face of violence. This is the time for us to uphold in public what is in the written moral teaching of our faith. This is the time for us -- this month of March -- to support an historic, moral option, a test ban ratified by our country.

Sister M. Gratia L'Esperance, RSM,
Mercy Justice coordinator, and:

Sister Janet Korn
Sister Joanne Bringley
Sister Mary E. Wintish
Sister Rosemary Sherman
Sister Patricia Beairst
Sister Nancy O'Brien
Sister Lucetta Sercu,

of the Mercy and Justice Committee

Disputes 'facts' cited by contra supporter

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to last week's letter (Opinion, Feb. 27: "Questions aid to Nicaragua"). I am a pledge signer: no aid to the contras.

As true Christians, we cannot agree with the killings and torture of innocent children, women and men by the contras, or with the destruction of day-care centers, hospitals and schools by the contras.

Their only aim is to terrorize the people. They seldom fight the government soldiers. So far, 1,200 people -- mostly civilians -- have been killed by them. We in America, however, seldom get to hear about this in the public media.

The writer of the letter in question is worrying about the military aid they (the Sandinistas) got from Russia? When a nation 100 times your size tries to overthrow your

government, mines your harbors and gives out a manual on how to kill your leaders -- a CIA manual -- what other choice would you have but to go out looking for help?

Nicaragua, a country 1/100th the size of the United States, doesn't and would never form a serious threat to the United States; the idea is ridiculous, and we should stop abusing their people because we don't like their form of government. A country that considers the welfare of its children a top priority deserves respect, not criticism.

Mr. Starkweather's figure regarding aid to Nicaragua by the Soviet Union is at least four times greater than the figure given by Secretary of State George Schultz (New York Times, Feb. 3, 1986). I respectfully suggest that he check the other facts he presents.

Lieve Seeger Demeyere
Lafayette Street Rochester

Decries misfortunes of Irish, cites their peaceful example

To the Editor:

As St. Patrick's Day draws near, we may reflect that Ireland was converted to Christianity without a single martyr. The thousands who have since died for the faith in Ireland have been victims of a foreign oppressor. Most were unfortunates like St. Oliver Plunkett who made no use of force. They were "sheep slaughtered for no other crime than being as God made them -- Irish."

The Catholics of the six counties of northeastern Ireland continue to suffer daily from discrimination and government violence because they refuse to abandon their national heritage symbolized by their religion. It is a living martyrdom.

Because of the propaganda war against them, they are condemned as terrorists

instead of being admired for patience and forbearance in the face of cruel provocation. Power brokers like Ian Paisley and Margaret Thatcher treat them as less than human, and Princess Margaret has publicly declared, "The Irish are such pigs."

Basic to the character of the Irish is their lack of aggression, a willingness to endure injustice rather than fight. Ireland is the only nation in Europe that has never attacked a neighbor. The Republic of Ireland has been a shining example to the world of tolerance and peace since its independence. The six counties are different only because they endure foreign misrule.

George M. Korb
St. Anthony-on-Hudson
Rensselaer, N.Y.

Thanking God for opportunity to participate in veneration

To the Editor:

You missed a golden opportunity if you could have attended and did not attend the novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, given by Father Albert Shamon at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Elmira. It was a chance of a lifetime to see and hear the priest who writes the weekly, beautifully worded column, "A Word for Sunday" in the Courier-Journal. He not only knows his

facts but has the voice with which to deliver them. I'm sure that everyone who was present came away with a deeper love of Our Blessed Mother. His daily Holy Hour was also an inspiration, and I for one thank God that I was able to participate. It was a wonderful way to begin Lent.

Isobel McCarthy
Hoffman St
Elmira

On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy



\$38,000 Catholic Dissident Ad

EDITOR'S NOTE: For reasons as yet unknown, Father Cuddy's column was not received in the mail at the Courier-Journal offices in time for publication in the previous two editions. We wish to thank our readers who have called and written to express their concern about this unforeseen hiatus.

Q. What did you think of that pro-choice ad in the New York Times, Sunday, March 3, protesting the Church's teaching that you can't be a practicing Catholic and accept abortion? It had 1,000 names.

A. I had to get a magnifying glass to decipher the names. I am told the ad cost about \$38,000. What a pity the money wasn't given to Mother Theresa. But lots of that crowd do not approve of Mother Theresa.

Q. But what did you think of the ad?

A. There are two things to consider: 1) the ad itself, and 2) the persons who affiliated themselves with the ad. Let's address the first. The big print read: "We (the 1,000 Catholic malcontents, which strangely include the Maryland Lutheran Theological Seminary) affirm our solidarity with all Catholics whose right to free speech is under attack." On Sunday night the TV news presented the ad.

Then a few innocuous people were asked by a reporter what they thought. The first said, "Scandalous." It was not clear whether the dissident Catholics were causing a scandal, or the Church. The most sensible opinion came from quite an unacademic young woman who said, "If they claim to be Catholics, they should go along with the pope and the Church. If they won't, they shouldn't claim to be Catholics."

Q. But the contestation is not about abortion but about freedom.

A. Who's kidding whom? It will be claimed that the issue is not abortion but freedom to be a Catholic and deny what the Church teaches. They would have a Church established by God, yet weasle about whether one can destroy an unborn child or not. No Catholic is free to deny the Trinity or the Real Presence or the sanctity of marriage. St. Thomas teaches that "two contradictories

cannot both be true at the same time and under the same circumstances." These people want us to accept contradictions in faith, and elegantly call it "pluralism." You notice that not one bishop is a signer of the \$38,000 ad.

The ad concludes, "Unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is doubtful; charity in everything." Catholics are strong for unity of faith, and there is no doubt among true Catholics that the destruction of unborn babies, whether by salt solution, knives or suction, is a horrible evil; and there is no charity in buying a \$38,000 ad proclaiming that any Catholic can calmly teach any such thing.

Q. What is your second point?

A. The names of the signers: most of the expected ones, lots of unknown. Of course Rosemary Reuther, who is no more Catholic than Brigham Young. She who is a darling of the radical feminists has declared that she has more devotion to the goddess Isis than to Mary.

In 1967, I made my retreat at Auriesville, under Father Dineen, who was rector of Jesuit Shrub Oak novitiate, since closed. My notes record: "After lunch I talked with retreat master Father Dineen. We sat under a tree and exchanged views about the currents in the Church. He smiled about the New Breed and is optimistic about their stabilizing, though he is conscious of a great hostility to the institutional Church.

"He suggests that the most insidious danger we will have is 'The Third Way.' In this, Catholics will not externally leave the Church. Hence, no schism, because that's too much trouble. But they will remain within the Church, accepting what they will, the morality which they find satisfying, the Mass and the Sacraments, as the spirit moves them -- but only tenuously remaining part of the institutional Church, as a kind of ecclesiastical fifth column." And that ad, and those people, including "The Memphis Women's Flood Distribution Network" (how did they get there, I wonder?) are a manifestation of his prophecy.