

C-J Opinions

EDITOR'S NOTE: For the past three weeks, this page has been filled with commentary on the case of Father Charles Curran. In an attempt to allow all writers to have their say, we have published letters on this matter to the exclusion of all other topics. But judging from the letters that have been on backlog all month, there are a number of other topics of interest to our readers. Although we have not yet had space to print each letter we have received on the Curran controversy, we must draw the line somewhere. This, therefore, is the final issue in which we will publish letters on Father Curran, until such time as his case is resolved.

Church must avoid polarization, seek unity on theological teachings

To the Editor:

As an active, lifelong, practicing Catholic, I feel that too many of us sit on our hands too often and too long while our Church is gradually being undermined, not by outsiders but from within. Catholicism must be strong to have lasted for so long. Oh there have been problems like the breakaway of Martin Luther, but the Catholic Church has survived. Today, we are in the midst of problems. Remember these words from scriptures, "Oh ye of little faith"? Is it possible that we could replace them to fit today's picture, "Oh ye of man-made faith"?

The Second Vatican Council brought forth what was to be a revitalization of our Church, but now I wonder if it was premature. So many times one reads of the good things that could come about from Vatican II if the true intent was met. What happened? It seems as if a Pandora's box opened and out of the woodwork came thousands of experts on theology to implement programs to revise the scriptures, sacred songs, catechism, the lifestyle of the religious, redesign of churches, and the list goes on and on...

Now the latest in the long list of events to further add to the deteriorating Catholic world while non-Catholic sit back and watch the show and atheists wait to move in on the spoils. A teaching priest who wears secular clothes has been straying from theological outlines and superimposing his own personal interpretations and disagreement of Catholic teachings. From the Vatican came a warning to cease or lose the right to teach Catholic theology. Bishop Clark stated to the media that if the Vatican penalizes Father Curran it will do much harm to the Catholic educational process, but failed to state the ultimate effect on students if Father Curran and any other theology teachers continue to defy the Vatican. Does our Church need that?

Our religion is something to be cherished, not treated like a law enacted by politicians and amended or repealed by vote. The rights of a mortal certainly are to be cherished and respected, but when these stray into ego trips, then something must be done. We are all God's children, and when any stray punishment is exacted. If 10 people are asked to interpret what a word or sentence means, we may hear 10 different meanings. Today millions of people are interpreting the

scriptures every day, and who is correct?

The pope is the earthbound head of the Catholic Church, and with him are hundreds of learned theologians with many years of scripture study. Do we suppose that one, Father Curran, can be right while the Vatican with the pope as its head is in error? Consider our young, forming children, the future leaders in the Church and in our general life. Will these children see our religion as Christ meant it to be or will they treat it as an elective, something for many disputes? Will they know our religion for what it is meant to be or will they become polarized by infighting religious. Bishop Clark has become polarized; he has become an American Catholic, not a world Catholic.

We need prayers for our bishops and religious, that they will review their priorities and goals, and strive for unity in the theological arena. So many of the laity are like trusting sheep desperately needing trustful herders. The laity needs religious who can be looked up to, but the supply is decreasing. Spiritual leaders are a must, as are leaders in everyday life. We need priests and religious whose main thrust is to teach and maintain us as God's children. We need them to provide an example for our young people as promoters of our faith. Examples so good that the young men and women will want to join the religious life. We need this influence on the young people, a public example of dedication, joy and pride, not defiance, egotism, disruption or indifference.

Yes, we are in a dangerous time when religions could well end up on the chopping block of despair. We are scattering in all directions, a trend that can only weaken our churches. Consider this scenario: churches competing for people to fill their pews; altars designed like showcases to hold trophies and incentives; books of coupons for baptisms, weddings, confirmations, first Communions, Masses; a computer and viewer in each surviving parish, linked to a master computer at diocesan headquarters where a central Mass would originate.

God help us if this ever was to happen. Far fetched? Nothing is impossible today, we often hear. We have a lot to think about.

**Michael Tarkulich
Curtis Road
Hilton**

Injustice greater sin than sexual misconduct

To the Editor:

How great an importance did Christ attach to sexual sins? When the Pharisees asked Christ to punish the adulteress, Christ replied, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

When the Pharisees left without condemning her, Christ told the adulteress, "Neither will I condemn you." (John 8:7-11)

In contrast, Christ showed what He thought of money changers who caused poverty, injustice and neglect of the poor when He said, "As long as you did not do it for one of those least ones, you did not do it for me. And these will go into everlasting punishment." (Matthew 25:45-46.)

This shows that Christ considered the sins of those who neglect the poor and treat their fellow men with injustice as much greater crimes than sexual sins.

Yet Cardinal Ratzinger and the conservatives want to punish people for merely holding dissenting opinions on non-infallible teaching regarding sex, even though they lead exemplary personal lives.

You have never seen Cardinal Ratzinger punish or even threaten to punish conservatives when they dissent from bishops' pastorals on economic injustice or papal encyclicals on social and economic injustice.

Cardinal Ratzinger never punishes administrators of Catholic institutions who fire workers for joining labor unions or striking, both of which are condemned in papal social encyclicals.

Cardinal Ratzinger's actions against Hans Kung in Europe, Leonardo Boff in Latin America and Charles Curran in North

America are intended as intimidating warnings to all Catholics on these three continents that they have no more right to think or dissent from non-infallible Church teachings than the people in the Soviet Union have to dissent from the decrees of the Politburo.

When is the Church going to condemn the class war that is being waged against the working class by Ronald Reagan and right-wing dictators?

**Walter O'Hagan
Sherman Street
Auburn**

Urges all to read article again, remember God's compassion

To the Editor:

My congratulations to Karen M. Franz and the Courier-Journal for the excellent and sensitive coverage of the Father Curran controversy.

I strongly urge that those who are pro, con or ambivalent carefully reread the article ("Implications of Curran case interpreted at symposium," C-J March 27), keeping in mind God's love and compassion for troubled spirits. Those acting in right conscience deserve our support and prayers, not condemnation.

The Church is strong. Our faith would be pretty weak if we were to think that the Church would fall apart because of sincere, intellectual study conducted under humble supplication to the Holy Spirit for guidance.

**Grace B. Carnes
Eagle Ridge Circle
Rochester**

Disparages promotion of 'teachable moment'

To the Editor:

Ask any Roman Catholic! Since Vatican II there has been the attitude that it would be "demeaning" for us to be given answers to inquiries about the teachings of our Church. After all, this is the age of the laity, and we are enlightened enough to come up with our own answers. All we do is to gather together a few facts and then rely on our consciences.

Now, after more than 20 years, we have become the objects of a "teachable moment" (C-J, March 27). All of a sudden it seems that we the faithful do not know the difference between infallible and non-infallible Church teachings and other things like the history of dissent. However, Vatican II did not change the fact that we are obliged to obey the teachings of the Magisterium and not just those that are infallible. As for the history, we have only to refer to King Henry VIII and Martin Luther to remember two dramatic examples of how the Church has

Holy Rosary priests support edict of Sacred Congregation

To the Editor:

We the priests at Holy Rosary Parish wish to go on record as firmly supporting the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in its recent action — approved by Pope John Paul — regarding Father Curran.

Vatican Council II has decreed, "Religious submission of will and mind must be shown, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra ... His (manifest) mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly ... from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine..." *Lumen Gentium* #25.

We regret the confusion and hurt caused for many Catholics in these recent days, especially for those who have struggled to follow the constant teaching of the Church in regards to human sexuality.

**Father Robert A. Meng
Father Timothy E. Horan
Father Walter J. Kohl
Father Emmett Murphy
Holy Rosary Rectory**

handled dissenters during past confrontations.

It is unfortunate that the Friends of Father Curran elected to limit their recent symposium to an "exchange of information" — one way? — rather than a debate about whether Father Curran is "correct." Many of us are disturbed by the fact that the "teachable moments" seem to come only when someone like Father Curran is being questioned by the Vatican, but are missing at times when we most need to hear the true teachings of the Church on matters as important as human sexuality.

**Mary L. Greisen
Pittsford-Palmyra Road
Fairport**

By supporting Father Curran, bishop endorses his opinions

To the Editor:

Bishop Matthew H. Clark by his support of Father Charles Curran has disavowed his loyalty to the Holy See, and it causes great anguish to the orthodox Roman Catholic community. The bishop by his support of such an anti-Catholic as Curran puts himself in the same category as Curran. By his support of Curran he blatantly puts his weight behind acceptance of abortion, contraception, homosexuality, masturbation and all manner of poisons already condemned as such by the Vatican.

The crowning achievement of this bishop who is out of step with Rome, to say the least, is his support of the communist government in Nicaragua. Is it any wonder that this apostate is losing the financial support of the Catholic community here in the Diocese of Rochester? Let him publicly swear allegiance to the Holy See without qualification or let him continue to lose the support of the orthodox Catholics of this diocese.

**Gerard G. Klueber
Ellicott Street
Rochester**

On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy

Piety of the people

In May, 1978, Father Bart O'Brien was unable to give the annual retreat for the Southern Tier women, and arranged for me to substitute. En route to the retreat in Mt. Pocono, I was notified that my brother, Joe, an undertaker in Auburn, had died suddenly. It was devastating news, since he was closer to my heart than anyone in the world. But the 80 retreatants could not be left high and dry. So the retreat was given, and at 2:30 Sunday afternoon, I began the sad trek to Auburn for my brother's wake and funeral.

Outside Syracuse, near Elbridge, I picked up a hitchhiker. "Hop in," I said.

He was about 20 years old, and not very prepossessing. Observing the clerical collar, he said, "Are you a Catholic priest?"

"Sure am," I replied. "The genuine article." He had a medal hanging from his neck, so I said, "Are you a Catholic?"

"Yes," he answered. "But you don't go to Mass much, do you?"

"I went last Christmas," he replied. "Now that was good. But didn't you go Easter, too?" I queried. "Most people go Christmas and Easter."

He paused, thinking. "No," he said, "it was Palm Sunday. I remember because I made a cross from the palm, like my grandmother taught me. Then in the afternoon I went to the cemetery and put it on the grave of a buddy who was killed in an automobile accident. We were good friends."

The incident impressed upon me the strength and value of sacramentals. Professor James Hitchcock, in his superb book, *Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism*, has a section on what he calls "folk religion." By this he does not mean superstitions, but rather little practices and devotions and sacramentals dear to the hearts of most Catholics: religious pictures and statues, in line with the doctrine of the Communion of

Saints; medals, holy water, genuflections, rosary, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, 40 Hours, processions, lovely First Holy Communion practices, May crownings, First Fridays — yes, and even the long discontinued "Pledge" to abstain from alcohol, a promise commonly made at confirmation in parishes of Irish ethnicity.

Recently, Bishop Dennis Hickey sent me a newspaper clipping about a pledge, instituted by Bishop Walter W. Curtis of Bridgeport, Conn. At the confirmation rite, as the confirmands are renewing their baptismal promises, the bishop proposes: "Do you reject the misuse of alcohol and drugs, which are special obstacles to our living in the freedom of God's children?" Hopefully, they respond, "I do." If that pledge is kept, it will help give a foundation for stability among our badgered youth.

Sophisticates sometimes smile patronizingly at these heart-warming devotions and sacramentals. But I think the young man who made the cross of palm, so taught by his grandmother, and who placed it with unaffected piety on the grave of his buddy, was nearer the spirit of our Lord than airy religious dabblers who enjoy being part of a fellowship of elite spirituality, and who smile at "the piety of the people."

A dozen years ago, I escorted a group from the diocese to Mexico. We stopped at many churches, replete with statues, paintings, candles and votive offerings; the Blessed Sacrament was in a central locus of honor. In every church, we found Mexicans in quiet and unobtrusive prayer. The one exception was a modern church in Cuernavaca. It was immaculate, bright and spacious, with modernistic paintings. It was without statues, candles or an obvious place of honor for the Blessed Sacrament.

The only people in the church were a few tourists who had come to see the modernistic paintings and architecture. There was no one there to pray.

