

C-J Opinions

Today's Church not restricted to European experience

To the Editor:

I found Edward Gaffney's letter to the editor (Opinion, July 3: "Writer questions choice of Vatican II quotations used in Curran forum") a bit unclear. I would like to ask Mr. Gaffney this question: "Where do you experience the reality we call 'Church?' Is it in the parish family in which you regularly worship within the diocese and town where you live? Or is it in the city of Rome, Italy, thousands of miles away?"

Jesus is recorded in scripture as having said, "Where two or more are gathered together in My name, I am in their midst." The Trinity, moreover, is so much more than an intellectual concept; it embraces females and males of every race and color throughout the world.

In sending the Holy Spirit, God affirmed and confirmed our relationship to Himself as His children. Jesus is quoted in Luke 8:21: "My mother, brothers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice." With

these words, Jesus changed the basis of relationships from what the Hebrew people had traditionally believed.

So many people in the Catholic Church today seem to confuse the pope with the Holy Spirit. While the pope is a symbol of our unity, the Holy Spirit is the cause of it and of our relationship to one another as sisters and brothers in the Lord. Jesus seemed to understand that putting God's word into practice did not happen all at once in the life of a person. Recall His parable about the Sower and the seed. Taking the word from our ears to our lives involves a journey — a movement from hiddenness to openness, from lack of perception to full understanding.

Jesus' style of caring always empowered people; they became stronger, more faithful, able to stand on their own and able to arrive at new understandings. Caring for people, is taking away the obstacles that weigh them down and keep them helpless and dependent. Sad to say,

the religious "magisterium" of the faith tradition in which He had been born and raised did not approve. Its teachers weren't really interested in learning anything new about God. They believed they already had all the answers. So they rejected Jesus and the deeper relationship with God that He was offering to them.

God hasn't abandoned us. The Holy Spirit is still present in the Church — in the people; the bishops, including the pope; in the priests, deacons and religious. Together we can all help discern how the word of God can be incarnated at the local level. Americans are different from Europeans. We incarnate the word of God as it comes to us differently than it comes to Europeans, to Eurasians and even to Africans. The scope of the modern Church is a global reality compared to the limited European scope of the Church in the Middle Ages.

The Church doesn't always have all the knowledge, all the answers. You can see how one generation — which at the time may be thought to be far out — actually prepared for the next period of history through growth and understanding of a faith that was meant from its inception to be unfolded slowly. For example, every major theologian at Vatican Council II had been silenced by Pope Pius XII at one time or another in the years prior to the council. Pope John XXIII exonerated these theologians when he invited them to the Second Vatican Council. The pre-existing mentality didn't understand that unity can exist in diversity and that new terminology can issue forth to express doctrine.

Sometimes a theologian may discover that a teaching contains an error and, therefore, he has to speak up, has to dissent. Initially, new knowledge can be threatening, as was Galileo's claim that the Earth was round. The Church was wrong in its response to that issue, as we

now know.

In his letter, Mr. Gaffney focused on the "authority" of the bishops under the "authority" of the pope. The focus today is on the pope in communion with the bishops. And we are also in the process of growing more aware of the conferences of bishops and the role they have played since Vatican Council II.

Both at the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council, some of the most ardent centralists accepted the dignity of the episcopacy as a fact, and even used the collegial nature of the hierarchy as a point of reference from which papal authority could be derived. But the First Vatican Council ended so abruptly and unsatisfactorily that German bishops, as well as others, declared that their role in union with the pope was based on divine authority and that they were not mere agents or delegates of the pope. Both Pius IX and Leo XII pronounced this as correct.

We can love one another and still differ; we can differ and still love one another. It's not a question of one or the other; it is both. Unity can and does exist in diversity. The Holy Spirit can protect a pope from writing error when he writes an encyclical, or the Holy Spirit can move the faithful to withhold their assent to his encyclical if it does contain an error.

There is still so much more to be done in the years ahead. We need everyone — all of us in the Church and those of good will beyond Church boundaries — to creatively seek listen to what the Spirit is saying to each of us, both as individuals and as a body of Christ. Together, with the Lord leading, let us turn the world upside down as those first-century Christians did.

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Seeks clarification of Curran statement

To the Editor:

Father Edwin Metzger's letter, "Study theologians' efforts: stop name calling" (Opinion: June 5), recommends only the works of one theologian, Charles Curran, for study. For objectivity and balance I recommend the book by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Ratzinger Report." Surely if the press has been able to mislead us on Charles Curran for 20 years, as Father Metzger suggests, and if we do not have the time, money or inclination to read dissident Curran's 20 theological tomes, there is reason to believe that Cardinal Ratzinger has read Curran and found his views antithetical to Catholicism, as did the letter writers whom Father Metzger alleges are "name callers." Isn't there a certain temerity in name calling letter writers for "name calling?"

As a Right to Life and a parishioner of Father Metzger, I have twice discussed with him that I read in the Courier-Journal about a year ago that Charles Curran has stated that individuation does not occur until 12 or 13 weeks after conception, and that abortion may be permissible up to that point. Father Metzger, who apparently has read Curran's books,

maintains that it is not true that this is Curran's view. A Courier-Journal editor's note or comment would be appreciated on this matter so vital to the unborn.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Father Curran certainly did not say that individuation occurs at 12-13 weeks. He said it occurs at 14 to 21 days, or two to three weeks.

Beyond that, we can only remind readers of the quotation we excerpted from a memorandum Father Curran provided to the press. "My position (on abortion) can be succinctly stated: truly individual human life begins at the time of individuation which occurs between the 14th and 21st day after conception. One can be justified in taking truly individual human life only for the sake of the life of the mother or for a value commensurate with life itself."

For elaboration on this brief statement, we — like Father Metzger — can only suggest reading his books.

Eucharistic minister says Lord consecrates unworthy hands

To the Editor:

The letter from F.H. Mitay published in the June 26 issue (Opinion: "Writer insists that ending name calling implies deletion from scripture") prompted this reply. That writer implied that a lay person, acting as an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, causes scandal within the Church.

When I read those words, a message came into my mind immediately, without prompting, as though from the Lord Himself: "Place

My Body into the hands of one who loves Me, and I, myself, will consecrate those hands that carry Me to the home of one who needs Me."

I serve the homebound members of a rural parish where the Eucharistic journey is as long as 40 miles on some Sundays. Our pastor serves two churches. Surely the Lord would not deny Himself to the sick simply because I am not a very worthy vessel.

Albert Gillow
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Church must open priesthood to all followers

To the Editor:

In the July 1 Democrat and Chronicle, there was an article concerning the unification of the Anglican Church with the Roman Catholic Church. The article quoted Pope John Paul II as stating that the prospect of the Anglican Church ordaining women as priests could be a stumbling block to the unification processes.

The implication is that if the Anglican Church does not reject the ordination of women, the unification cannot come about. I personally feel that the Anglican Church has every right to say to the pope that if the Catholic Church does not stop its practice of denying women full participation in the Church, then this could jeopardize any unification.

The refusal of the Catholic Church's hierarchy to openly and realistically address the issue of women priests does not forebode well for the viability of the Catholic Church in the

21st century. Statistics in our parish bulletin clearly make this point: By the year 2,000, there will be only 150 priests to serve 161 parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Rochester. We can pray for new vocations, but God does tend to help those who help themselves.

The reasons often heard for not ordaining women as Catholic priests is the statement that the apostles were all men, therefore . . . The problem with this logic is that it flies in the face of reality. We do and have done many things that the apostles never did.

The Second Vatican Council was said to have "opened the windows and let in some fresh-air." Unfortunately, it also left many doors still closed.

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Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Baby Nora

As I held little Nora, I peered into her eyes. Her face was "squished," as we parents say to joke and mock the cuteness and innocence of a pliable newborn who easily gets scrunched up. In spite of her posture, she seemed quite content: this innocent little girl of two weeks who already had been the object of lawyers' deliberations, of cross-country plane trips, of tears, of anguish, of waiting and of prayers.

Nora was adopted. Her natural mother, an unmarried 17 year old from Arizona, had courageously placed her baby into the care of another, but not without a great deal of thought and consideration, something most 17 year olds do not do easily.

Nora's "real" mother — that is, her adoptive mother, as I shall call her — is a friend of mine, a single woman in her mid-30s who wanted to become a parent. I refer to Nora's adoptive mother as her "real" mother because I believe that parenthood has only a nebulous link to the biological experience of conception and birth. Becoming a parent is a process, not an act, something that starts

the minute you hold that child in your arms. So, in a sense, everyone who has lovingly cared for an infant has been a parent. Nora's "real" mother was learning that quickly.

As I held Nora in my arms, I noticed that Nora's "real" mother, Mary, seemed as interesting and as thought-provoking as Nora. "Oh, Mary," I thought, "now you are really going to find out what work is."

I was reflecting on the times when my daughter used to wake up in the night wanting her mother's breast and needing a diaper change. My wife and I worked together on the procedure. I would be the first to get up and bring the baby to my wife. Afterward, I would prepare for the change of diaper, which more often than not meant a complete change of bed linen, too, since my daughter had wet through everything. It always amazed me how one could amass a load of laundry in a matter of minutes.

Now, as I looked over at Mary I thought how, as a single parent right from the start, she would have to do everything herself with no one to help her and with no one to rely on if she happened to be overtired or sick or whatever.

I tried to comfort her by suggesting that if she could just get through these next five years, she could probably make it. I didn't tell her that my daughter had gotten up virtually every night — sometimes three, four, and five times — for almost two years. No, I thought, the five-year comment was already out of line; don't say anything more.

I did add, however, that I thought her getting Nora was a good thing for her soul; it was the way God was going to save her. I remembered an article I had written along those lines.

Mary asked why I had said that. Did I perceive her as a particularly sinful person? Of course not, I said. Obviously, I was groping for the right words to say to this new and inexperienced mother and, admittedly I felt uncomfortable.

The circumstances of Mary's getting Nora are unique or what some might call providential. Nora's biological mother had been living with Mary's brother and sister-in-law in Arizona. Mary soon struck up a circumstantial friendship with the young woman, eventually leading to discussion on adoption of the baby. Mary has an agreement with Nora's natural mother to communicate monthly regarding the child's welfare.

Holding that baby flooded my psyche with thoughts. Here was Nora, one life in a sea of lives, one baby in a world full of babies. What makes her life so significant? When it seems that everyday so many people die for senseless reasons — when the life of a young

South African black is snuffed out because a cop with a gun lost his temper or when an unborn fetus is expunged because no one cares enough to give him a chance to experience life in this world — what makes Nora's life so privileged? In one sense maybe it wasn't fair that Nora should have a chance at life when so many others do not.

Still, Nora will not have it so easy, I reflected. Surely, at least she'll have one parent who loves her, but she will also have questions that will be painful to answer: What are my biological father and mother like? Why did my mother place me into the arms of someone else? Why could my adoptive mother care for me while my biological mother could not?

No one will ever be able to provide satisfactory answers to the questions Nora will undoubtedly raise one day because there are no good answers. Yet, for some reason God gave Nora a break because Mary, Mary's brother and Mary's sister-in-law loved life enough to give life.

Little Nora, I don't think your life will be so easy. Your little heart will ache from an indescribable pain that no one will be able to erase. And some days, though the sun will shine, it will not shine on you. You will look up at the stars at night and ask God, "Why?"

But, Nora, you are also blessed because you have a mother who loves you. You are blessed because you know love in your life and, God willing, one day you will be able to pass that love on to someone else because a few people dared to open themselves up to the love and the life of God.