

C-J Opinions

Writer defends Church for waiting to condemn slavery

To the Editor:

With all due respect, I would differ with Bishop Clark on the question of whether the official magisterium can err in teaching on matters of faith and morals. I believe the issue of slavery, which he offered in his column as evidence of such reversal, though apparently supporting his position, does not admit of such a conclusion. If one defines slavery as any situation in which one person works for another without pay and is subject to certain limitations imposed by the other, that state in and of itself cannot be said to be intrinsically immoral.

One does not have to enlist one's mind exhaustively to come up with circumstances in which the law of justice, incumbent upon all, would oblige repayment in the form of toil, when no other recompense is possible to one to whom a significant debt is owed.

Such a situation is described in Genesis 47, when those to whom Joseph sold food during the protracted famine found themselves without assets, and thus worked as slaves for Pharaoh while keeping four-fifths of their harvest for themselves. These Canaanites who had become slaves expressed gratitude to Joseph, saying: "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord that we can

be Pharaoh's slaves" (Genesis 47:25).

The higher law of charity revealed by Christ certainly would have altered the manner of resolving this situation, such that pure justice could be transcended, and those without assets would not be forced to make repayment. However, while the natural law obliges all men, the law of charity cannot be simply imposed on those not subject to it through the Christian revelation.

Due to this proviso, Christians have been somewhat limited in expressing abhorrence to slavery. That St. Paul did not exhort slave owners to promptly release those subject to them, does not signify an endorsement of the more blatant abuses of the institution, or even a judgment of the practice in light of the Christian revelation. Evidently the Holy Spirit was most concerned with proclaiming the hour of salvation. The priority of that gospel should not be taken as a promotion of that which was of lesser concern, or signify a contradiction of what was later to be emphasized.

Secondly, with regard to the purported right to dissent from "non-infallible" teaching to which Bishop Clark seemingly alludes in expressing the difficulty that some have such that they "found themselves

unable to give internal assent to that the Church proposes," I find no such right enunciated in the Vatican documents. In reality, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church prescribes that the faithful must submit both mind and will to the teaching authority of the pope. It does not allow that the Catholic conscience may function independently of the divine law which Christ has revealed to the Church. To do so is to render impotent both one's conscience and the privileged status of one gifted with a supernatural faith at baptism. Not even the Catholic theologian is one whom formal dissent is to be found within, for if his theology is truly Catholic, it cannot contradict the revelation that was complete at the death of the last apostle.

The term "non-infallible," therefore, is rather meaningless, for it does not signify that which it is understood to imply. Since revelation was given fully during the apostolic age — only subjective development can take place — all Church doctrine was established irrevocably and infallibly. That a doctrine has yet to be defined has no bearing on its objective truth, but merely reflects the disposition of the Church, which often has not perceived the need for such a definition.

Nor does it signify that a "non-infallible" teaching will not be formally defined as infallible at a future date. Neither does it dismiss the potential that many doctrines could currently be categorized as such, were it demonstrated that at any point in the history of the Church they were universally held.

Finally, one's conscience is far from infallible, were it not possible infallibly to distinguish it from the voice of one's intellect, one's fellows or one's desires. St. John of the Cross said, "the soul must of necessity fall into many perils of falsehood, when it admits knowledge and reasoning; for oftentimes that which is true must appear false, and that which is certain doubtful, and contrariwise; for there is scarcely a single truth of which we can have complete knowledge." It would seem presumptuous for one who chooses to form this conscience apart from the teaching Church, to whom Christ promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to trust in the merits of that Church at the final judgment, whose constant and authoritative teaching be rejected.

Helen Ann Wagner
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Columnist overlooks love mother expresses through decision to place child for adoption

To the Editor:

As one who has worked with pregnant young women through "Birthright" and also as the mother of eight children myself, I have some thoughts about Victor Bartolotta's column about Baby Nora (C-J, "A Closer Look," July 17).

I don't think he gives Nora's birth mother enough credit! He allows her that it took thought and consideration and courage to give up her baby. But then he goes on to emphasize that the adoptive mother is the "real" mother, in a way which is unnecessary to the point of his column and hurtful to Nora's birth mother and to all the women who have given up babies or may at this very moment be deciding to do so. In addition he gives an insufferably male point of view about the beginning of parenthood.

For women, parenthood has a very concrete, not nebulous, link to "the biological experience of conception and birth." The

nine months of pregnancy provide a gradually growing awareness of the reality of that baby, and they certainly involve difficulties as severe as getting up at night (which I have been doing for 13 years).

For Nora's natural mother, the pregnancy may have involved four months of throwing up every day and feeling nauseated every waking moment. During this time, she may have heard repeatedly from doctors and nurses, "You know it's still not too late to consider having an abortion." But she stuck it out. Later, she probably experienced heartburn, leg cramps, and that awkwardness and heaviness, waddling around feeling as if there is a basketball between your legs. For a young, first-time mother there is also the distortion of the body image, the loss of her sexual attractiveness, the realization that in some ways (stretch marks, less firm breasts) her body will never be the same. I

almost forgot backaches and lying in bed unable to get comfortable in any position, feeling that very real baby punch, squirm, wiggle and kick. And then there is labor, which besides being painful can be a very self-shaking experience, like being invaded by a whirlwind.

All of this is worth going through, of course, to have a baby. Somehow it culminates in one of the most intense of natural attachments. But Nora's birth mother doesn't have a baby, only full and painfully aching breasts, and an aching heart. She overcame merely natural love with love in the

will, choosing what she thought was best for her baby.

Mr. Bartolotta, Nora "got a break" because her birth mother loved life enough to give her life. I'm glad she got some help from Mary's brother and sister-in-law. Mary will give Nora a lot in the years to come and will be, psychologically, her "real" mother. Nora's birth mother and all birth mothers have already given a lot when they choose to give life.

Susan F. Peterson
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Laity saves the Church on 'Hail Mary' issue

To the Editor:

Imagine that someone took a picture of your mother, pasted her face to a naked body, then showed the picture to millions of people, portraying her as a vulgar, immoral

woman. Would you say, "If I protest, it will only draw more attention to the picture," or would you defend your dear mother's honor?

That is comparable to what the movie "Hail Mary" has done to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the mother of God, mother of the Church and our spiritual mother. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Rochester diocese has chosen to use the aforementioned excuse to justify its inaction, leaving the laity, accompanied by only a few clergy and religious, to defend the dignity and honor of our Blessed Mother.

God has not abandoned us, though. He has given us some brave shepherds. Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, and a few other bishops have publicly condemned this blasphemous movie, giving us as laity the reassurance and impetus we need to protest and make reparation to God and His Holy Mother. We know also that all of Heaven is with us as we offer our prayers of atonement.

Bishop Sheen once said that the laity would someday save the Church. The fulfillment of that prophecy seems to be getting closer, especially in this diocese, as we are called to defend the Church with more heavenly than earthly help.

Jean M. Lloyd
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Stop chipping at foundation

To the Editor:

A phrase I have been hearing used by those who think they have far greater knowledge than Pope John Paul II, the Cardinals and the magisterium is, "we have to keep chipping away at the foundation."

I refer to two Scripture passages: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24), and "And I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Both of these statements were made by the Son of God, so therefore, to "chip away at the foundation" is like the proverbial man shoveling sand against the tide. Amen.

Vic Yanaitis
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Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



The fruits of life

Last year's mercy-killing/suicide case involving a Fairport physician shocked the community. Dr. John Kraai allegedly ended the life of his terminally ill and longtime friend. Later, apparently distraught over the negative impact of his actions and trying to spare his family more agony, Dr. Kraai took his own life.

The Dr. Kraai case and particularly his passing happened all too quickly to adequately be laid to rest. That is why now it might be valuable to reflect on this man, this modern-day suburban Tom Dooley who literally gave his life to his family and to his patients.

It is with a sincere interest that I write about Dr. Kraai. He was our family physician for three generations, caring for my paternal grandparents, my parents, and my brothers and sisters. Dr. Kraai delivered all of my brothers and sisters and me. He was a general practitioner whose medical expertise included pediatrics, internal medicine, and a host of other medical services that today are performed mostly by specialists.

My contact with Dr. Kraai spans my entire life. In fact, I was fortunate to have benefitted from his services as recently as a few months before his death. While controversial at times because of his gruff demeanor, Dr. Kraai was as kind-hearted and as self-giving as anyone I have met.

Dr. Kraai will best be remembered for his untiring service to his patients. The number of hours he is known to have worked in a single day or in a single week is in itself notable.

He began his workday very early in the

morning with hospital rounds. He continued on rounds until early afternoon, when he began office hours for his regular patients, an activity which often took him until midnight.

I remember once leaving a gathering of friends around 10:30 at night saying that I had a doctor's appointment. My friends looked on in disbelief. "Who has office hours at this time of night?" they asked. "Oh, Dr. Kraai in Fairport," I told them.

Aside from long office hours, Dr. Kraai was well-known for making house calls. Even though he had to curtail this activity somewhat as he got older, he continued to visit sick people in their homes as a regular practice. On other occasions, as a way of bringing comfort and peace of mind, Dr. Kraai visited his homebound, elderly patients. If these patients were well, he probably just gave them shots of vitamin B. An immigrant from Holland, Dr. Kraai seemed to have a special affinity for the older Italian immigrants whom, it is believed, he admired for their courage and hard work.

Stories about Dr. Kraai's good works are common and well-known to Fairporters. It is obvious that Dr. Kraai's concern for his patients exceeded simple business.

My own father tells me that, while in the hospital awaiting heart surgery, he was awakened at 5:30 in the morning by someone reading to him from an article about the great success of coronary bypass operations. That person was Dr. Kraai.

My aunt and others tell stories about how, during hard times, they received medical care from Dr. Kraai and got, instead of a bill, money and groceries.

I remember going to Dr. Kraai just a few years ago for a physical examination for school. I was in his office about half an hour during which time I received, among other

things, several medical tests and two booster vaccinations. The total bill was \$7.

Stories about Dr. Kraai's benevolence seem endless, but there is one story that rings differently from the rest. On one mission of mercy, he revisited a dying friend with whom he no doubt had shared a good deal of life.

The friend was in pain, but more importantly the friend suffered from a disease that strips the mind of all that makes life meaningful.

In an obvious state of depressed isolation, Dr. Kraai allegedly gave the man a fatal injection. For that, the gates of hell loosed and Kraai himself, like his sick friend, lost most of what had made life worthwhile to him as a husband, father and physician.

Later, Dr. Kraai sadly could think of no other remedy for himself and for his family than to take his own life.

Dr. Kraai is now gone from this life. His office on Fairport's Main Street, a landmark and refuge to so many sick, is no longer bustling with patients. But Dr. Kraai has not been forgotten, nor will he ever be forgotten.

If our God is anything, He is a forgiving God. Dr. Kraai's decision to end the life of his friend cannot be condoned, but it can be understood. To end the suffering of someone you love is understandable, it is forgivable — in one sense it is even merciful — but unfortunately not condonable.

Fortunately, I am convinced that God does not look at one or two isolated mistakes and judge us on that basis. Fortunately, I believe — and Catholic theologians support this belief — that we are primarily judged by the posture we have determined our lives should take. That posture — the option to follow the path of goodness, truth, love and hence God — in the long run determines the kind of fruit our lives will bear.

Scripture says, "and you shall know them by their fruit," the fruit that is born day after day, year after year. The fruit Dr. John Kraai bore is obvious to those who knew him. It is a good fruit, and its nectar is sweet.

God tastes of it and knows the quality of its sweetness. God looks at the life of John Kraai, M.D. and God is pleased.