

C-J Opinions

Writer advocates awaiting Synod results before expanding women's roles

To the Editor:

The matter of the role of lay people in the liturgy is on the agenda for the Synod of Bishops, Fall, 1987, I am told by Father John Gurrieri, liturgy director, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Meanwhile, we are being told in Rochester that it is now permissible for women to serve at the altar, except for assisting with washing of the priest's hands. However, I have found other information.

The NCCB office says those who justify the use of women altar servers say that, since they interpret 1983 canon law to be in doubt in this matter, they choose to follow the general instruction of the Roman Missal and interpret that to permit women to carry the cross and candles and to assist in every way except to approach the altar with the water and wine.

Father James Collins, Elmira, wrote the

Sacred Congregation and received these specific clarifications Nov. 24, 1984, from Archbishop Virgilio Noe, Secretary (and a copy went to Bishop Matthew Clark): 1. "Women are not permitted to act as altar servers" (this does not just mean the task of ministering the cruets but all the functions of the altar server); 2. "Following from the above observations it follows that girls are not to carry the cross, act as mitre bearers or thurifer."

No. 18 of the 1980 Instruction Concerning Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery (*Inaestimabile Donum*), prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, approved and confirmed by Pope John Paul II, reads: "There are, of course, various roles that women can perform in the liturgical assembly; these include reading the word of God and proclaiming the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. Women are

not, however, permitted to act as altar servers."

Inaestimabile Donum is considered by some canon lawyers to have been invalidated along with the 1917 Code when the 1983 Code of Canon Law became effective. Father Gurrieri said the Sacred Congregation still recognizes the validity of *Inaestimabile Donum* and so does his office.

Isn't it unjust and unwise to give Catholics (and here we are directly involving the children) the assumption of correct procedure when, as Father Ronald Krisman, assistant director, liturgy, NCCB, concludes, a real difference of opinion exists? Prematurely implementing programs utilizing women as altar servers may appeal to individuals eager for change, but it wounds men and women for whom fidelity to Christ-given authority and unity in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist are of

greater importance. Why can't we be patient and await the results of the Synod and, meanwhile, do an excellent job in preparing everyone for liturgical roles now clearly open to them with the approval of and confirmation by our Holy Father?

Jeanne D. Sweeney
Nob Hill
Rochester

Cancelled stamps requested for the benefit of sisters

To the Editor:

May I ask your readers if they will save their cancelled stamps for Sister Claire Adrian, OP? Anyone wishing to may send the stamps to: Mr. J. Lane, 118 Rogers Avenue, Somerville, Mass. 02144. Proceeds from the sale of these stamps are used for our retired and sick sisters.

Sister Claire Adrian
St. Catherine, Ky.

Commentary

Catholic chaplain reflects on recent UR showing of film 'Hail Mary'

By Father William Lum
Catholic Chaplain
University of Rochester

Perhaps now that "Hail Mary" has been shown and the protests are over, we can attempt a calmer and more objective discussion.

I have seen "Hail Mary" in the company of members of the Catholic Church who are trained in canon law, theology and scripture. After seeing the film, we all had to admit that the film is not blasphemous, not sacrilegious and not pornographic.

In making this statement, I am in no way attempting to defend or support the film as something of theological or artistic value. I am simply making the statement that the outcry and protest against the film are not justified.

This film is not a film made for entertainment. It is not meant for popular consumption. Rather, it is a dense, philosophical film made in the context of the French intellectual and artistic society. The film deals with the philosophical and cultural question of dualism — the question of the dichotomy between body and soul, the material and the spiritual. For American film audiences used to simple plots, special effects and no thought content, this film is not easy to watch.

In facing this dichotomy between body

and soul, some Catholics have forgotten authentic Church teaching and have lost their balance. It is not a matter of body versus soul; it is not a matter of material versus spiritual. St. Thomas Aquinas said rather that the human person is a composite of both body and spirit. We are made in the image and likeness of God. The body is God's good creation as much as the soul is God's good creation.

Some people have expressed concern about nudity in the film. There is a difference between being nude and being lewd. There is nothing in this film that would appeal to the prurient interest of a normal person. Over the centuries sculptors and painters have depicted the nude human body in various ways. There are many examples of nudity in the pope's own museums and galleries in the Vatican.

Some protestors expressed dismay that the Catholic chaplaincy did not take a strong stand regarding the showing of this film. In fact, the Catholic chaplaincy took a very strong stand in choosing to avoid generating any publicity for this film and to avoid generating a large audience for this film. Outside protestors created such great publicity that the resulting audience was twice the size that anyone expected — the largest audience of the entire summer series of films.

The Catholic chaplaincy continued to take a very strong stand in choosing to ensure that the religious issues raised in the film and in the protest were faced in an open forum. Because of our commitment to truth and to the Catholic linking of faith and reason, the Catholic chaplaincy stood firm in not allowing the passions of an angry crowd to be the sole representation of the Church of Jesus Christ. We very much supported the panel discussion held after the showing of the film. The panel included a theologian, a scripture scholar, a philosopher and a film critic.

Some protestors questioned my loyalty as a Catholic priest. In Luke's gospel and Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." My treasure is with the Church. My heart is with the Church, with that community of disciples of Jesus Christ.

As disciples we are, all of us, in the process of learning about God, about the gospels, about life. We do not have all the answers yet. We have to live in ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty. The Church is not a place for knee-jerk reflexes based on hearsay. As members of the Church, we have to be committed to truth, and that means that we must be willing to examine the facts and the evidence. That means that we must be willing to enter into dialogue with people who hold positions that are different from our own.

One of the most beautiful tributes to Mary

in the gospels is that image of the one who listened to God's word and acted on it. We pay no honor to Mary when we hear only what we want to hear or when we jump to conclusions. We honor Mary greatly when we show a readiness to listen, to discern God's calling and respond in faithfulness and in wisdom.

Some protestors spoke of obedience to the pope. Certainly we members of the Church must be faithfully obedient to the pope. But we must also avoid treating the papacy as an idol. Simply because one hears reports that the pope says something doesn't mean that one should immediately stop thinking. Again, we need to hold onto our Catholic balance.

At the First Vatican Council more than 100 years ago, an argument ensued between those who maintained that the pope was infallible in all matters at all times, and those who completely opposed the idea of infallibility. The First Vatican Council resolved the argument by affirming a very carefully conditioned papal infallibility — that the pope is infallible only in matters of faith and morals, only when speaking *ex cathedra*, and when it is proposed for the belief of the whole Church.

This means that the pope is not infallible in every statement he makes. This means that the pope is not an infallible mathematician, philosopher, historian or even film critic. A true sense of loyalty to the pope is intended to ensure that we never attempt to make the pope something which the pope is not.

Some protestors raised the issue of anti-Catholicism. That has been and continues to be a very serious problem in American history and American society. For the record, at this time the University of Rochester is neither anti-Catholic nor anti-Christian.

At this time, there is a very respectful and supportive climate for all religions at the University of Rochester. But the climate at any institution of higher education also challenges any religion to be able to explain itself and to give an account of itself. The climate does not allow for ignorance, superstition or false piety.

Many people on both sides have worked very hard for the past 20 years to develop mutual understanding and respect between religion and higher education. We live in a world in which there are many religious traditions, many cultures, many differences. Our human memories are too full of the stories of bigotry and oppression, as one group sought to annihilate another group.

Because of such memories, there is great concern about censorship and academic freedom in American universities. In the Catholic Church, there should be a similar concern. The Church's official documents of the past 20 years have shown great sensitivity to the religious and cultural differences of all God's peoples.

We members of the Church need to become as sensitive about religious and human differences as our official statements are. Perhaps our faith is not yet strong enough. Perhaps our Catholic identity is not yet strong enough for us to accept all these differences. We need to learn how to be strong in our faith, clear in our identity and capable of being enriched by the differences and diversity of God's peoples.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Four sets of wings

On a hill overlooking the horizon in Geneseo, N.Y., four different fliers make their debut in the sky — each flier having its own set of wings.

The first flier, a tiny insect with delicate wings, flutters aimlessly about. Next, a June-bug with churning wings makes his evening appearance and, though he seems intent on smelling the scent of pine trees, his confusion becomes evident when he begins to bump into buildings.

Then the swallows begin to circle. Seeming to enjoy the act of flight, they flutter their wings quickly at first, then glide effortlessly for a distance — until physics tells the birds it's time to flutter once again.

Finally, coming from nowhere, a supersonic jet zips across the sky, altering the sunset and challenging God's final revelation before the quiet darkness of night falls upon the countryside. The jet uses its power and rigid metal wings to preach to the world about its own attempt to match God's magnificence.

All four winged fliers teach me how we journey, how we fly in this life to the next. Their flights also remind me about those who fly together in heaven.

The flight of my day is coming to an end. The chimes ring nine times, and

though it is still light, I know that a few miles away the monks at the monastery have already logged two hours of sleep.

I am, at first, firm in my decision to stay in my place until night has robbed the sky of any remaining color, but impatiently I begin to return to my room only to discover that God has saved the most spectacular part of the sunset for last.

As day ends, I mark these events: no nuclear bombs have exploded accidentally or on purpose. This summer's ubiquitous construction workers have finished a day pounding and banging, bolting and welding and deepening their tans. We earth-dwellers have made it through another day, and for that, have something for which to be proud. At least this side of the world will now take a 12-hour hiatus, and for awhile the flying will end.

While we rest, I think of others whose flying has led them to a face-to-face journey with God. Though I have no proof, it is somehow clear to me that those souls know first-hand what real flying is all about.

However, for us earth-dwellers, flying is still something to be practiced. God only makes worthwhile the effort to learn to fly because he promises to teach us by giving us the gift of grace, which comes to us either in spurts of information like those gained by students in

crash courses, or steadily, like the drip of an IV into the veins of a hospitalized patient. In either case, flying is the ultimate goal, a part of our efforts to attain heaven.

The pathway to heaven requires us to fly straight, though our *experience* of the journey is crooked. God sufficiently lights the way most of the time and, when seeing otherwise becomes difficult or impossible, God causes the ground underfoot to appear more solid.

The journey and the path of our winged fliers teach us a lesson about, and even parallel, the way we also travel down the pathway to God. Though the journey of our winged fliers is worldly and ours is spiritual, the worldly journey is fused and linked with that of the spiritual.

The insect flutters aimlessly, but keeps flying until it gets what it needs and wants in order to survive. The June-bug has purpose: to bask in the aroma of pine trees and get drunk or distracted in the process, yet still keep flying. The swallow enjoys the experience of flight so much that reason for travel becomes superfluous. The jet, though perhaps too proud, flies straight and strong. With discipline it will accomplish its goal.

Our flight, our journey, like that of our fliers, is aimless and purposeful, joyous and painful, disciplined and meandering.

Four sets of wings from four different fliers mark the horizon: each flier — like its human counterparts — journeying on in history toward the pathway to heaven.