

C-J Opinions

Emphasis on sexual morality diverts laity from need for economic justice

To the Editor:

Christ declared that the whole law of God was based upon the two commandments, to "love God" and to "love thy neighbor." This implies that the most important rule is that we treat our fellow men with justice, both in matters of economics and foreign policy.

Cardinal Ratzinger and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith ignore those two commandments upon which the whole law is

based, and in their place substitute the commandments dealing with sex, so as to divert the laity from those most important commandments, which the Congregation does not dare attack.

Five popes have written five social encyclicals upon those two commandments. Considering the priority Christ placed upon those two commandments, if these social encyclicals are not infallible, certainly teaching of lesser importance should not be

called infallible.

These encyclicals applied those two commandments to the economic system. They demanded justice for the working class, including recognition of unions, a wage high enough for a man to adequately support a family and educate his children, and demanding that strikers not be penalized.

Since the very first of the five encyclicals, conservative Catholics have dissented from the moral principles taught by the popes in those encyclicals. They labeled them as socialistic, and have ignored and violated the moral principles as if they never existed.

They threatened to withhold funds from Catholic University if it did not fire Monsignor John A. Ryan, who supported the first encyclical. Conservative Catholic spokesman William Buckley Jr. publicly dissented from the teaching of Pope John XXIII's encyclical when he wrote in his column, "Mater si, Magistra no."

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has failed to penalize or even reprimand these conservatives who continue to publicly dissent. The Congregation has no right to ignore public dissent by conservatives on economic matters, yet penalize liberals who dissent on non-infallible sexual matters.

Christ was outraged by the money changers in the temple, yet was only mildly disturbed by the adulteress, to whom He said: "Neither will I condemn you. Go and

sin no more," just as a confessor might speak to a penitent confessing venial sins.

Why this arbitrary elevation of sexual morality to top importance and the relegation of economic morality to the trash basket?

The Congregation's aim is to continue to keep what it considers the semiliterate working class intimidated by guilt feelings on sexual matters while keeping the wealthy happy by downplaying economics as a non-moral matter of mere opinion (upon which Church teaching) can be ignored without feelings of guilt.

Those who commit economic injustice feel no guilt because economic morality is downplayed as if there were no such thing. Since I never heard of an employer or an administrator voluntarily changing his anti-labor policies, it can be assumed that a priest seldom if ever heard anti-labor sins confessed.

The Congregation erroneously implies that its opinions on sex are infallible and that the social encyclicals of the popes are not. Christ's teaching emphasized just the opposite rating of importance.

The underlying basis of the Curran affair is to divert our attention and activity from correcting economic immorality.

Walter O'Hagan
Sherman Street
Auburn

Fr. Cuddy's column is 'last straw'

To the Editor:

After too many weeks of reading letters in the secular press and the Courier-Journal by self-appointed judges who are eager to condemn Father Charles Curran, Bishop Matthew Clark and anyone else who might possibly sympathize with these "radicals," I have come upon the last straw. I refer to the column by Father Paul Cuddy (C-J, 9/4/86), in which he ignores the main issue, distorts the public statements of Father Curran, and then proceeds to demean all of us uneducated faithful by judging us unsophisticated enough to possibly comprehend the subtleties of this theologian's reasoning when he explains them publicly. This attitude is typical of the detractors of Father Curran. No letter that I have read has made any

attempt, beyond a brief listing of topics, to clarify the questionable areas of his studies in light of his publicly professed acceptance of the main body of Church teaching. Perhaps those quick to judge have not reviewed the first-hand evidence.

It's all too easy to find fault and point the finger, especially in the name of the Church. But the way of Christ is not easy. The Church has struggled through the centuries to deal with new and difficult situations that our world presents, situations that call for a Christlike response but which have no lived experience in our history or tradition. I totally disagree with Father Cuddy that supporters of Curran deny any working of the Holy Spirit in the pope or the Vatican. Quite to the contrary, the meaning of Church transcends hierarchy, and the Spirit works in us all as members of the one body. With all due respect, the pope is not God. His every proclamation is not an infallible lesson, else we should worship him, and wouldn't that be heresy?! Please do not misunderstand; the teaching of the Church should not be taken lightly. But it is the role and duty of the theologian to interpret it and, yes, question it in light of the current, lived faith of us all.

If the only voices that can speak publicly can simply reinterpret the past, we will be condemned to stagnation. I believe our faith is alive and growing to meet new challenges, and the Holy Spirit works in strange ways, not to be silenced by earthly judges. I pray that all of us will be open to all who sincerely search for the truth and that that search will continue to mark our common journey of faith.

Ronald E. Jodoin
Park Acre Road
Pittsford

Familiar with phenomenon of 'demons' in typesetting

To the Editor:

Having worked for a magazine in typesetting and layout, I am all too familiar with the phenomenon of "printing demons." I am, therefore, understanding when my words are the victim of their editorial license. However, since a word was added to a sentence of mine in the last paragraph of my letter of August 14 (CJ Opinion: "Writer defends Church for waiting to condemn slavery") I think it necessary to correct the error. As printed, I could not discern any meaning from the sentence.

Hopefully, the correct sentence is more intelligible: "Finally, one's conscience is far from infallible, were it possible infallibly to distinguish it from the voice of one's intellect, one's fellows or one's desires."

Helen Ann Wagner
Lark Street Rochester

Questions inconsistencies in Church teaching

To the Editor:

One of the key issues in the case of Father Curran is the question of intrinsic evil. As I understand it, there are several things — such as contraception, abortion and homosexual acts — which Father Curran says are not sinful under certain circumstances, even though they are basically wrong. The Vatican, on the other hand, says these things are in and of themselves evil, and therefore always sinful.

There seems to be a deep inconsistency in our Church's teaching here. If we move from the bedroom to the battlefield, we find what at least my conscience says is a far worse intrinsic evil: the killing of one human being by another. Indeed, from the time of Jesus Christ until the fourth century, Christians avoided violence, based on the teachings of

Christ and on the Fifth Commandment. Then came St. Augustine's Just War Theory and the adoption of Catholicism as a state religion. Ever since then, the Church has taught that killing is not sinful in cases of self defense, and is even recommended when one must protect one's country.

Does the Vatican claim the right to dictate which intrinsically evil acts are sinful and which are not? Does this dictate vary with times and circumstances? Is there room for serious prayerful judgment on an individual level? Or, if these acts are always evil and sinful, why doesn't the Vatican condemn all warfare and human killing, and even preparation for it? The world sure needs to hear that right now!

These questions profoundly affect the moral life of the whole Church. Apparent inconsistencies in teaching damage the Church's credibility for potential converts, and raises doubts in the minds of believers. We must pray to the Holy Spirit for our leaders and or moral guidance to clarify this issue.

John F. Toth
Stonehill Drive
Rochester

Chaplain's comments denote 'comedy, tragedy of errors'

To the Editor:

Father William Lum is completely disillusioned in the integrity of Courier-Journal readers if he expects us to believe the film ("Hail Mary") was not blasphemous, sacrilegious or pornographic. His entire commentary on it (CJ Commentary, Aug. 28: "Catholic chaplain reflects on recent UR showing of film 'Hail Mary'") denotes nothing less than a comedy and a tragedy of errors.

In good conscience, we as Catholics cannot allow the apathy and indifference displayed in defense of this scandalous film, since our Blessed Mother's name must be defended. Her entire life was spent in submission to God's will. "Let it be done to me according to Thy word." Her name Blessed Virgin must never be defiled.

In my estimation, this sordid film was another typical example of the devil's workshop.

Vivian M. Giegerich
Green Knolls Drive Rochester

Enjoyed C-J edition

To the Editor:

I thought you produced a great newspaper this week, September 4. The reporting, editing and layout were excellent. I especially enjoyed your article on Cardinal Mooney soccer (C-J: "Patience, defensive 'forte' should place Mooney near top"). Mr. Kiley did a great job of reporting, which serves the community and the sport well. Thank you.

J. Michael Madero
Crestview Drive East Pine City

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



A translucent veil

In a letter dated September 7, 1947, my maternal aunt, now deceased, wrote to my mother about recent problems she experienced digesting food. Ironically, for some unexplained reason, my mother saved the letter and still has it today.

A few years later, at age 41, my aunt died in surgery to correct a problem with her liver, which had an obvious link to her earlier digestive problems. In her journal four years prior to her death, my wife described some brief but traumatic physical disturbances occurring in her system. She wondered about her own death and reflected on similar physical problems that her aunt had experienced before her death. Perhaps my wife's worst fears were realized when she contracted the same disease that victimized her aunt.

In the same ironic vein, a year before her death, my wife received a book from a friend. The book, *An Interrupted Life: the Diaries of Etty Hillesum*, is about a 29-year-old Jewish woman whose life is cut short at Auschwitz by the Nazis.

On a trip to Florida, a young widow met an attractive man who told her that he had just completed surgery at Roswell Hospital in Buffalo to have a fourth malignant tumor removed. The widow described the experience with this man as being like having one final conversation with her late husband. She asked the man questions that she had not had the chance to ask her husband before he died.

More recently, in a conversation with a woman who had undergone a mastectomy, I learned of this woman's initial hesitation

to accept the necessary surgery because she felt that her cancer dictated an ironic future for her life — a problem for which there was no solution.

On first learning that she had cancer, the woman told me that she was not surprised. Believing in a genetic link, she always figured she would get cancer, since it was the same disease that took the lives of many of her relatives.

Suddenly, I found myself wondering about the fate and the irony of life. Is there a connection or a thread that binds the experiences of all the people I have just described? And, if there is a common thread, what might that be?

Is the irony of life a truth that is imposed on us through nature, by God or by personal choice? What part does hereditary disease play in understanding the irony of life? Do chance meetings with people — like the meeting of the widow and the man — speak more or less of the presence of God in an ironic way? Do gifts from friends — like the book my wife received — bear ironic messages for our futures?

The only thing about which I am certain is that the irony of life is difficult to explain. Probably the best way to try to explain irony is to try to understand how God works in our lives.

Recently, a friend shared with me his confusion about his beliefs. For a long while, he depended and based much of his life's activity upon a faith in a benevolent God. More recently, he told me that he still has faith that there is a God, but now he seriously doubts God's goodness. Is it possible, he asked, that a good God could

allow such a mess as ours to exist?

In my friend's mind, God's movement in life is seen as ill-motivated. In doubting God's goodness, my friend might subscribe to a God who allows or even perhaps causes ironically negative events to occur.

However, my contention is that God's movement in life is many times misinterpreted by us, and therefore, we tend to misinterpret irony. Irony, however, can be a powerful tool that God uses to make his presence known to us. We may note God's movement in life as, for example, supernatural or inadequate. This occurs mostly because as humans we try to pull apart things that cannot be dissected. At times, irony in life appears negative because of God's alleged absence, when in fact God is such a pervasive and constitutive part of our lives that he is indiscernable. Irony, then, can have the effect of pulling God out of the ordinary realm of existence so that we can see Him more clearly.

This understanding does not totally explain apparently negative or evil irony in life. It does, however, point to my basic contention that we are often so bent on grasping truth and goodness in our lives — that is, on grasping God — that we fail to see God when He is present.

If we could ask my aunt about the letter she wrote to my mother, if we could ask my wife about the entry in her journal, if we could ask God to explain the chance meeting of the widow and the man, what kinds of answers would we receive about the irony of life?

I think the answers we would receive are the answers I believe God gives to us now. The purpose of irony in life appears as a translucent veil ready to cover reality, or to do us harm, or to confuse us. But, in the long run irony points directly to a God who fiercely desires that our reality and his reality — that our purpose and his purpose, that our lives and his life — exist now and forever, beyond any doubt, as unified and one.