

From the editor's desk

Since this column is appearing in the position where editorials have appeared in the past, some explanation seems in order. But first, let me ask you to pick up any other newspaper and look at the editorial page. Who wrote the editorials? Whose views are being represented? The best clue you're likely to find is the use of an editorial "we."

Well, after attempting intermittently to write traditional editorials — like those mentioned above — during my 21 months as editor of this paper, it's time for me to admit that I find the task very painful.

On the one hand, the inherent presumption of editorials makes me feel obliged to say something profound. If I'm going to be pompous enough to refer to myself as "we," then what I say had better be good. On the other hand — even though journalistic tradition dictates that editorials should address "important issues" — I'd much prefer writing about more mundane matters. After all, I'm no expert. Why should you care what I think about the Iran arms deal?

So I've decided to give up on traditional editorials and to write this column instead. The opinions you'll find here will be those of Karen Franz, not necessarily those of the Courier-Journal staff, and definitely not those of some mysterious "we."

I've been thinking a lot lately about my mail, especially about a letter I received a few weeks ago from someone who identified him/herself only as "A Sad Reader." Because the letter was anonymous, we can't publish it as a letter to the editor, but I'd like to tell you a little about it and why I find it so distressing.

"My sister just had an abortion. She's a 'good' Catholic, but she says the Church is changing and that there are lots of Catholic religious leaders who say abortion is OK," the writer said.

Noting that the sister based this assertion on Courier-Journal articles — particularly those on Father Charles Curran — the writer lamented: "I don't think the Courier-Journal means to be making my sister and a lot of other people think this way, but that's what's happening."

Naturally, I was saddened to learn that the writer's niece or nephew had been aborted, and the writer has my deepest condolences. But I was also disturbed to learn that the writer believes the Courier-Journal contributed to the sister's decision.

It seems to me that the sister's explanation is a prime example of hearing only what one wants to hear. When one doubts that an action is right but chooses to do it anyway, comfort can probably be found by parroting — however inaccurately — a supposed expert.

The substance of Father Curran's dissent from Church teaching is both extremely complex and widely publicized. That combination, I believe, has led to widespread misinterpretation. Unfortunately, no matter how carefully journalists present information on the case, each of you has the power to mentally re-edit the words we write.

In this case, the sister chose to ignore the fact — although it had been clearly stated in the Courier-Journal — that Father Curran believes abortion is morally acceptable only under very specific circumstances. I seriously doubt that the sister was in those circumstances.

The bottom line is that journalists can provide reams of information, but we can't make people read the parts they don't want to see. Nor can we make them question their motives for embracing a theory they think justifies their actions. Most importantly, we can't make people realize that opinion polls — even of "Catholic leaders" — are a poor indicator of morality.

But, after reading the sad reader's letter for the 10th time, I surely wish we could do all those things.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



In the scheme of things, the tension between cat and mouse often symbolizes a chunk of relational conflicts between people and nations.

In the following story, Cat has taken a village mouse hostage and is making unreasonable demands before she will release the mouse. Mayor Mouse, in charge of securing the release of Hostage Mouse, is conducting secret talks with Negotiator Mouse, who has promised to get Hostage Mouse released if Cat's demands can be met.

"But the price Cat is demanding for Hostage Mouse's release is outrageous!" exclaims Mayor Mouse to Negotiator Mouse. "Cat wants the village's entire season supply of cheese and bread?! Impossible! Besides, I promised the village mice that the food supply was one thing that I would not negotiate with, especially with the prospect of a harsh winter."

"I can almost guarantee that she'll release Hostage Mouse if you give Cat what she wants," replied Negotiator Mouse. "Trust me."

Mayor Mouse felt trapped. On one hand, he felt extreme pressure from the village mice to get Hostage Mouse released. On the other hand, he had made a public vow to the whole village that he would never use their food supply as a bargaining tool with Cat.

Still, Mayor Mouse knew that Negotiator Mouse was right — the cheese and bread was the thing Cat wanted most. Mayor Mouse wanted to trust Negotiator Mouse, but somewhere in the back of Mayor Mouse's brain, he felt a nagging doubt.

Foremost in Mayor Mouse's mind was the knowledge that giving Cat what she wanted might mean freedom for Hostage Mouse, but it would also mean extinction for the village's entire mouse population. How could they survive without food? Yet Mayor Mouse wondered if there was a way to give Cat what she wanted and get it back, too.

Mayor Mouse also knew of Cat's reputation for kidnapping and murdering the mice of other villages; he knew of Cat's cruelty, of her broken promises, of her greed.

More importantly, Mayor Mouse knew that his first payment of food to Cat, which he had kept secret, had proven fruitless, despite Cat's promise to release Hostage Mouse. Mayor Mouse felt the strain of public pressure setting in around him; he thought the air was beginning to choke him. Had God abandoned him?

He thought for a time. Finally, after securing a promise from Negotiator Mouse to tell no one, Mayor Mouse instructed him to take the village's entire supply of food and give it to Cat. Negotiator Mouse did so, for a price, of course.

The next day, Mayor Mouse ran frantically to Mayor Mouse. "Mayor! Mayor!" cried Negotiator Mouse, "Cat has now taken more village mice hostage!"

Letters

Putting a price tag on Christian charity

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although the following letter may offend some members of the community, we are publishing it — albeit with some remarks deleted — in the interest of furthering discussion through the letters to the editor.

To the Editor:

I am very unhappy with the article in reference to Mt. Carmel Church (C-J, November 27): "Neighbors Find a Home at Mt. Carmel. Twelve apartments in Renovated School," by Teresa A. Parsons. This story is making the school appear to be "heaven" to the readers. Actually, all it attracts is low-life trash.

The lower Marketview Heights area is an up-and-coming neighborhood. Rents are over \$500 a month, and most of the houses have been remodeled; new \$60,000 homes

have been built. The low-class slum houses are quickly disappearing from the area. Many working people are coming to the neighborhood. Why slow down the progression of the neighborhood by inviting undesirable?

What kind of example is the Catholic Church trying to set? I have to give credit to the members of the Moslem Church on North Street who worked very hard in getting rid of Gervasi's saloon and their undesirable clientele.

It is wrong for the Catholic Church to encourage the return of these people who are predators on the rest of the law-abiding residents of the Marketview Heights area.

The Church says that the people who use the facility are needy people, but they do not realize they are hurting the neighborhood and

the people they "help." These people get welfare checks and spend it (improperly) because the Church is "giving" them food, clothes and shelter.

The only Christian thing to do is to teach them to be productive. A good Christian does not give things away, but teaches others how to be productive so they can help themselves survive. There is a saying, God helps those who help themselves. Mt. Carmel should not support these people, but teach them to help themselves. Turn the school back into a school. Let the people learn how to help themselves. Catch a fish for a man and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.

Carol Fama
Ontario Street
Rochester

Nicaraguan visitor 'bears witness' to lack of repression

To the Editor:

I empathize with Catholics (who are) confused about the situation of the Church in Nicaragua. We hear from U.S. Church leaders like Bishop Gumbleton of Detroit who've been to Nicaragua and openly support the government; and, we hear of Nicaraguan bishops who champion the contras.

It is vital that North American Catholics know that members of the Church hierarchy in Latin America have often blessed the most brutal right-wing dictatorships and military forces like the barbaric contras — especially when those forces have the backing of Western power structures. Many examples could be given. Otherwise, liberation theology wouldn't be the potent factor it is throughout Latin America.

The best way to know the truth, of course, is to witness it in person. In Christian tradition, "bearing witness" to some hard time or injustice means more than observing it from a safe distance. I spent six

weeks in Nicaragua last year, attending Mass and visiting every part of that beleaguered nation. I spoke with fellow Catholics, including many Sandinistas, who impressed me with their faith and forgiveness. I neither found any repression of worship nor heard of any.

For those who cannot witness for themselves, I recommend Conor Cruise O'Brien's article "God and Man in Nicaragua" in the August 1986 issue of the Atlantic Monthly. O'Brien reports substantial support for the Sandinistas among bishops, priests and lay people, and he describes dwindling respect for those few members of the Church hierarchy whose rhetoric and actions aid the CIA-created contra aggression.

North American Catholics can also use common sense to note important differences between the Sandinistas and fascist regimes in Central America. In El Salvador nuns, priests and journalists are gunned down by soldiers in league with the oligarchic right-wing.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated while celebrating Mass. These things don't happen in Nicaragua. El Salvador carpet-bombs the poor; Nicaragua feeds them.

Yes, the enemy press of La Prensa and some elements of the Church aiding the contras have been censored; suspected collaborators have been banished. Every nation, including the United States, has done similarly in wartime.

Finally, listen to the words of Aryeh Neier, director of the respected human rights organization Americas Watch: "But the Nicaraguan government's practices, obnoxious and abusive as they have been, do not fall into the category (involving revolutionary situations) of the murder of thousands that has gone on in Columbia and Peru, and the murder of tens of thousands which has gone on in El Salvador and Guatemala."

John E. Milich
Ithaca

Excommunicate Cuomo for abortion views, reader urges

To the Editor:

Governor Mario Cuomo's address given at the St. John Fisher College inauguration of Dr. Pickett (C-J Nov. 13: "Governor makes case for the liberal arts") was impressive, but was the execution of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More a case made "for the liberal arts" as the headline suggests, or rather was it a case made for integrity?

Cromwell and Henry VIII, the prosecutor and persecutor of John Fisher and Thomas More were the products of what were the liberal arts of their century. On the other hand, St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More were so single-mindedly popish that they wouldn't

sign the act of supremacy. They exhibited none of the "liberal" dichotomy that pits personal conviction against official public conviction and policy. Such a dichotomy is apparent in the death-dealing pro-abortion enactments and rhetoric of Governor Mario Cuomo. He professes that he is personally opposed to abortion, but slavishly follows his Henry VIII, the Supreme Court's morbid Roe v. Wade fiat.

For his complicity in the abortion killing as outlined in Pope Paul VI's declaration on procured abortion, Governor Cuomo should be excommunicated. Instead the assurances he receives from "Catholic" theologians that he is

blameless seems to be reinforced by the bestowing of an honorary degree by a Catholic college in the see city (of this diocese). Yet no amount of "Cromwellian hype" updated by modernist theologians will cancel the words of our blessed Lord, addressed to another (person) "personally opposed, but ..." (Jesus said,) "He who handed me over to you has the greater sin."

Louis J. Pasqua
Exchange Street
Geneva

National defense is hardly a cream-puff affair

To the Editor:

I have never felt I had much in common with the mace-wielding bishops of the Middle Ages, but must say they stand up favorably compared to today's peacenik clerics. At least they had the courage of their convictions.

Recently a bishop in Albany and other Christians opposed the naming of an aircraft carrier Albany; I presume because a warship is warlike and violent. What else? It is protecting me from the slavery of communism. It isn't done with cream puffs at 10 paces.

This compares with the words of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Washington, who referred to the submarine pens in Puget Sound as an Auschwitz. These submarines protect me and my family. To liken

them to a Nazi death camp is a flight of liberal imagination impossible for a conservative to follow.

I'd like to hear a frank critique of these remarks and their authors by a communist. Probably "useful idiots" would be mild.

John F. Starkweather
Middle Road
Rush



"WHILE I RESPECT YOUR CHANGE OF HEART, I HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT ARTIFICIAL TREES ARE TEN TIMES MORE EXPENSIVE."

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They should be sent to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 1 1/2 pages. We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made, and the letters will reflect the writers' own styles.

Because submitted opinions exceed the space reserved for letters, we publish only original letters address to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent to other publications or persons. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.