

# The Editor's Desk

## Seasonal silliness

People often refer to the weeks preceding Election Day as "the silly season." Yet — in my case, at least — the term would be more aptly applied to Advent.

While pastors everywhere exhort us to focus our lives on the true meaning of the season, I find myself acting more and more ridiculous each year since I entered college.

In those days, the coming of Christ seemed to pale in importance beside the specter of fall-term finals. By the time I stumbled out of my last exam — usually just three or four days before Christmas — I was always exhausted and suffering from something resembling strep throat. I was also frantic to return to Rochester and begin my Christmas shopping.

I got my degree in 1983, but I can see now that I haven't gotten much smarter since then. Now it's not finals hanging over my head, but the pressure of producing a Christmas edition on a very tight schedule.

I find myself writing articles — including this one — as the sun comes up. I've decided what to give everyone for Christmas, but I haven't yet purchased even one gift. Worst of all, I've had very little time for those who are most important to me — my family.

The funny thing is that I know I'm not alone in my predicament. I imagine lots of you are in the very same spot.

Well, I don't know about you, but I'm determined to find a way to work things out better next year — to make sure that Advent is a peaceful time to enjoy with family and friends — to ensure that Christmas won't be just anti-climax.

Next week, you'll receive your Courier-Journal on Christmas Eve. Instead of the usual news and feature articles, we'll be serving up another all-Christmas issue. We hope you'll enjoy it.

Also, in keeping with our postal permit, we will not publish an edition on January 1. We will resume publication — in our normal news format — on January 8. See you then!

## Victor Bartolotta Jr. A Closer Look



"Teddy Ruxpin" is the \$59.86 talking bear that my four-year old daughter wants for Christmas. Teddy's price, by the way, does not include the cost of four "C" batteries, essential if one wants to see Teddy's mouth go up and down as Teddy tries to give form to the lyrics playing in his belly. Nor does the cost include a set of Ruxpin books and tapes.

Teddy comes with no computer "hard disk" inside him; instead, he runs on cassette tapes which, as you know, are not cheap. After some quick totaling, I concluded that Teddy will cost about \$74.85 without tax. That's a sale price amount, by the way.

Teddy Ruxpin's quasi-life was about to cause a dilemma in my real life: Should I buy Teddy Ruxpin for my daughter for Christmas?

First, I drew up a mental list of people I could ask about their feelings on whether I should make this purchase.

It went like this. "Well, if I ask so and so, they'll say, 'Oh, go and buy it; what the heck.' But if I asked other friends whose opinions I also highly regard, they would be shocked that I would even consider such a purchase. These friends would be scandalized that someone could think of paying \$74.85 without tax for a stupid stuffed animal, when this Christmas so many children in the world will lack even sufficient food, let alone gifts.

Admittedly, I take a great risk personally in discussing this topic publicly. Opinions will generally fall into the two categories that my friends would allegedly symbolize. Some people will be offended that I could be so cruel as to deprive my daughter at Christmastime of a legitimate request, while others would consider such a purchase sinful in light of obvious human suffering.

In the process of making a decision, I raised the issue with my daughter, Lynn, while we were driving home: "Honey what do you want for Christmas? Do you still want that Teddy Ruxpin doll?"

"Daddy," she replied, "it's Ruxpin, not Roxpin. Yes, I want him."

"But, honey, you know he costs a lot of money and Daddy can't really afford him. You know you could buy a whole roomful of toys for what it cost just to buy one Teddy, er, Ruxpin."

I didn't explain the social reasons why I also felt I could not buy her the bear, but I probably should have tried.

"But Daddy," Lynn responded, "You always get what you want for Christmas."

The comment stunned me for a moment. What had we done to give Lynn the impression she can get everything she wants at Christmastime?

Finally, when we arrived at home, I made the decision. "Lynn, I can tell you right now that for this Christmas you won't be getting Teddy Ruxpin. But maybe later on it might be possible, OK?"

Lynn's response was unusual and it surprised me; but, it was as clear and simple, as genuine and sincere as her own little four-year-old heart: "OK, Daddy," she said and went on to play.

Though perhaps I was lucky because of Lynn's extraordinarily positive response, for the moment the debate had ended inside of me and I was at peace.

But I wondered how many other Christian parents are struggling with what and how much they should spend on their children this Christmas in the midst of a suffering world.

And somehow I sense that God is pleased with our internal struggle and, hopefully, with our decisions as well.

## Letters

# Men, not God, say gays are sinners

To the Editor:

In response to Mark A. Petersheim's letter to the editor (C-J Opinions, Nov. 20: "Failure to rebuke all sins does not weaken rebuke of one"), I would like to comment about some of his thoughts and also add my own.

Mr. Petersheim is classifying homosexuals and homosexual acts as sinful along with adultery, fornication, and lusting in your heart for another person.

Let me remind Mr. Petersheim that when Jesus lived he didn't speak for or against homosexuality. Jesus was not afraid to talk about sinfulness. He spoke often about adultery, unforgiveness, self-pride, the wrongful judging of others. Why didn't Jesus include homosexuals and homosexual acts among these evils? Is the reason he never mentioned homosexuality because it is not evil or sinful? Who has classified homosexuality as being sinful down

through the ages, God or man?

When the Bible was written, everyone assumed there was only one sexual orientation. Today we know differently, there are two natural sexual orientations, heterosexual and homosexual. If a heterosexual person practices a homosexual act it is wrong because he is doing something against his nature. Likewise if a homosexual person practices a heterosexual act it is wrong and unnatural for him, because that is not his sexual orientation.

If Mr. Petersheim were to look deeper into the issue of homosexuality he would find out that since the beginning of time, 10 percent of the population has always been gay. Homosexuality is not a matter of choice — who in their right mind would make such a choice when they know they will be discriminated against, called names, be the target of jokes, etc.? Our sexuality is a gift

from God; whether heterosexual or homosexual, how we use these gifts is our choice. It's just as good and natural for a person to be a homosexual person if that is that person's sexual orientation as it is for another person to be a heterosexual person if that is that person's sexual orientation.

People have always been afraid of or condemning of other people who are different from themselves. Why don't we start learning from our differences instead of condemning them?

No, Mr. Petersheim, I don't think it is God who is saying homosexuality is sinful, but self-justified Christians like yourself — and our churches are full of you — who are the condemning ones. Remember, God does not make mistakes.

Sandra A. Behnke  
West Avenue  
Hilton

## Isolation of issues denies 'seamless evil'

To the Editor:

Neither Vic Bartolotta nor Cardinal Bernardin needs my defense, but I feel I must respond to Stephen Fisher's letter (C-J Opinions, Nov. 27: "Finds seamless garment approach impractical"). His perspective can be understood in a political, scientific or military sense, but it is untenable for a Christian. Why? Isolating single moral dilemmas such as abortion from the whole picture denies the underlying "seamless evil" in all the forms of sinfulness.

Abortion is a crime not only because of the physical destruction of the unborn, but because of the spiritual destruction of those who survive. When we abort, we say, "We have no hope. We cannot accept the reality of a humanity

different from ours. We cannot trust in other people. We cannot trust God's personal presence in our life."

The arms race, for example, is just the same. We know that defense spending robs from the poor to pay industrial contractors, but it also takes a spiritual toll on the world, among those who live their lives under the threat of mutual, assured annihilation. When we spend money for arms, we say, "We have no hope. We cannot accept the reality of a humanity different from ours. We cannot trust God's personal presence in our life."

Such hope and trust are matters of the heart. The conclusion is that political action alone cannot be the Christian answer. As individuals, we

must center on our own hearts, our own lack of hope and trust, and our own part in the violence of this age — the arms race, abortion and other grave injustices. The prayer and labor must be for a change of heart that will give birth to true and lasting justice, not just legislative formality.

Our petty choosing of isolated issues backed up by our favorite biblical and Vatican document passages is really secondary to the reality of God's call in our life: "If anyone wants to be a disciple of mine, let them renounce their self and take up their cross every day and follow me."

Todd Flowerday  
Chapin Street  
Rochester

## Writer is 'disappointed' by outcome of bishops' meeting

To the Editor:

Ronald Reagan often talks about "Monday morning quarterbacking." I suppose this is something like that.

I am disappointed that the bishops, meeting in Washington, did not simply bypass the issue of Curran and Hunthausen. What they should have done was to make a simple statement in support of academic freedom to pursue studies in all

theological fields. No mention should have been made of the teaching of such findings or their application. The pope and the magisterium could not in any way quarrel with such a statement; in fact, they promote theological study. In that way, the bishops would not have had to compromise their own beliefs. Each would have had the freedom to express his individual conscience, and go on

from there. Let the chips fall where they may. That would be the less-cowardly way to go.

Back to Reagan. Anyone who considers catsup a vegetable, who advocates nuclear arms and "Star Wars" and who decreases expenditures for education, etc. dislikes mankind. Kudos to the bishops who are not interfering in government, but preaching the good news to the poor, which is their prerogative.

Grace B. Carnes  
Eagle Ridge Circle  
Rochester

## Foundation staffer grateful for story

To the Editor:

Many thanks for Teresa A. Parsons' comprehensive and excellent article on the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation!

I would like to re-emphasize three points which Teresa addressed:

1) The monies that are raised to help low- and moderate-income people go directly to these people. All administrative costs are funded by the Episcopal and Roman Catholic dioceses of Rochester, and the state of New York.

2) The foundation helps all people regardless of their race, color or creed, even though the name of the

organization might indicate otherwise.

3) Many people, even Catholics and Episcopalians, do not know that Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation exists. We need to shout from the housetops that this organization will help low- and moderate-income people with monies for closing costs and emergency repairs, and information on how to purchase a house for the first time. Call the foundation today if you know of anyone with a housing need! Call them today with your donation!

Rosemarie Horvath  
Bishop Sheen Ecumenical  
Housing Foundation

## Mr. Clark's daughter appreciates memorials

To the Editor:

My family and I want to thank you and Mr. Bartolotta for acknowledging the importance of the letters written by my father, John J. Clark III of Wayland. Perhaps more people will have the courage to publicly express their own opinions and not just go along with the crowd.

It is a shame you did not have the opportunity to meet face to face.

You would have enjoyed his warm chuckle and that twinkle in his eye. He would have enjoyed that surprise visit you mentioned.

I hope you will continue to wonder how he would respond to your columns and keep them a challenge. I have a feeling he is watching!

Theresa Clark Drum  
Marion Street  
Rochester



## Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They must be brief, typed (double-spaced, please) and no longer than 1 1/2 pages.

Letters should be mailed to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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.