

The Editor's Desk

Covering dissent

Recently, I've been perplexed by a series of complaints that seem to fall into a consistent pattern. If you read the page-five article on the Catholic Press Association and a few of the letters appearing on this page, you will see opposing viewpoints on the efforts of Catholic publications to report both the facts and substance of dissent from Church teaching.

In the past few weeks, several of my correspondents have warned, chastised, scolded and even damned me for our recent coverage of the case of Father Charles Curran, the recent Vatican document on homosexuality, the partial transfer of authority from Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen to his auxiliary, the removal of the imprimatur on "Parents Talk Love" and other matters.

It seems that these writers would like the Courier-Journal to publish only the official positions promulgated by the Vatican, giving no "ink" to those who disagree. Like it or not, what I've just described is not responsible journalism.

However, the writers do make one compelling point — that information on dissenting views may be misleading to those who are not well-catechized. Two clichés come quickly to mind: "Ignorance is bliss" and "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Each, in its own way, is true. But the Courier-Journal staff is neither qualified for nor charged with the job of catechesis.

On the other hand, as CPA president Albina Aspell notes, Catholic publications help no one by withholding information from their readers. Those who are thoroughly versed in Church teaching have the right, in my opinion, to hear and reflect on various viewpoints, whether or not those views are in accordance with official teachings. Intelligence is one of God's gifts to us, and it seems to me that we should be trusted to use that gift responsibly.

Moreover, how would readers react if they were informed that someone like Father Curran had been censured, but were not told why he had been censured? Wouldn't Catholics — both the knowledgeable and the naive — feel that they were being kept in the dark, perhaps for some less-than-divine purpose?

But then there's the snag mentioned by Aspell — the difficulty of keeping reports on dissent balanced. That is a problem we constantly struggle with at the Courier-Journal. I must acknowledge that from an outsider's point of view, some of our articles may seem to be biased toward the views of the dissenters.

That, however, is not our objective. Though it may sometimes occur as a result of journalistic dynamics, such a *perceived* bias is not intentional. You see, the nay-sayers — be they those who dissent from Church teaching or those who criticize Courier-Journal coverage — are far easier to locate than are those who agree with whatever is under consideration. The nay-sayers organize and lobby, while those who are pleased by a given action are quietly content.

Then, of course, after we have published an article in which someone criticizes a given action or idea, people who agree with that action or idea call us to complain that their views were not solicited. As exemplified by our article on Catholics United for the Faith (December 18), we do our best to give them equal time.

As for the argument that we do not print the full text of the Vatican statements, we simply don't have the space for such lengthy dissertations. And if we did print these documents in full, the Courier-Journal would become a theological journal rather than a newspaper. Any number of theological journals can provide interested Catholics with such texts, but only the Courier-Journal can tell you what other members of this diocese are thinking or doing.

So, in the interests of maintaining the local emphasis in your diocesan newspaper, we publish National Catholic News Service's articles and analysis on Church documents. But that does not mean that members of this diocese cannot obtain the full texts of Vatican documents. For this purpose, we heartily recommend "Origins," which contains the text of most major Vatican statements as well as many other interesting articles.



"IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, THE KIDS AND I'LL SIT IN A REAR PEW."

Letters

An open letter to Father Paul Cuddy

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although our general policy dictates that we do not publish open letters, we feel obliged to make an exception in this case. Since Father Cuddy used most of his December 18 column to criticize the approach of Father Hohman, it seems only fair to let Father Hohman respond in this forum.

Dear Father Paul:

As long as you brought the subject of God's unconditional love to our scrutiny (C-J, On the Right Side, Dec. 18: "That 'Smile: God loves you' sign") in the interest of clarifying matters for young people who, in your mind use it as leverage for being irresponsible, I feel constrained to reply — also in the interest of clarification.

First of all, I realize that you are coming at the matter from the point of view of being concerned about the seeming disregard by so many people — let's not lay it on the young simply because we are the old — of some basic moral standards.

That concern is admirable, but to place the blame on the concepts of "Smile, God loves you" or on God's unconditional love is to miss the mark badly.

Dear Father Paul, you know you believe in God's unconditional love, and I'm sure you smile many times a day because God loves you. Yet you know you are not worthy of that love and did nothing of yourself to earn it. Please recall the following and see if you don't believe in God's

unconditional love:

1) The Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Generous Father, who even before the prodigal has changed his ways, waits at the gate lovingly with robe and ring and sandals in hand. Do you think the son left home because his father loved him unconditionally? (Luke 15.)

2) The Parable of the Lost Sheep. The shepherd goes out to get them while they are still lost. (Luke 15.)

3) Countless mothers who still love their children no matter what heinous crimes those children may have committed — sometimes even to the foot of the gallows.

4) Romans 5:6-10 — "At the appointed time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for us godless men. It is rare that anyone should lay down his life for a just man, though it is barely possible that for a good man someone may have the courage to die. It is precisely in this that God proves his love for us: that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Now that we have been justified by His blood, it is all the more certain that we shall be saved by Him from God's wrath. For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son, it is all the more certain that we who have been reconciled will be saved by his life."

5) I John 4:10 — "Love then, consists in this; not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins."

I tremble at the thought of putting words in your mouth, but I believe you are concentrating not on God's love but on the response to that love, which is the condition for making it effective in our lives and in the world. If, under the influence of the Spirit, we refuse to respond to God's love with our love for him, it will do us no good, but it will still be there.

Now about the problem of people — not necessarily young — abdicating many moral standards. First of all, I don't think it's all that much worse now than it was in your time. It merely gets more publicity. However, that's just an opinion. I do think morality suffered much from the image of triviality which it was given in many cases in the past.

If trivial things are presented as sinful or deadly sinful when they are trifles, all morality suffers. I am certain you will not regard them as trivial matters, but most people did, and the results have been harmful.

Finally, the society in which we live, the flagrant presentation of evil as OK and the complexity and mobility of our society make it a place in which I wouldn't want to be growing up. But we know that God's grace and unconditional love can conquer all and make all things right, if by his grace we cooperate.

Smile, Father Paul, God loves you!

Father Louis J. Hohman
Pastor
St. Louis Church
Pittsford

Courier-Journal 'advocates' Father Curran?

To the Editor:

The Courier-Journal for many months now has been advocating the positions sponsored by Father Charles Curran and has been opposing Catholic orthodoxy on many points, both explicitly and implicitly. It is therefore interesting to see your editorial of December 11 trying to avoid the consequences of your position by claiming that you are not responsible for an abortion committed because of the Courier-Journal's teaching. An objective observer however wonders how you can sow the seed and not be responsible for the harvest.

We must remember that, besides

abortions, there are homosexual actions, contraception, marriage after divorce, masturbation, sacrilegious communions, anti-papal attitudes and possibly, finally, schism. On the Day of Judgment, the "nuances" of your position will evaporate like mist before the Truth.

"It must needs be that scandals come. Nevertheless, woe to him through whom the scandal cometh. It were better for him that a millstone be hanged around his neck and he be drowned in the depths of the sea!"

Rev. Leonard A. Kennedy CSB
Dean of Philosophy
University of St. Thomas
Houston, Texas

EDITOR'S NOTE: Just for reference, I never use the term "nuanced," except in a direct quotation. The word literally means "clouded," and when I choose to take a position, it will not be clouded in any way.

However, I don't recall the Courier-Journal taking any positions on the teachings of Father Curran. We've merely reported them. Reporting the news is the function of a newspaper.

If being informed of Father Curran's views leads some people astray, I must conclude that their catechesis is distinctly lacking. Unfortunately, Father, catechesis is the province of clergy and other religious education professionals, not of journalists.

'Shocked beyond belief' at article on study of Vatican letter

To the Editor:

I was shocked beyond belief by your article entitled "Diocesan committee studies Vatican letter on homosexuality" (C-J, Dec. 18). That article devotes half a page (to the views of) gay and lesbian Catholics — the Dignity/Integrity group, whose president, Bill DeStevens, is given top billing with a diabolical attack on that Vatican letter as, quote: "... a hypocritical statement filled with misinformation, contradiction and outright lies based on ignorance and fear."

The entire article is a one-sided argument against the Vatican letter, except for the alleged "formed

committee" to study that Vatican letter. It is not shown who picked the "committee," and it is not very clear what the purpose of that committee is; ostensibly also to oppose the Vatican letter.

The Vatican letter correctly (defines) homosexuality as "an objective disorder" and also as "a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil."

AIDS originated with homosexuals, and yet DeStevens attacks the Vatican letter as "(implying) that gays are the source of AIDS..."

Dignity/Integrity aligns itself with Father Charles Curran, recently relieved of teaching "his" moral views

in a Catholic university. Dignity/Integrity clearly comprises a separate religion within the Catholic Church, even to the extent of trying to force the Vatican to accept their willful, continuing lifestyle.

Gays have equal — not superior — rights in the Catholic Church. That includes former religious gays. We are all bound to avoid sin and to abide by the teachings of the Church, as given by Jesus Christ, and to love and pray for one another.

Leo J. Gangl
Indian Creek Rd.
Ithaca

Questions authors' motives in taking 'worthwhile risk'

To the Editor:

After reading "Authors say the risk was worthwhile" (C-J November 27), I am questioning their motives. They say "risk;" they use the words, "would the book ever come under scrutiny?" Were they apprehensive about their book? They must have known its contents, in part, were contrary to Catholic teaching.

When I saw (the book) advertised by the Paulist Press, I purchased a copy and read most of it. (In the book, the authors) say parents came to them because they wanted to teach their children about these matters and

"wanted to do it right." But they, the parents, did not get it right. Why did (the authors) not teach our Catholic parents how to present the teachings of the Church in these areas that affect families so deeply?

The saddest part of all of this is that they do not expect their own lives or ministries to be affected. May I ask, and receive an answer, are they still in a position to teach these moral values that are contrary to Church teaching? Thank you for listening. We raised nine children and sent them to Catholic schools, but unfortunately,

they were not always taught Catholic teachings. I sympathize with parents today. There will not be peace in families while our children are not being taught the truth.

Judy Snow
Sue Adams Lane
Auburn

EDITOR'S NOTE: We don't have any answer to the writer's question, as the Courier-Journal is not involved in such matters. Questions of this nature are better sent directly to the Diocese of Rochester. But we thank her for writing and expressing her view.