

## The Editor's Desk

Nearly everyone seems to be fascinated by the "Baby M" case, and I guess I'm no exception.

In the column below, Vic Bartolotta ponders who has the greater moral and legal right to the child. I, on the other hand, am so baffled by the moral questions of surrogate conception that I can't even begin to think about parental rights.

At the risk of sounding unenlightened, I'll sum up my feelings on surrogate parenthood in two words: It's sick.

The financial aspects of such arrangements bother me the most; because they go far beyond the realm of private adoptions, in which the adoptive parents pay legal fees and medical costs for both biological mother and newborn child. According to an article in Sunday's Democrat and Chronicle, the adoptive parents in a surrogate birth contract pay all of these costs, plus a fee of about \$10,000 to the surrogate mother.

I can understand how special circumstances might convince some women to become surrogate mothers. If a woman desperately needed money to feed existing children, for example, she might consider bearing a child for a worthy couple or — as in the case mentioned by the newspaper article — for her infertile sister.

But such cases must account for only a fraction of the 500 surrogate births that have occurred to date. In the remaining cases, it seems, the surrogate mothers must have had less altruistic motives at heart. As I see it, when a woman conceives and bears a child solely in order to turn a profit, she's selling human life.

The newspapers tell us that New York state is considering legislation to regulate surrogate-parenthood arrangements. One proposal would restrict use of the surrogacy procedure to couples in which the wife is medically unable to conceive or carry a child. This restriction was designed to eliminate the possibility that some women might use surrogates to avoid the inconvenience of carrying children for nine months.

Carry that thinking one step further, and you can envision a society in which a whole class of women produces babies for sale, while the orphanages remain filled with unmarketable products — children who aren't white, are handicapped or are too old for baby talk.

And what would happen, I wonder, if a problem arose with the merchandise? Would a woman who miscarried be faced with a breach-of-contract suit? Would adoptive parents receive full refunds if they returned handicapped babies with their original sales receipts?

The Democrat and Chronicle article quoted a spokeswoman for the New York State Catholic Conference as saying that surrogate parenting is "an assault on the family." I'd take that a step further — it's a dangerous assault on the value of human life.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

## A Closer Look



### Children of pain

The case of "Baby M" — the child born to surrogate mother Mary Beth Whitehead, who was artificially inseminated with sperm from William Stern — is bound to set legal precedents as well as moral ones. Both Whitehead and Stern claim they are Baby M's rightful and legal guardians. Their legal battle to determine custody of the 10-month-old girl should be settled later this month.

This inherently multifaceted issue is further complicated by the absence of laws dealing with surrogacy. Such obstacles, however, should not stop us from trying to understand as fully as possible what is happening to Baby M and the people who claim to be her legal guardians.

Adoption laws established to protect the rights of natural parents might be used as a guideline in this case. In New York state, for example, the law gives a grace period of 30 days to any biological mother who has put her child up for adoption, in case she changes her mind. In New Jersey, biological mother Mary Beth Whitehead has not been given that option, simply because surrogacy laws have yet to be passed.

True, surrogacy is not like adoption in every respect. But surrogacy is similar to adoption in that, in both cases, the biological mother's womb is the child's vehicle of entry into the world.

Though the argument is an old one, it is the right one in this case. The mother's relationship to the baby is a special thing, a graced thing that no one, no court and no amount of money should supersede. The life of the baby is best served when the baby remains with the natural mother, as long as the mother is fit.

William Stern's claim to be Baby M's legal guardian stems primarily from his donated sperm, which fertilized Whitehead's egg. But the ability to produce sperm that will later be used to artificially inseminate an egg cell does not a parent make. Nor does any amount of money paid to a surrogate mother to bear a child — even if the mother later refuses, as did Mary Beth Whitehead, to accept it.

Moreover, any determination regarding the child's future should not take into consideration the affluence of the adoptive parent or parents. And the only "right" that Stern ought to have — if any — is the right to an occasional visit.

Surrogacy is frequently questioned by adoptive parents and people who work with foster children. Why engage in surrogacy, they wonder, when so many poor or orphaned children literally cry out for loving homes? Surrogacy is a particularly unconscionable act for those who consider the millions of aborted children who might have been saved with more help.

Perhaps more than anything, the case calls attention to the psychological and emotional pain that surrogacy can cause the people who engage in its practice. One parent is bound to lose, and both parents will probably experience some degree of pain — an inevitable outcome for which both must bear the blame.

At times, all of us tend to blame God for our apparent misfortunes. Childless couples often look for ways to express their generative love, and that in itself is admirable. Yet is surrogacy an act of love or the supreme act of egotism on the part of parents who feel that they must have a child with their genes and their looks?

While surrogacy appears to be the act of loving people, it tends to ignore the other God-given alternatives, such as adoption or foster care. For that reason, surrogacy often results in disappointment rather than fulfillment, and in grief rather than joy. And no one can blame God for that.

## Letters

### Young reader urges Marian devotion

To the Editor:

Once again, Oral Roberts, television evangelist and faith healer, stole the headlines in recent newspapers and publications.

It is a sad fact that history's greatest evangelist — the Blessed Virgin Mary — has been largely ignored. Since Vatican II (which actually promoted Marian devotion), many Catholics have allowed their rosaries, scapulars, icons and images of Mary to collect dust on a forgotten shelf.

Mary is indeed the greatest and most persistent evangelist. She has called at Lourdes, Mt. Carmel, Guadalupe, Knock and Fatima. As queen of heaven and earth, she has more glorious titles and is invoked under more names than the most spectacular of European monarchs. As our queen, she demands neither territory nor political power. Her sole weapon is the rosary, and her army is the legions of people throughout the world who recite it daily.

Many Catholics, sadly enough, continue to regard Mary and the Fatima apparitions with as much skepticism as (they would) a psychic and a crystal ball. Mary's Fatima requests are not impossible: 1) the rosary and scapular, 2) the reception of Holy Communion and confession on the First Five Saturdays and 3) consecration to her Immaculate Heart. If these acts of reparation were not performed, mankind was doomed.

Let's see how much harm has already come in accordance with Mary's prophecy. Atheistic, communist Russia has spread its errors throughout the world, and many nations (Cuba, Nicaragua, Poland, and so forth) have disappeared as they succumbed to the red tide. World War II has come and gone. And the world has come to realize that the pope who was to "suffer much" is our (current) pontiff, John Paul II.

It is no coincidence that the attempt on the life of the Holy Father took place on May 13, 1981, the 64th anniversary of the first apparition! The Fatima messages are important; they are for everyone. Our freedom, possessions and even our lives — as well as the freedom and very existence of mankind — depend on our response to Mary's message. Is Mary, in fact, not like a mother who, seeing her child in danger, will go to any extreme to save that youngster from harm?

In this papally proclaimed Marian year, let us renew our devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, mother of the Church and our mother, given to us from the cross. Let us don our scapulars, finger our rosaries and pray to the Blessed Virgin that, through her intercession, we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.

Ted Crosby, 16  
Griffith Road  
Phelps

### Writer's 'objective yardstick' offered in credibility dispute

To the Editor:

There are a number of falsehoods, distortions and unreliable sources in Robert Bart's letter (C-J Letters, January 8: "Disputes 'witness' value of writer") about Nicaragua. Since Bart challenges the value of my personal witness in Nicaragua while making unwarranted assumptions about my political beliefs, Courier-Journal readers need an objective yardstick to judge credibility.

At this time of daily revelations about the White House junta's subversion of our constitution, one salient fact should be pointed out. For the past three years, I have consistently informed readers about the lies and illegality that are now becoming public knowledge; on the other hand, Robert Bart has never disowned any statement, policy or practice of Ronald Reagan.

Space does not permit a comprehensive rebuttal to Bart's Jan. 8 letter, so I will limit my reply to matters of the Church in Nicaragua.

Bart's depiction of Nicaragua's government as "atheistic" is patently absurd, since three of the highest-ranking officials in that country are Roman Catholic priests: Father Miguel d'Escoto (Maryknoll) is for-

eign minister, Father Fernando Cardenal (Jesuit) is minister of education, and Father Ernesto Cardenal (Trappist) is minister of culture.

Scores of Sandinista priests are joined by the overwhelming majority of Catholics in Nicaragua supporting the revolutionary process, which is nothing less than establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Furthermore, hundreds of U.S. priests, bishops and nuns have been to Nicaragua, along with thousands of other Christian prelates and lay people.

Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, representing the U.S. Catholic bishops before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on April 17, 1985, said, "Direct military aid to any force attempting to overthrow a government with which we maintain diplomatic relations is illegal, and in our judgment, immoral, and therefore cannot merit our support . . . We believe that it violates existing treaty obligations and undermines the moral standing of the United States within our international community."

John E. Milich  
P.O. Box 333  
Ithaca

### 'Sartorial dissenters' weave reversible garment

To the Editor:

In his "seamless evil" letter (C-J Letters, Dec. 18: "Isolation of issues denies 'seamless evil'"), Todd Flowerday states that Victor Bartolotta Jr. and Cardinal Bernardin have no need of his defending them. Unfortunately, being totally defenseless, the unborn do have need of our defending them. The seamless garment allegory implies catholicity with both upper- and lower-case "c."

In his document on procured abortion, Pope Paul VI observed that those who share complicity in abortion by counseling, financing or legislating — as well as through direct participation in abortion — incur automatic excommunication. As Scripture states, "No murder has life."

Some have outgrown the seamless garment that was designed to fit the repentant. Instead of a seamless garment, these conspirators have

woven a "seamy" garment for themselves, with "pro-choice" emblazoned on one side of the seam and "death to the unborn" on the other.

The seamless garment is not reversible. As Jesus said, "My words will not pass away." The sartorial dissenters bent on turning Roman Catholicism inside out have designed their seamy garment to be reversible. In this mode, a sprig of college ivy is pinned to the notorious seam, and *voilà!* — you have the "academic freedom gown," every bit as capable of wreaking spiritual havoc in this bogus mode as it was in dealing death in its original mode.

May God bless and make fruitful the effort of the Right to Life people as we struggle to restore the sanctity-of-life ethic in this nation.

Louis J. Pasqua  
Exchange Street  
Geneva

### 'Social issue' claims countless lives daily

To the Editor:

A friend recently was bemoaning the fact that (the parish) priest very seldom preached against abortion. I asked if anyone had asked that he do a homily concerning the innocent unborn. Oh yes, said my friend, but was always given the pat answer, "It is a social issue and doesn't belong in church." I ask this priest and all the others who have hidden behind this statement if they considered the Holocaust in Germany to be a social issue.

This "social issue" claims more

lives each year than any war or all the wars combined, since killing unborn babies was legalized in 1973. It happens daily, not too far from your rectories. Women and their unborn children are victimized daily by that kind of logic.

So, don't say it is a social issue and turn your backs on those most innocent and vulnerable amongst us, or perhaps Jesus will someday turn his back to you.

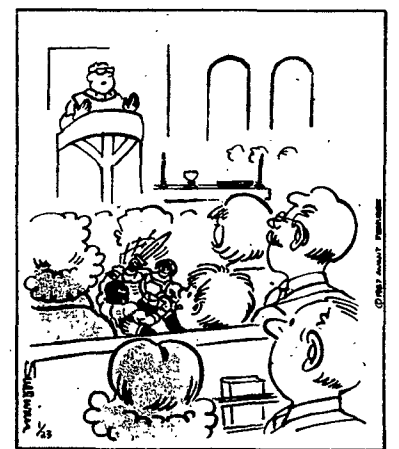
Mary Ellen Frisch  
Gillett Road  
Spencerport

## 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 1½ 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.



AND REFLECTING ON THIS MESSAGE OF PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL