

The Editor's Desk

It seems that whenever the word "saint" is mentioned, I automatically think of heroic martyrs like Joan of Arc, who valiantly defended the faith against fierce attacks. Thus, as I watched Alain Cavalier's award-winning film *Therese* last Friday evening (see story on page 5), I was struck by the simplicity of St. Therese of Lisieux, by the unremarkable nature of her short life.

Therese was a contemplative, set apart from the world by her calling to become a Discalced Carmelite at the age of 15. Within the walls of the cloistered convent, she scrubbed, cooked, mended and prayed. But she did nothing to distinguish herself from the convent's other sisters.

As John Coulson noted in his biographical dictionary *The Saints*, "During the nine years she had spent in that little provincial convent of Normandy, she had apparently never done anything remarkable, spectacular or even noticeable, so that, during her last illness, some nuns wondered what the prioress could find to say in the short biographical notice that was sent to Carmelite convents after the death of members of their order."

In fact, no such obituary was ever written. Instead, the sisters at Lisieux mailed copies of Therese's journal to other Carmelite convents, setting in motion what Pope Pius XI later called "a hurricane of glory." Within 15 years of Therese's death from tuberculosis, the writings — edited into an autobiography entitled *Story of a Soul* — had been translated into 15 languages and had sold more than 1 million copies. Countless spiritual and material favors were reported to have occurred through her intercession.

Though Therese's life had not been unusual, her canonization was unusually quick. The customary 50-year waiting period was suspended, and Therese joined the communion of saints on May 17, 1925, less than 28 years after her death.

In the bull of canonization, Pius XI wrote that St. Therese had achieved sanctity "without going beyond the common order of things."

Looking back on the film, however, I realize that actress Catherine Mouchet does portray Therese as a woman possessed by one quality beyond the realm of ordinary concerns. Through Mouchet's eyes shines an intense spiritual zeal, a thriving desire to save the souls of sinners.

In an early scene, the 14-year-old Therese exclaims, "I saved him; I won!" after learning that a notorious murderer kissed the crucifix before going to the guillotine. Years later, she tells the Carmelite prioress that her goal is to become a saint. Reproached for her pride, Therese responds, "I will become a great saint in secret."

Sharpening the distinction between warrior and secret saint is a scene in which Therese's sister Cecile, also a Carmelite, takes a photograph of Therese costumed in armor. But the tin-foil shoes don't fit her, and Therese, never a Joan of Arc, collapses in a fit of tuberculin coughing.

Yet Therese of Lisieux often has been termed the most popular saint of modern times. It is perhaps a tribute to this dual nature of sanctity that France placed St. Therese alongside St. Joan of Arc, by adopting the quiet Carmelite as the nation's secondary patroness.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



My nine-inch black-and-white Motorola TV died two weeks ago. It was a slow death actually, a gradual thing. First I lost the picture, but the sound was intact. Although I could hear Channel 8 anchor Jim Parsons' voice, I couldn't see him.

Since I know what Jim looks like, I was able to endure the problem without becoming too annoyed. However, things worsened as I tried to resurrect the picture and ended up destroying the video portion on the other three channels. At that point, it appeared I had blown something on the set.

So I decided that I would try to fix the set myself. No, I'm not an electrician and, frankly, I know little about electronics, but I figured I'd give it a shot anyway.

The immediate problem was getting the plastic back off the television. Ignoring the obvious warnings against tampering by untrained personnel, I worked on the back for about 15 minutes before I decided that probably only a television repairman with a special tool could successfully complete even this step.

That left only one thing for me to do: call a TV repair shop to see if I could get the thing fixed for a reasonable price. I dialed a repair shop on Clifford Avenue.

"Hello, do you fix these little black-and-white TVs?" I inquired of the person who answered.

"What kind of set do you have?" he queried.

"Motorola," I said proudly, thinking to myself that my set was no off-brand, cheap thing.

"Look," he explained to me, "Motorola stopped making TVs over 10 years ago. Besides, why fix the thing when we've got brand new black-and-white sets for \$59?"

"Thanks for your help," I replied as I hung up the phone, loath to part with 59 bucks I didn't really have to spare. At least the phone conversation had resolved one thing. I neatly wrapped the black cord around the back of my Motorola and tossed the set into the dumpster, where it lay on its side, looking forlorn.

In truth, I hadn't paid for the TV. I had borrowed the set from my cousins last October to watch the World Series. Several times since, I had borrowed it again to watch the Super Bowl and similar programs.

I guess my cousins just got sick of lending me the TV all the time, because they ended up giving it to me.

Now that I don't have a set, I'm not sure whether my daughter and I really need one, anyway. She visits her grandparents, Lynn has plenty of opportunities to learn about all those new toys from all those advertisements neatly spliced between Saturday morning cartoons.

Sure, I'll miss Jim Parsons, and my daughter will miss the newest adventures of Rainbow Bright. But I guess it's hard for me to believe that if Jesus were living on earth now, He'd be spending a lot of time watching television.

Letters

Column's shock value is inexplicable?

To the Editor:

I don't know why I was shocked to see a column by Father Richard McBrien in the *Courier-Journal*. He is renowned for his rejection of many of the same basic teachings that Father Curran rejects — a position for which Father Curran has been declared unfit to teach Catholic theology.

The publication of Father McBrien's views by the diocesan paper confers credibility on those beliefs of his and Father Curran's that have been found (throughout the Church's history) to be erroneous. Since truth is the foundation of authentic love, the consequence of confusion as to "what is truth?" — when that answer is available through our Lord's infallible guidance of His Church — is lives that are distorted by caricatures of that charity that Christ embodies.

Such confusion has an impact not only on the holiness of those who call themselves Catholic, but on what that designation signifies to those outside the Catholic Church. Malcolm Muggeridge once stated to a correspondent

that "Kitty (his wife) and I had once thought of ending up in the Church of Rome." What inhibited them was the boldness with which a group of priests attached *Humanae Vitae* and persevered in defiance of the Holy See. They concluded that the Catholic Church, "this last bastion" in a dying civilization, "was going the way of the modern world."

Finally, Malcolm Muggeridge embraced the Catholic Church at the age of 79. He had realized that it was not those vocal dissenters who speak for the Church, but the Holy Father, the successor of Peter, and those bishops in accord with him, who are her infallible teachers of doctrines of faith and morals.

One of the human realities that is evident in every generation and every individual is self-will. The desire not to be subject to another was responsible for the fall of the angels and the fall of our first parents. In some sense, it is responsible for every sin.

Is not Father Curran's notion of "the infallible conscience" (meaning compelling adherence independent of

magisterial teaching) indicative of that tendency? If the conscience is "infallible," then obedience to the Church is optional. Every individual, in that case, has to decide what are the constituent elements of Catholic faith. The teaching Church's divine mandate would evaporate in the plethora of individual interpretations.

I pray that the laity and religious of Rochester who choose the designation "Catholic" will perceive that unless we subject our consciences to a guarantee of truth, independent of our wills, we have no assurance that we are acting or will be recognized as those of whom Christ said, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). **Helen Ann Wagner**
Lark Street
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: Father McBrien's column was selected by our editorial committee after considerable discussion. While we respect the concerns of those who dislike the column, we should also note that several people have written to praise the column but did not wish for their letters to be published.

Finds coverage weighted toward dissenters

To the Editor:

In recent months, there have been a number of articles in the *Courier-Journal* regarding the Vatican's actions towards Father Curran, Archbishop Hunthausen and the recent Vatican letter on pastoral care of homosexuals.

In its coverage of the Vatican, the *Courier-Journal* has given more space to the views of those who oppose or are critical of the Vatican's actions. A sample of the headlines illustrates this: "Catholics express anger, confusion over Vatican action in Seattle," "Actions aimed at silencing dissent dishearten local scholars," "Archbishop Weakland blasts swing toward 'rigidity, fear'"

The recent Vatican letter on pastoral care of homosexuals drew an article in the November 6 *Courier-*

Journal on local reaction entitled "Vatican letter seen as another rejection of gay Catholics." This article only carried the critical comments of Sister Cheryl Lee, who is the chaplain of the local chapter of Dignity/Integrity. In a December 18 article subtitled "To gays, letter reads more like an attack than pastoral care," further local negative reaction to the letter was printed.

The coverage of the Vatican's letter on pastoral care of homosexuals, in my opinion, was not much different from what one would expect to find in the secular daily papers. If anything, the secular papers might have written more balanced articles.

In addition to covering local events and concerns of Catholics, I believe a diocesan newspaper's emphasis should be to explain the Church's

teachings and decisions with depth and sensitivity. I do not believe it should focus on criticism of the Church's teachings or decisions. If the *Courier-Journal* felt it was important to print so much negative reaction to the Vatican's letter on pastoral care of homosexuals, for example, why didn't it at least print the actual text of the letter for Catholics to read?

I know I am not alone in my feelings of dissatisfaction with the *Courier-Journal*. We're not asking for much. All we want is a Catholic newspaper that puts faithfulness to our Holy Father and our Church's teachings and decisions as its first priority.

Raymond N. Buonemini
Holcroft Road
Rochester

Catholic Charities director discusses outcome of campaign

To the Editor:

Please accept my belated but very sincere thanks to all of you at the *Courier-Journal* and your very generous donors for the fine response to the Catholic Charities/*Courier-Journal* Christmas Campaign.

The "100 Neediest Cases" published between Thanksgiving and Christmas gave a sampling of the needs many of our fellow citizens are enduring throughout the diocese.

The response from your readers enabled Catholic Family Center to provide food vouchers to 1,636 families and individuals. We were able to find donors to distribute baskets and toys to an additional 211 families. The total value of the food vouchers was \$27,300. This program helped to make life better for many children, elderly people and others who would have had a pretty bleak Christmas without such support.

While the statistics mentioned

above are only for those served by CFC, I am sure there were several thousand more persons helped through the other branches of Social Ministry and Urban Services.

Thanks again for helping us to show that you care through sharing. Best wishes to all of your readers for a blessed New Year.

James M. Maloney
Executive Director
Catholic Family Center

It's a shame writer missed whole lecture

To the Editor:

In response to Ms. Echaniz's letter to the editor (C-J Letters, January 29: "Finds cremation article inadequate") we at Assumption attempt to present the Good News of the Gospel to our young people in language which they can understand and not with hermeneutically unverifiable assertions concerning es-

chatological realities. It's a shame that (Ms. Echaniz) and the reporter could not have been present for our entire course on death and dying. Things would have been more understandable had my entire lecture been reprinted in this paper.

Father George D. Heyman
Assumption Parish
Fairport

Courier-Journal should not carry insulting column

To the Editor:

It is not right for our diocesan paper to carry a column in which one segment of its population is, with predictable regularity, unfavorably labeled, put down and publicly judged. I refer to the "rabid feminist," "fancy Jane" women religious against whom Father Cuddy's emissions of hostility are from time to time strewn upon the pages of the *Courier-Journal*.

Would you also carry a column in which similar labels, aspersions, and diatribes were periodically shot forth against the male clergy? I think not.

But enough is enough.

Beatrice Ganley, SSJ
East Avenue
Pittsford



"YOU REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT'S THE LAST TIME YOU'LL GLAM-PUNK AN OFFERING INTO THE COLLECTION BASKET."

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.