



Cultural conspiracy

Coincidence alone can't account for what Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu terms a systematic cultural bias that transforms the strengths of black students into failure. See page 8.



Sparring students

Through the experience of the Mission Bouts, an annual night of boxing at Aquinas, students learn to better themselves while helping missions overseas. See page 12.

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World & Nation in Brief from NC News

World

CRS to aid earthquake victims

New York — Catholic Relief Services will send an initial sum of \$20,000 and 17,600 pounds of food to aid residents of the remote area of Ecuador that was devastated by a series of 10 earthquakes in early March. The announcement was made by CRS spokeswoman Beth Griffin on March 13. Griffin said CRS has sent assessment teams to the Ecuadorian towns of Lago Agrio, Coca, Baeza, Santa Rosa and Cayambe, which are located within the area that was hardest hit by the earthquakes. At least 500 people were killed, 1,500 injured and 20,000 left homeless by the earthquake, she said.

Bishop's remarks add to strain

A Chilean bishop's suggestion that an attempt on President Augusto Pinochet's life may be considered an act of heroism has strained Church relations with the military government as Pope John Paul II prepares for an April visit to the country. At the center of the controversy is Bishop Carlos Camus of Linares, Chile, former general secretary of the bishops' conference. In a March 8 newspaper interview, Bishop Camus said the people who tried to kill Pinochet while he was traveling in an armed caravan last September "perhaps will become heroes."

Nation

Welfare system needs reform

Washington — Welfare benefit levels and much of the welfare system itself constitute an "affront to conscience" and are in need of reform, the executive director of Catholic Charities USA told a House subcommittee. Father Thomas J. Harvey, whose organization represents diocesan Catholic Charities agencies, said sustenance for families in need of welfare "has declined about 40 percent in real dollars." "The poorest people have become poorer, even as we somehow expected to see them pull themselves up by their bootstraps," he said.

Condoms in prison blasted

Burlington, Vt. — A new policy of providing condoms to inmates in Vermont's six regional jails makes prisons into "sexual cesspools," said Bishop John A. Marshall of Burlington. "Some people would like to say that health can be separated from morality, that to prevent the spread of AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), for instance, it is permitted to use an evil means — some might say a lesser evil — such as a contraceptive device. This is not so. A good purpose does not justify an evil means. Never," said Bishop Marshall.

Priest pleads not guilty

Woodridge, Ill. — A priest of the Diocese of Joliet, Ill., pleaded not guilty March 11 in DuPage County Circuit Court to charges of sexually abusing a female former student. Father Edward A. Stefanich, 48, was indicted in early March by a grand jury. He is charged with four counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a former student of St. Scholastica School, Woodridge. Father Stefanich was ordained for the Joliet Diocese in 1965, and has been pastor at St. Scholastica Parish for the past 10 years.

Bioethics paper provides more than prohibitions

By Teresa A. Parsons

Contrary to the impressions created by initial media reports, theologians found the Vatican's document on bioethics surprisingly likeable, once they had a chance to read it.

Released March 10 by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" is being hailed by many as the first clear voice to question whether what is medically possible should necessarily be done.

The Vatican instruction was released at a timely moment for Americans, who — as a result of New Jersey's Baby M case — are now confronting a whole host of new biomedical technologies and the specter of legal issues raised by such procedures as surrogate motherhood.

Even so, the document's timing may have been unfortunate. Coming as it did on the heels of what has been termed a Vatican crackdown on dissent in the American Church, the document has drawn reaction that focuses primarily on what the document denies.

"I expected it to be more harsh from the preliminary indications in the press," said Marvin Mich, assistant professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's Institute. "But compared to the language in the (letter to Father Charles E. Curran), where everything is 'intrinsically evil or wrong,' the language in this document is a little bit softer — not as condemnatory."

"It expresses a considerable degree of openness in the conclusion, when it says the document is not meant to halt the effort of reflection," Mich added. "For a Vatican document to say that is something to be noted."

Dr. Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, assistant professor of religious studies at Nazareth College, agreed that many of the document's passages were surprisingly positive.

"The media reports made the whole thing sound like one big 'No,'" she said. "Although it is rather cautious in its methods and conclusions, the document is rational and reasonable, and I think some passages will live beyond the moment."

Theologians say that the Vatican's instruction in bioethics largely reaffirms the Church's traditional teachings on the sanctity of marriage, the conjugal act and the dignity and primacy of each individual.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

PARALLEL AGENDAS — Governor Mario Cuomo and Cardinal John O'Connor of New York chat just prior to the luncheon session of the New York Catholic Conference's March 9 Public Policy Forum. In his brief address, Cuomo said the goals of the Church and the state are often the same. For story and more photos, see page 5.

Although the document's approach was traditional, Mich believes it amplified some points to a new degree. Under several headings, for instance, the instruction states that a child has a right to be the product of a conjugal act within marriage.

"It seems to be saying that you are somehow violating a child if he or she is brought into being in a laboratory rather than in a bedroom," Mich said. "I think that's a new statement."

From his perspective as an assistant pastor, Father Timothy Horan believes the

heart of the document is its description of man as a unity of body and soul.

"To express his nature, the conjugal act, though expressed in bodily terms, must convey not only man's physical, but also his spiritual nature," he explained. "Most of the biomedical interventions described in the document separate man's essential unity. The physical and the spiritual are torn asunder. The man and the woman are no longer one physically, and the woman is now subject to the technician ... This robs the

Continued on Page 10

Bishop asks commission to study Vatican document

... Bishop Marshall has asked the diocesan theological commission to study the newly released Vatican document on bioethics. The commission, in turn, has referred the task to a subcommittee on moral theology, headed by Marvin Mich, assistant professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

Other names being considered include Father Thomas J. Harvey, executive director of Catholic Charities USA, and Father George Norton, director of communications at St. Scholastica School.

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