



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

The thornbush revisited

Five years ago this week, we published *Fire in the Thornbush*, our pastoral letter about women in the Church. We chose April 29, the feast of St. Catherine of Siena, as the date for publication, in recognition of St. Catherine's holiness, scholarship and prophetic courage.

In that letter, we tried to read the signs of our times in light of Catholic tradition and to suggest ways in which the convergence of those realities was calling our community of faith to a conversion of heart.

We were not the first diocese in our nation to engage in such an effort, but we were among the first, and our work generated considerable response from sister dioceses all across the country. The volume of mail was remarkably heavy and, although some were negative, the letters were largely and strongly positive. I remember being surprised by the strength of that response, and I remember thinking that the response in itself indicated somehow that we were pursuing an issue to which the Lord was very strongly calling us.

Five years later, I am more deeply convinced than ever of that assessment. I say that because of my experience on the committee charged by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops with drafting the Pastoral Letter on the Concerns of Women in Church and Society. The information we have received from far more than 100 dioceses in our country indicates strongly that we in the Diocese of Rochester were on the right track five years ago, and that we need to recommit ourselves to this work in order to be faithful to the Holy Spirit working among us.

As I write these words, I am aware that not all in our family of faith see all of the issues related to this theme in quite the same way, and I become more aware as the years go by that change in large groups can be slow, even when everyone within the group is willing to go a new way.

Having said that, I must confess to a certain impatience with the pace of our progress, an impatience that emerges not when people are actively engaged in meeting challenges and welcoming new opportunities available to us in all of this, but when it is clear that people are apathetic about it or thoughtlessly resisting the effort.

I don't know any easy way to solve that difficulty except to keep the challenge before us, and to encourage you and our communities to be diligent in prayer, study and work, that together we might soon arrive at a much better place on this issue than we're at now.

Let me test this out on you as I draw this column to a close. Over the years, I have come to the pastoral judgment that all ministries — all forms of Christian service — that do not require ordination should be open to all qualified members of our faith community, regardless of sex. I further judge that we'll do excellent work if we actively recruit men and women to share the burdens and/or the joys in all areas of service, which in the past have been reserved to one sex or the other.

I do not think I am able to mandate such recruiting in every area of parish life, but I want you to know that I encourage it as something much needed in the Church, and I promise you that I will support you in it.

Peace to all.

The Editor's Desk

The real questions

It's Tuesday morning, April 28, and I've had quite enough of the televangelist sex scandal, as the pundits are now calling the sad tale of Jim and Tammy Bakker. I mention the date because I'm sure that as the week goes on we'll all be confronted with even more charges and countercharges. Now — although media commentators have been calling the mess a 'holy war' for some weeks — the TV preachers themselves are threatening bloody battle. All the sound and fury so far has been mere prelude, I presume.

When I read or listen to reports on the matter, I wind up arguing with myself. One part of me laments the futility of the struggle, the un-Christian and vengeful tone, the assumption of the right of judgment — a right I've always believed was reserved to God alone. "Why are they doing this?" I ask myself.

The other side of my nature, the amateur student of politics and power, provides a ready answer — they're doing it for power and money. The conflict isn't really about sexual morality, it's about numbers — the number of TV congregants, the ratings, and — most importantly — the tally of the postal collection basket. Oftentimes, in order to achieve such numerical success, one has to drag the other guys down. Sex is merely a ploy, my cynical side says, and it's an effective one, because sexual sins are hard to prove and even harder to disprove.

Maybe this sex scandal is important to the viewer-donors for whom the televangelists vie so desperately, but it means nothing to me. As far as I'm concerned, whatever Jim and Tammy Bakker have or have not done is between them and God. I'm far more concerned about the personal demons that could bring so-called men of God to such a low ebb of Christian charity that they're willing to condemn each other for simple human sinfulness. I'm concerned about what each of these TV preachers — from the Bakkers and Swaggart to Falwell, Roberts and my personal favorite, Gene Scott — does with all the money brought in. It seems they never stop talking about money, but has any of them ever provided clear information on where it goes? Do they help people in need, or do they help themselves to piles of cash? Are they filled with the love of God or love of themselves?

It seems to me that the media and the American public are allowing the evangelists to blind them with a sexual smoke screen. If these preachers weren't masters of the media, they wouldn't be where they are today. But that doesn't mean we have to go along with their nonsense. It's time for us to stop talking and joking about alleged sexual improprieties, and get down to the real questions of televangelism.

Letters

Policy on letter publication clarified

To the Editor:

The letters to the editor section of your March 19 issue left me dismayed and confused. I know you wish to carefully present both sides of some issues and let all voices be heard, but enough is enough. I don't think you should print letters that contain unkind, untrue or hurtful attacks on people such as Bishop Clark, Father McBrien and the religious women of our diocese. Letters implying that our bishop does not bear witness to the truth or lead us to sanctity and that our religious women live "repulsively" do not belong in the Courier-Journal.

At the bottom of the letters page you had a note that you routinely edit offensive words and libelous

statements. Quite frankly, I found much of what you printed was offensive and I was not one of the persons being attacked. What do reasonable people have to do to put a stop to this — cancel our subscriptions?

I can't understand what credentials many of your letter writers have that make them such facile critics of our bishop and theologians, who have years of study, experience and expertise and probably even a call from God to be our shepherds and teachers.

Therese G. Lynch, MD
Harwood Lane
East Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: I sincerely

believe that our refusal to publish the letters to which Ms. Lynch refers would only provoke more frustration and resentment on the part of the writers. Meanwhile, the rest of our readers would be naively unaware that this angry undercurrent exists.

As to the term "offensive" in our letters policy: In this content, the term refers to vulgar and crude language, not merely unkind words; libel is a complex legal term defined by five criteria. None of the letters we have published were libelous.

Regarding the qualifications of any of our letter writers, I can only offer this quotation: "By their deeds you shall know them."

Reader notes 'shortage of male celibates'

To the Editor:

I read with a certain sadness the article about the clergy convocation (C-J Letters, April 9: "Diocese plans expanded clergy convocation"). I have no problem with the bishop calling together the priests of the diocese, but the phrase "Church without priests" left me cold. This implies that there is a shortage of priests, and I agree with Carlo Carretto in his book *I Sought and I Found*, when he said that there was

no shortage of priests, only a shortage of "male celibates."

One of the great secrets of the Church seems to be that we all are the Church and, through the initiation of baptism, all share in the priesthood of Christ: male and female, celibate and non-celibate, black, white, red, yellow or whatever. The Church has repeatedly segregated the "consecrated male celibates" from the rest of the Body of Christ and

treated the main body of worshippers, to use a current movie title, as "children of a lesser god."

Throughout his life, Jesus laments those of little faith. Let us come together in faith, in the presence of the trinity, and joyfully celebrate the love of the Lord: his for us and ours for him. Let our lights shine!

John J. Schmitt
Mt. Vernon Ave.
Rochester

Father Lum's recent letter is denigrated ...

To the Editor:

It is indeed sad that Father William Lum considers area Catholics who are faithful to tradition as local heretics (C-J Letters, March 26: "Bishop's critics termed 'rigorists'"). Concerned Roman Catholics wonder why those like Father Lum object to Catholics who hold to the phrase, "quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" (what has been believed "always, everywhere, and by all") as a criterion of orthodoxy. It would seem that those who reject this criterion are the ones whose Catholicity is in doubt. As for calling those who follow tradition "rigorists," if it is rigor that is needed to keep us in the state of sanctifying grace, then may God grant us rigor.

Father Lum calls for prayers for us poor misguided souls who point out the errors of "modernism." Let us pray also for him that he and the many others like him will embrace the cross rather than the world.

"He who does not take up his cross is not worthy of me," said Our Divine Savior Jesus Christ.

Gerard G. Klueber
Ellicott Street
Rochester

... and wholeheartedly praised

To the Editor:

We commend and thank Father William Lum, chaplain of the University of Rochester, for his forthright letter of affirmation and support of Bishop Matthew H. Clark (C-J Letters, March 26: "Critics of bishop termed 'rigorists'"). We wholeheartedly subscribe to Father Lum's cogent defense of our bishop. We also concur with Father's exhortation to pray for the bishop's

critics, and we add a recommendation to pray for Bishop Clark as he requested us to do in his column, *Along the Way*, (C-J, March 26).

We consider Bishop Clark to be a good shepherd, and we hope and pray that he will continue to be our bishop for many years to come.

Loretta & Tom Scahill
Cypress Street
Rochester

Pharisees, says writer, return to haunt us in modern times

To the Editor:

As a lay Catholic, I am disturbed and saddened by the letter entitled "Concerned Catholics Speak Out" (C-J Letters, March 19). Let me reply that in no uncertain way do the "Concerned Catholics" speak for the rest of the loyal, faithful diocesan Catholics.

Recall how Jesus was criticized for healing the blind man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees overlooked the miraculous healing power manifested and the joy of the blind man's cure,

to level criticism as to the legality of the situation. More concern for rules than for an individual! The Pharisees — religious leaders — threw the blind man out bodily because he defended Jesus.

How sad, how unfortunate that this same circumstance repeats itself today in the life of the Church!

To criticize Bishop Matthew H. Clark — a humble, intelligent, faithful, spiritual shepherd of Christ, who is living and practicing the faith with compassion, as Christ would expect

— is to complain that Christ was a friend of publicans and sinners, as the Pharisees said (Luke 7:33-34).

Besides, who are we who profess loyalty to Christ's Church, to pronounce judgment and ask for relocation of Bishop Clark? Do we have the theological background and training to question Bishop Clark's interpretation of Christian freedom and teaching? Let's reserve judgment for God alone!

Dorothy Rice
Evergreen Drive
Rochester

Crossroads' uplifting music found praiseworthy

To the Editor:

My husband and I attended the mass of Reparation for abortions at St. Augustine's Church on March 6. The mass was beautiful and inspiring, and I wanted to comment on the music group, Crossroads, that ministered there.

To see a group of such fine, talented young men sing and play to the Lord with the love and sincerity they depicted was indeed uplifting.

We were prompted to attend the concert at Christ the King Church on

Saturday evening, and were once again treated to two hours of praising the Lord through the music of Crossroads.

We hope to work to get them back to play for the youth in Rochester. I'd like every teen in the city to see and hear them play. We'll be in the front row.

Diane Yehl
Hillary Drive
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 1½ 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.