

C-J Letters

Article failed to separate theological notions of charity

To the Editor:

The perceptive Catholic observer must view with dismay the Courier-Journal's front-page article of July 2 ("Pope's meeting with Waldheim puzzles local clergymen"). It misleads in several directions. It suggests that a plethora of Catholic clergymen were upset at the Holy Father's recent reception of Austrian President Kurt Waldheim. It suggested, also, that this reception was somehow unnecessarily antagonistic to interfaith cooperation. I'd submit that a survey of Catholic clergy generally would show the majority applauding the liberal move as entirely within the realm of Christian charity.

The article cited the names of only two local clergymen, Father Joseph Brennan and Rabbi Judea Miller. Father Brennan's studies of and sympathies with the Jewish community here are well-known and laudable. Rabbi Miller's frequent and articulate promotion of a sempiternal spirit of holocaustal memorialization is also well-known. It is sad that neither of these two theological minds has given any clear expressions of the separate notions of "charity" maintained by the two creeds. They are capable of doing so.

It is that difference that is at the

crux of the pope's admirable decision to receive even "sinners and dine with them," and of the Jewish repugnance of such.

Once again, it is time to challenge Catholic theologians to point out and clarify this simple theological fact. There is a fundamental difference in the notion of "charity" at work in the separate theologies of Jews and Christians. It is hard to comprehend why scholars like Father Brennan, more competent than this writer, do not address this important question in your pages. The distinction becomes more and more vital to understand as Jewish leaders worldwide become more and more bent on a perpetual observation of the holocaust and its admitted horrors. It is one thing to remember; it is too easy for that remembering to assume a renewed and inordinate spirit of vengeance and recrimination.

Christ taught that no crime is beyond forgiveness. It seems Jews cannot accept that teaching. But the law of Christian charity is absolute. "Lord, when my brother wrongs me, how often must I forgive him? Seven times?" "No," Jesus replied, "not seven times: I say, seventy times seven times." and Christian eschatology provides the rationale: "My heavenly Father will treat you in ex-

actly the same way unless each of you forgives his brother from the heart." No hint of qualification here. Not foolish sentimentality this; something deep within the recesses of the Christian spiritual legacy requires an aversion to centuries-long recrimination and vengeance.

In light of the understandable need voiced by Jews for continued recollection of the holocaust so that it does not happen again, Christian theologians must nevertheless drop the timidity that has allowed this distinction to be blurred. Christian notions of absolute charity derive from

the New Testament; Judaic notions of retributive justice derive ultimately from the Old Testament. Christian exegetes must courageously insist on that measure of altruism that sets no limit in the New Law of charity. Rabbinical scholars must acknowledge and clarify the limits of the Old Law's philanthropy, if that is what justifies for them the unrelenting punishment of offenders.

These are the musings of a layman. If I oversimplify, let me be corrected. Let me challenge Father Brennan and Rabbi Miller to assemble an article that will make clear

this important distinction. It will be a worthy project.

Clarence Amann
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EDITOR'S NOTE: We didn't intend for our article to be taken as a comprehensive representation of the spectrum of Catholic and Jewish thought on the pope-Waldheim meeting. We aimed only to give readers a sampling of views from informed leaders in both communities. If we failed to make that distinction clear, we offer our apologies.

Pope acted out of Christian forgiveness

To the Editor:

The Courier-Journal lead article of July 2 ("Pope's meeting with Waldheim puzzles local clergymen") regarding the meeting of Pope John Paul II with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim reported the feelings of bewilderment and criticism among "local Jews and more than a few Catholics." It is unfortunate that this article mirrored the criticism and comments of a number of columnists featured on the editorial pages of the Gannett press.

Those who feel that the pope "owes an act of reparation" for participating in this meeting do not perceive the world and its problems as the Holy Father does. He is accused of being insensitive to the memory of the victims of the holocaust and, somehow, his being Polish is also

mentioned as a problem.

It is necessary to point out that the holocaust was not a uniquely Jewish experience to the Polish nation. The first victims of the gas chambers in the Auschwitz death camp were Poles. After five years of Nazi occupation, Poland lost six million of its citizens, or 22 percent of its total population, the highest ratio of population losses of any country in Europe. Half of the camp's victims were Polish Christians and half were Polish Jews.

Pope John Paul II is keenly aware of the immense suffering and agony of the Jewish people during World War II. He has never condoned or forgotten the actions of the Nazis. However, some time ago the bishops of Poland met with their German counterparts and forgave the German nation for the terrible

crimes committed by the Nazis. In the same way, Pope John Paul II met with and forgave Mehmet Ali Acga for the assassination attempt he made on the pope's life in 1981. Who can criticize the pope for acting in the same spirit with which Christ asked us to forgive our enemies? Pope John Paul II does not ask us to forget the holocaust victims, whether Jews or non-Jews — he asks us to forgive and not seek revenge, to strive for reconciliation not retribution.

It would be better for a Catholic newspaper to stress the moral and religious implications of Pope John Paul II's actions, rather than the political or public-relations aspects.

Richard J. Brzustowicz, MD
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Rochester

Priest finds rabbi's remark 'disturbing,' 'offensive'

To the Editor:

I found the remarks of Rabbi Judea Miller, reported within your front-page, July 2 story ("Pope's meeting with Waldheim puzzles local clergymen") of the pope's meeting with the president of Austria deeply disturbing and offensive.

If the rabbi believes our pope makes "cynical political decisions," the rabbi is uninformed at best, insulting at worst. Perhaps you, or someone else, could inform the rabbi that our Catholic faith recognizes the pope as the vicar of Christ; this is not simply a claim the pope makes in his own name. The rabbi is "appalled" by the meeting; others would

more charitably and responsibly say they simply don't understand the purpose of the meeting.

Perhaps Rabbi Miller's remarks belong in a newsletter to his congregation, not within our diocesan newspaper's front-page report of a major news event concerning our Holy Father. In charity, I must presume his remarks were (included in the article because of) his leadership role within the Jewish community, not as an intelligent response to a reporter's inquiry.

Father Daniel Holland
St. Patrick's Church
Elmira

Writer clarifies textbook ordering issue

To the Editor:

Thank you for your balanced article on the demise of the parents' federation and for your thoughtful editorial.

One inaccuracy ought to be clarified, having to do with the complicated issue of textbook ordering.

While it is true that abuses do exist among the public school districts' handling of our schools' orders, the more widespread and basic problem is that our schools are under-ordering in the first place, using the state reimbursement amount as a formula for determining entitlement, rather than the textbook re-

quirements of the children.

Further, parents are not involved in the ordering process in our schools, as is required by the law (through the signing of a request each year, just as is required to obtain transportation for our students). Because parents continue to be left out, they are unfamiliar with the extent of their children's entitlement. The parents' federation repeatedly brought both the under-ordering and the lack of signed parental requests to the attention of the diocesan education office, the school principals and parents when given the opportunity, but both

practices continue in our schools.

Finally, it should be noted that St. John the Evangelist School in Spencerport did successfully challenge the refusal of one public school district to provide St. John's students necessary texts on an equitable basis. While initiated by the principal, the challenge had to be brought in the name of the parent, not of the school itself nor of the diocese, thus demonstrating the importance of the parental role in the process.

Gina Ouwelen
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Rochester

Add neglect for the needy to list of society's evils

To the Editor:

I would like to reply to Ted Crosby's letter in the Courier-Journal of June 25 ("Battle rages between Mary, 'Satanic communism'"). I, too, believe we must listen to Our Lady of Fatima's request for the rosary and reparation to her divine son.

However, I believe we must not too narrowly interpret Mary's warn-

ings to the world. Russian communism is not the only evil in our world today. Right in our own country, millions live in poverty, many more are homeless due to mental illness and other consequences of society's spending billions of dollars annually on arms to kill, while neglecting the needs of some of its most needy children and citizens. This is a shameful indictment of a

society that purports to care about our own and the needy and/or persecuted of the world.

Yes, we must pray daily and do something to help overcome the evils of our world. The (unfortunate), too, are God's children.

Glenna Wickline
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Candor, N.Y.



"SOMEHOW I CAN RELATE TO ALL THOSE TV EVANGELISTS ASKING FOR MORE AND MORE MONEY."

C-J Letters Policy

The Courier-Journal wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting Church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the Church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader

interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: Letters to the Editor, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.

Laws made to serve

To the Editor:

I have a comment in response to Mrs. Edward P. Saliwenkier's letter on the altar-girl issue in the July 2 issue of the Courier-Journal ("Writer notes lack of justice or equality").

The laws were made to serve human beings, not for human beings to serve the laws.

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Apalachin