

The Editor's Desk

I try hard to avoid made-for-television movies. Generally, their dialogue is sappy, their acting is juvenile and their plots focus on such important social crises as not having a date two Saturdays in a row.

So my decision to watch Monday evening's "Choices of the Heart" was a reluctant one. According to the TV listings, the film is "a fact-based account of the last years in the life of Jean Donovan, a college student who became a lay missionary in El Salvador and was murdered there in 1980."

That sounded worse than the usual TV fare. I didn't want to watch some silly TV movie trivialize the deaths of the four churchwomen — Donovan and three Maryknoll sisters — whose lives came to a brutal close in 1980 at the hands of a Salvadoran death squad. Instead of the treatment these women's stories deserve, I had visions of Half Pint flailing about in a political quagmire.

In a peculiar way, that's what Gilbert's Donovan did, but the treatment was by no means trivial. Donovan emerged not as a saint, but as a mixed-up college kid — squandering her inherited wealth on fancy cars and eating her breakfast cereal moistened with vodka — who turned to missionary work to find some meaning in a life many would envy. She was a real person who naively went to El Salvador looking for "a vacation," as she later told the women with whom she met her death.

Pretty soon, I forgot about "Little House on the Prairie," and became absorbed in the story of four women who were martyred for their efforts to help innocent children whose parents had been killed in the guerrilla war or assassinated by the government death squads. I was horrified by the surprise arrests, the bloody ambushings, the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero during the consecration of the Mass, the link between the U.S. and the death squads.

It's not that I didn't know about all of this before, but I'm embarrassed to admit that I'd forgotten. The movie made me remember my sophomore year at Syracuse University, when former Secretary of State Alexander Haig was invited to be the commencement speaker. The whole campus was outraged, and the professors turned their backs to the stage when Haig received his honorary degree. I remember watching the TV news that night, seeing footage of student protesters dressed as four bloody churchwomen. I remember being proud of the professors and the protesters, and hoping that their message was understood by Haig and others who may have had a hand in arming the Salvadoran death squads.

I remember now, and I don't think I'll forget again.

We're going through something of a bitter-sweet transition at the Courier-Journal these days. Jeff Goulding, who pleased so many of you with his creative and insightful photographs these past two years has taken a position on the staff of the Middletown (N.Y.) Times Herald Record. He and Emily Morrison — his wife for nearly a year — are leaving Rochester this week, for what we hope will be an exciting next step in their careers. The job is a good step for Jeff, who has long hoped to move up to a daily newspaper. Emily plans to pursue freelance writing in the Middletown area, which I'm certain will be a highly successful — if no less hectic — endeavor. (Fortunately, she will travel back to Rochester several times during the next few months, so you will continue to see her byline periodically.)

Obviously, we're happy for them. But we're sad to see Jeff and Emily go, too — both because they have made huge contributions to the Courier-Journal and because they have been good friends. Their departure from the staff has left a void — both physically and emotionally — in the Courier-Journal newsroom.

Although they can't be replaced in our thoughts, I'm now working on filling their vacant desks. I hope to be introducing new staff members soon, but for the time being, please be patient with us as we muddle through in a distinctly understaffed fashion.

And on behalf of the C-J staff and those of you who have admired their work, let me say to Emily and Jeff: "Thank you, good luck and keep in touch."

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.

C-J Letters

Are today's Catholics really holier?

To the Editor:

When I was a lot younger, confession was, for one reason or another, the prerequisite for most of the faithful receiving Holy Communion. Before the monthly Holy Name Sunday, the priest had a real heavy Saturday night "in the box." And only a few people went to Communion at every Mass. Quite simply that's the way it was in Buffalo, where I used to live.

The situation since shortly after Vatican II has drastically changed. Walk into any Catholic church between 3-5 p.m. on any given Saturday, and you will find it practically empty, with a lonely priest hopefully waiting for penitent souls. Yet at Sunday Mass, practically the entire

congregation receives the Holy Eucharist — which is wonderful and an inspiration. Now either the people today are all saints and a lot holier than (people were) when I was growing up, or the faithful have somehow relegated the sacrament of penance to a once-in-awhile rite to be said when you have murdered someone or committed adultery. Gone is the appreciation, the gratitude, the maturity and the wisdom to avail oneself of the tremendous grace that Our Lord suffered and died to obtain for us.

We all have problems, and who is better than the Lord, through His priest, to give us the counsel and guidance we so badly need. Many people pay a psychiatrist a lot of money

to listen to their troubles, and he gives them less comfort than what is available to us for the asking in reconciliation.

The mystery of grace has apparently escaped the consciousness of many of the faithful. Very tritely, the degree of our illumination in heaven will reflect the amount of grace we had on earth. If we are truly serious about our faith and our lives in the hereafter, it seems to me that the frequent reception of the sacrament of penance is a *sine qua non* to continue on the straight path that leads through the narrow gate.

Jerry Paladino
RD 1
Rock Stream, N.Y.

DWI problem requires action, not talk

To the Editor:

The Pembroke High School Tragedy in Genesee County in which four persons died reminds us again of the deadly mix between drinking and driving. The answer is not to simply say that you should not drive after you have been drinking. People who drink will drive. Often they are completely unaware that their senses have been impaired.

Solving the drinking-driving problem must start with changing our perceptions on drinking. Many RAID, MADD and SADD members do not oppose drinking. They usually only oppose driving after

drinking. This idea has not worked and it will not work.

The first question one receives in a restaurant is, "Can I get you a drink?" When you visit a friend's home, you are usually asked if the host can get you a drink. Beer is one of the most frequently advertised products on television. Most cannot imagine a party without alcoholic beverages.

The time has long since passed when drinking can simply be frowned on. Drinking not only kills the brain cells forever; it also kills people.

Those arrested for drinking while driving must not be allowed to plea-

bargain. Drivers' licenses must be revoked and suspended for longer periods. Fines must be increased. More jail sentences must be imposed.

We need action, not talk, when dealing with drinking drivers. Society, from youth up, must be educated as to the dangers and social unacceptability of alcohol. Despite all the continued grief from drunk drivers, the problem will not disappear until positive steps are taken.

Frederick Garwood
Attorney at Law
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Marian exaggeration worries Pittsford pastor

To the Editor:

As we begin the Marian Year, I am very nervous about the extravagances that can so easily arise from the celebration and that were so evident in the letter of Ted Crosby in the June 25 issue of the Courier-Journal ("Battle rages between Mary, 'Satanic communism'").

In Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, we read on page 67 that the Church "strongly urges theologians and preachers of the word of God to be careful to refrain as much from false exaggeration as from too summary an

attitude in considering the special dignity of the Mother of God."

It seems to me that when Mr. Crosby makes the statement — quoting St. Dominic in a highly dubious historical citation — that: "It is through the rosary and scapular that I will one day save the world," Mr. Crosby is engaging in just such extravagance.

Jesus is Savior of the world — he and none other. Mary, by the gift of God, cooperated magificently in that work. But she did not save the world, and to imply that somehow the work of Jesus didn't "take" and that she needs to step in now and do

what he couldn't do is blasphemous in content if not in intent.

The world needs to be consecrated to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Mary's "yes" is a glorious example for all of us. But Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Savior. Mary must be appalled to be placed in the position of usurper.

Down with extravagance; up with praises to God for the grace He has given to Mary to be the example for those who respond to His will.

Father Louis Hohman
St. Louis Church
Pittsford

How would today's rigorists answer St. Alphonsus Liguori?

To the Editor:

During the 200th anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution, let us not forget that August 2 is the 200th anniversary of the death of the patron saint of moral theologians, St. Alphonsus Liguori.

In 1732, he founded the Redemptorist order and became a bishop in 1762. He was canonized in 1839 and declared a doctor of the Church in 1871 by that most-conservative of popes, Pius IX. In 1950, he was named patron of moralists by Pope Pius XII.

He was the Father Curran of his time. His opponents continually accused him of acting in bad conscience and of teaching doctrines condemned by the magisterium of the Church.

St. Alphonsus was a prolific preacher and writer, and his books have been translated into 60 languages. His most famous book, *Moral Theology*, is a classic. In it he emphasized the primacy of conscience. He pointed out that neither Holy Scripture nor natural law can give a definitive answer to many questions.

He declared that, "The science of

morals is so broad and clouded that what appears convincing to some appears to others as unfounded. Imposing on others certain obligations is not a sign of holiness, but of arrogance."

Father Bernard Haring, one of the most influential Catholic moral theologians of this century, asks the rigorist critics of today's dissenting theologians, "how they would have reacted against a man like St. Alphonsus?"

Walter O'Hagan
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God chastises those He loves, calling them to repentance

To the Editor:

Father Richard P. McBrien's column, "Resolution of the Seattle Case" (C-J, June 25) made reference to a "tiny, irresponsible band of right-wing Catholics in Seattle."

According to Father McBrien, these "right-wingers" were causing trouble because they were critical of Seattle Archbishop Hunthausen's ministry. One of their criticisms regarding his ministry was that the archdiocese failed to ban from the archdiocese a homosexual organization called Dignity. This organization, by the way, defied Church

doctrine concerning homosexuality.

Another valid criticism leveled at the archbishop was the fact that he believed it was immoral for a nation to defend itself by possessing nuclear weapons. Again, Church teaching opposed his views.

What is disturbing is that Seattle is not an isolated case of opposition to Church teaching. Other churches — like our own — defy the Vatican on altar girls, homosexuality and nuclear defense.

We hear members of the clergy criticize those of us who believe that God punishes sexual perversion with

fatal afflictions. This, despite the fact that God Himself destroyed two ancient cities for practicing unnatural vice.

Today, however, it seems that the Lord has shown His mercy by chastizing those He loves with an affliction that gives them time to repent and change their lives, thereby saving their immortal souls.

Isn't that what religion is all about?

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