

C-J Letters

Encourages reading of pope's book

To the editor:

On Sept. 6, Bishop Clark had printed a Labor Day editorial in the *Democrat and Chronicle* in which he acknowledged the philosophical limitations of the framers of the Constitution and reminded readers of principles from the U.S. bishops' economic pastoral.

As I read the editorial, I had a familiar feeling of distress: When will all the bishops read *The Acting Person* that the Holy Father wrote as a cardinal? This book gives the reader a new respect for the human person, as he or she experiences — along with the author — the scope of the intellect and will, including some limitations. After this new respect has been established, relational obligations are introduced — indeed, we are almost propelled into them! What the reader experiences is that motivation depends upon respect for all human persons as individuals. Every concentric circle of activity — political and otherwise — must be governed as last by the more basic relation of neighbor; not that our many circles are canceled by it, but rather enlivened by it. And, last but

not least, we are empowered to regain control over our spheres of activity at least to the degree that we are able to recognize the presence or absence of elements for authentic participation, including authentic dialogue. The reader is free to draw all kinds of tremendously helpful conclusions from this information.

Yes, there are difficulties over translations. According to my most recent information, a German translation is best. However, it is admitted that the basic thought can adequately be grasped in the English version that exists. Nazareth's library has a copy on open shelves.

People who read *The Acting Person* begin to see applications everywhere: Polish Solidarity, the pope's own *Love and Responsibility* and the multi-year theology of the body series of General Audience Addresses. I await its application to the "American mind" in both political activity and in the working of the Church in this country. We will do no more than tread water until this book is widely read.

What each reader can do is to keep honing his own respect for himself

and others and to keep watch for improving and introducing authentic modes of participation in all his relational spheres. When one no longer feels compelled to try (vainly) to operate in authentic political situations (rigged committees that one cannot change, for example), guilt and frustration are greatly reduced, and time is recovered for creative, authentic participation. (Authenticity or inauthenticity should not be assumed nor lightly applied; application depends upon an analysis of various elements.)

The Acting Person is an extremely difficult book, but I have found it the most rewarding, non-doctrinal study I ever made — and other readers, however few and far between, seem to feel the same. It's phenomenology at its best, adequately consonant with Thomism, and is a brilliant contribution not only to philosophy but to the dignity of every person who is willing and able to study it — extending to the perceived dignity of all those with whom the readers come into contact.

Judy Echaniz
Barrington Street
Rochester

Christianity requires personal conscience

To the editor:

The September 10 Courier-Journal contained the headline "Pope arrives today; will fight selective mentality." The article went on to explain the Vatican's feeling that Catholics, particularly in the United States, choose only Church doctrine that adheres to their own personal desires. I offer this rebuttal by a dissenting, but still real, Catholic:

The message of the New Testament is self-surrender and transformation with the goal of "renewal of the mind," which means prayerful meditation bringing about inspired spiritual direction. This is viewed in Scriptures as a shared, but individual, process. We are to be responsible for our actions, words and thoughts — no one else can establish these for us, for Christianity is, by nature, an act of faith requiring active participation and contribution from all. Nowhere in its pages are we commanded, or even encouraged, to deny our own inner voice — the Spirit within — to follow blindly each or any form of dictatorship, however benevolent. To do so, in fact, is to shirk the greatest of all our Christian responsibilities and commit that most grievous sin: denial of the Holy Spirit, which is, itself, to turn one's back on the divine truths received in mystical union with said Holy Spirit.

Questions retirement age amid shortage of priests

To the editor:

It is news to no one that our Rochester diocese is facing a critical shortage of parish priests. Since at the present time new vocations to the priesthood are few, the problem will no doubt be with us for some time to come.

There is one part of this dilemma I do not understand. Why are priests of our diocese expected to retire at age 70? Many of them have no desire to leave their parishes and are perfectly capable of carrying on their priestly duties. In the Buffalo diocese, priests may retire at age 75 and then it is their choice.

Until recently, I thought this requirement to retire at 70 years was a papal directive. Apparently it is a local decision. Can someone please explain to me why, at this time so crucial to the future of our Church, are we needlessly forcing so many wonderful priests to retire?

Terese Metzger
Orland Road
Rochester

As if the difference between the Vatican and the theological dissenters isn't enough cause for grief and confusion, the Vatican is single-handedly forming its own muddle — with no outside interference — by issuing opposing statements such as these from the above-mentioned article: (Both quotes by Archbishop Jan Schotte, adviser to the Pope for his trip to the U.S.)

1) "Do they want to be Catholic or do they want to create their own concoction?"

2) "(Catholics) must discern the elements that can be a true enrichment for the Church (and reject) what is not compatible with the Gospel or with the nature of the Church?"

Statement one is a plea for mental retardation at the expense of independent, intellectual spiritual pursuit. To be Catholic, one must be trained to salivate on command — at the ringing of the Vatican's bell? That type of dumb, dependent response is

repellent as sinful to the thoughtful Christian.

Statement two is at loggerheads with statement one. To follow one is to be Catholic in name only, and to follow two is to commit the "crime" of which the penalty is religious community exile. We're told to think, to use our "wise and discerning minds," but only as a form of spiritual exercise. The "real thing" is left to the hierarchy, much like when a jury receives a vital piece of information in a trial but as the defense objects, the judge orders the court to "disregard that last statement."

However the truth may reach us, it is a working of grace. Only the most thoughtless and foolhardy would send it packing in favor of rigid spiritual leadership. Accepting graced visions, we visit Gethsemane's grief.

Martha A. Kelch
Westway Street
Rochester

Claims writer took Liguori's comments out of context

To the editor:

Once again Mr. O'Hagan has torn things out of context to justify his preconceived notions (C-J Letters, July 30: "How would today's rigorists answer St. Alphonsus Liguori?")

First, I question Mr. O'Hagan's statement that St. Alphonsus Liguori was the Father Curran of his time. It was Liguori who wept when the Holy See condemned the Jesuit Order. It was done over his protests. But once it was done Liguori bowed his head in obedience and said, "The Pope's will; God's will." Has Father Curran acted like that?

Parents often make mistakes, but that does not give license to the children to be disobedient. The power of the keys, the authority to teach authoritatively in the Church, was given only to Peter and his successors. Obedience to that authority is the bedrock of unity. Liguori was always obedient to the Holy See. Public dissent is the very opposite; it is disobedience, and so attacks the unity of the Church.

Moreover, a distinction is in order here between pluralism of theological opinion has always existed in the church. Augustinians, Thomists, Scotists have engaged in open debate for centuries. The Probabilism of Liguori and the Determinism of Suarez are theological opinions. Nothing wrong here, for both schools of

thought operate within a dogmatic framework that, itself, does not change.

Today, however, American political democracy has crossed over into the field of dogma. Some American theologians would reduce dogma to a matter of opinion, as though dogmatic questions belong to the internal faith of its citizens. This is wrong. It dissolves the Church. One, for instance, can play basketball — but only as long as there are lines on the court. Remove the lines and to play basketball becomes impossible.

Public dissent to the moral teachings of the Church on mainline issues is not offering theological opinions within the lines of dogma (complementary pluralism), but is reducing dogmas to opinions (contradictory pluralism, condemned by Paul VI).

As Alan Besancon said: "One of the signs of this shift from a plurality of theological opinion to a plurality of dogma is that people today speak so little of heresy. In our time, which is perhaps the most heretical period in the Church's history, the notion of heresy — in fact, the very word itself — is rarely mentioned."

Secondly, Alphonsus never branded the magisterial teaching of the Church as arrogance; he thought only those arrogant who sought to impose their opinions on others — opposite schools of thought to his own.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

The journey of Peter

Since returning from Los Angeles on Thursday evening, I find that John Paul II and his pastoral visit to the United States remains very much on my mind. That is true in part because everyone I meet wants to know about the pope and the events at Los Angeles. It is true also because my experience of the events of that day continue to call me to a meditation on the life of the Church.

I refer to the two principal events of the day: the morning meeting of John Paul II with all of the bishops of our country at the San Fernando Mission, and the evening celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy at Dodger Stadium. I'll write of the meeting this week and of the Mass at Dodger Stadium next week.

At the morning meeting, four bishops on behalf of all the bishops gave talks to the Holy Father about four pastoral themes we had identified. John Paul responded to each bishop immediately after he spoke. The themes presented were: the relationship of the local Churches to the Church at Rome; the Church's moral teaching in the modern age; vocations in the Church; and the laity, with a strong emphasis in women in the Church.

In my opinion, each presentation was very well done and gave a good representation of the Church's pastoral life in this country. The speakers told of our achievement, our struggles and our hopes, and did so with specific reference to some of the concrete realities of our culture that deeply affect the way we understand, communicate and live out our faith.

They spoke of such things as 1) the desire of people to participate in the development of decisions that effect their lives, 2) the greater appeal that invitation and persuasion have for Americans than does authority, 3) our need to let human sciences be resources in our moral decision making and 4) our need to recognize the new moral questions raised in a rapidly changing, highly complex society.

The responses of our Holy Father were more general in nature. While he gave us much encouragement and a good deal to think about, I was a little disappointed that he seemed reluctant to respond to the four presentations on the concrete pastoral level at which they were raised. It may well be that John Paul judged that such a discussion would be inopportune at that time. Whatever the case, I am hopeful that we shall have similar opportunities in the future and that those discussions will be more free-flowing than the rather structured ones that took place in Los Angeles.

Opportunities for such discussion will not be lacking in the near future. The Synod of Bishops on the laity takes place in Rome next month. Throughout next year the bishops of our country will travel to Rome in regional groups to make their five-year reports to John Paul. There is also a strong possibility that there will be held thereafter an extended meeting in Rome between John Paul and a representative group of American bishops.

It strikes me as I write these words that there are in the Christian Scriptures abundant references to the friends of Jesus talking with one another and searching together for the Lord's will and for the most fruitful way to live that out once it was found. Peter was very much a part of that story; John Paul is today. And that is a wonderful sign of life in the Church.

Peace to all.

Alphonsus never attacked the magisterium of the Church; moreover, he was always obedient to the authority of the Church, even when it was mistaken, as in the condem-

nation of the Jesuit Order. That's a far cry from the dissenters of today.

Lena Shipley
East Avenue
Waterloo

Letters to editor read like war zone

To the editor:

The violence of (recent) letters to the editor against a priest who has served our diocese faithfully for over 50 years sent me to rereading Father Cuddy's column "Where There's a Will . . ." (C-J July 16). Father Cuddy made a simple sentence of 23 words. "Now that St. Bernard's has ceased as a seminary, the St. Bernard's Institute is a kind of successor, but not a seminary."

I do not read in that sentence any judgment, good or bad, about SBI.

I do note that (Father Cuddy) clearly answered Miss Tressy's question about where to make a bequest for the education of a student for the priesthood. He suggested making the bequest to the bishop of Rochester or the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, for the education of men for the priesthood.

To quote a great lady, "Where's the beef?"

John J. Costello
Chief of Police
Auburn

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.