

Columnists

Another point of view on bingo

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

The charismatic Father James Callan, administrator of Corpus Christi Parish, Rochester, has accomplished great things since his reign began a decade ago. But he has an obsession about the iniquity of bingo.

In the life of St. John Bosco, the apostle to youth in Turin, Italy, we read of his roaming Italy and France selling raffle tickets to help orphans and deprived children. He founded the Salesian Order to continue that work, which carries on to this day. Who would condemn Mother Teresa of Calcutta for raffling off a big automobile given to her by Pope Paul IV at the end of his apostolic visit to India? Who will condemn the 11 apostles for selecting the successor to Judas by casting lots (Acts 1:26)?

Father Callan points an accusing finger at hundreds of church bingo workers, at pastors who tolerate bingo, at patrons who find comfort and companionship at bingo parties. The immorality of bingo is in his own imagination, not in Catholic moral doctrine. And he seems ungrateful towards hundreds of bingo workers who perform generous service to their parishes, and deserve praise. Bingo patrons are really a social group, giving comfort and companionship to one another.

Father Paul Schnacky, the zealous pastor of St. Joseph's, Wayland, disagreed so vehemently with Father Callan's position on bingo that I said: "Write an article" Here it is.

Another point of view:

Bingo is one of my church ministries. It was not always that way. Once I greatly opposed it. I hadn't studied theology to run a bingo game. My fingers weren't anointed with sacred oil to count out bingo cards and hand out prize money. I was trained to preach, not to call out bingo numbers. But I changed. Why? Because a widowed, inner-city welfare mother taught me that there's more to bingo than

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the games. There are the players.

Kay didn't drink and didn't do drugs. Her socializing was limited because of her small children. One of the few places that she as a single person could go and be accepted was to a bingo game, run by the church. She taught me the reaction of people to the presence of a priest in their midst who cared about them, mingled and talked with them, listened to them.

So I started to mingle and talk and listen. And I learned a lot. Each person has a story, carries a cross, is seeking the warmth of human companionship. This is a ministry of presence.

I am in the school hall each week religiously, as pastor of the parish and as their friend. I talk to each and listen. I try to give each a sense of acceptance.

And while the numbers are being called, I pick out individuals and pray for them, silently, unbeknown to them. I think Jesus looks kindly upon them and wants me to do the same. We priests are interested in them and want to help them in their journey of life.

Priest-writers to the *Courier-Journal* have recently advised us to take off our Roman collars and to come down off our pedestals. I like what Cardinal John Wright wrote on the American priesthood: "However much a priest may think himself like other men, the world does not see him so."

The law and Father Curran's case

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Sadly, the dispute between Father Charles Curran and the Catholic University of America will continue, this time in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

Father Curran is not contesting the board of trustees — and ultimately the Vatican's — right to remove his canonical mission to teach Catholic theology within the university's ecclesiastical faculty.

He has expressed his willingness to accept an appointment elsewhere in the university. The department of sociology was generally agreed upon.

What Father Curran insists upon is his right to be called a professor of Christian social ethics within the department of sociology, to have his courses cross-listed in the department of religion and religious education, and to have them open to all students in the non-ecclesiastical degree programs of theology. In other words, Father Curran is asking that his contract with CUA be honored.

However, the board of trustees demanded that Father Curran sign a demeaning statement promising that he would not teach Catholic theology to anyone anywhere in the university.

Father Curran refused to sign, and the civil lawsuit went forward.

More is involved here than civil law. There is also the matter of Church law, or canon law.

There is an ancient canonical principle that laws which impose penalties or restrictions are always to be interpreted strictly.

In other words, if there is any doubt that a restriction or a penalty applies more widely, the assumption must be that it does not apply. In the case of laws that confer favors, the rule of interpretation is just the opposite: when in doubt, the favor applies.

This ancient principle has been reaffirmed in the new, or revised, Code of Canon Law. Canon 18 reads: "Laws which establish a penalty or restrict the free exercise of rights or which contain an exception to the law are subject to a strict interpretation."

When Father Curran's canonical mission was withdrawn, that action made him ineligible for continued service as a professor in the university's ecclesiastical faculty of theology.

Nothing was said explicitly about his capacity to teach as a Catholic theologian elsewhere in the university, including in the non-ecclesiastical departments of the School of Religious Studies. And certainly nothing was said explicitly about his capacity to teach or lecture

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in other Catholic institutions of higher learning.

On matters of such consequence, it would seem that administrators have an obligation to be unambiguously clear about the meaning and extent of their decrees or declarations. Nonetheless, certain people have been trying to stretch the Vatican letter and the subsequent action of the board of trustees to cover situations which the original order did not directly or explicitly touch upon.

Nothing in the Vatican letter concerning Father Curran says explicitly that he cannot teach Catholic theology in any other Catholic college or university. Neither is there anything explicit in the Vatican letter that says Father Curran cannot teach in his field of competence in other departments of the Catholic University of America. The canonical mission traditionally hasn't applied to non-ecclesiastical faculties.

Which leads one to ask if Canon 812 isn't really behind all this maneuvering to ostracize Father Curran from the entire world of Catholic higher education?

Canon 812 of the revised code reads: "It is necessary that those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority."

If successfully invoked, Canon 812 would shatter in one blow the academic integrity and credibility of Catholic higher education.

But leave Canon 812 aside for the moment. There is still the canonical principle that insists that legal restrictions are always to be interpreted strictly. Only the granting of favors is to be broadly interpreted.

Father Curran's adversaries may be in violation of a basic principle of ecclesiastical interpretation in the very act of trying to uphold ecclesiastical law and order.

And in the process they are also about to bring civil law down around their heads — to absolutely no one's benefit except the enemies of the Catholic Church and of its extraordinary system of higher education.

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