

Columnists

What do you want me to do for you?

By Cindy Bassett

The roadside just outside the town limits of Jericho was a place of opportunity for a person like me. For anyone traveling to the temple in Jerusalem must necessarily pass here. It was very likely that a good Hebrew's heart might be moved to give a few coins in passing to a blind beggar who nearly stood in his path. And just in case the passerby felt no tinges of sympathy for my plight at first glance, he certainly could not ignore my loud pleas.

I was long past humiliation. There was just no other way for me to exist in the world. My real name is Bartimaeus, but most everyone in Jericho called me "the blind beggar."

People mistakenly assumed that my hearing was faulty because I couldn't see. But the truth was I heard every insult that these travelers heaped on my head as they walked along the road.

They said: "Throw that disgusting creature a coin or we'll have no peace," or "Why doesn't someone put that man where no one will be forced to look at him?"

I heard other things, too. I knew all of the gossip of Jericho just from the little snatches of conversation I heard from those going past me.

One day, I heard people talking about Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, they seemed to speak of nothing else. Some said that Jesus was just the son of a carpenter who had become a traveling preacher in the region. Others called him some sort of miracle man.

"I saw it with my own eyes. He raised the widow's son from the dead!"

"He fed 5,000 people with a few loaves and fishes."

"Jesus talks of a new kingdom — open to all!"

"But Jesus is a Jew. What kind of kingdom would this be?"

"I understand that Jesus goes around with

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sinner and those who break the law!"

For my part, I waited for the day when Jesus would come along this road so that I could decide for myself who he really was. I'd never been to the temple in Jerusalem, but this disgusting creature did know the Scriptures well. Could Jesus be the Messiah promised by God long ago?

I had not long to wait. One day, I heard a huge crowd approaching. "Is it Jesus?" I asked someone.

"Yes, it is he," I was told.

So I began shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" There were many in the crowd who tried to silence me, but I only shouted louder until someone said, "Go now, quickly. Jesus is calling you!"

When at last I stood before him, Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Master, I want to see," I answered.

"Then go, your faith has healed you," Jesus said kindly.

When the crowd saw the miracle, they all began praising God. I could see, but that's not the real reason my life was changed. Before I had ever met Jesus that day on the roadside, I heard him calling to me. And I decided to follow him all the days of my life.

After his healing, Bartimaeus became a well-known member of the Jerusalem church.

Scripture reference: Mark, Chapter 10:46-52.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, help us to respond to your call in our lives and bring our needs before you in faith.

Two-track doctrinal system

by Father Richard P. McBrien

One of the central issues in the controversy surrounding Father Charles Curran has been the validity of the distinction between infallible and noninfallible teachings.

None of the moral teachings at issue in the Curran case has been taught infallibly. Each is a product of the ordinary magisterium of the Church.

Father Curran and his supporters have argued that such noninfallible teachings are just that: noninfallible. That is, they are subject to error, in whole or in part. Under given circumstances, therefore, dissent from noninfallible teachings is legitimate precisely because those teachings are not immune from error.

In their turn, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and his supporters have tended to collapse the distinction between infallible and noninfallible teachings. Theologians, like everyone else, must render obedience to all of the official teachings of the Church, whether those teachings be infallible or noninfallible, definitive or non-definitive. The distinction is of no account.

There is a striking, but heretofore unacknowledged parallel between the positions taken by both sides in the Curran dispute and the positions taken in another ongoing debate regarding the authority of the Catholic Church's social teachings.

In the Curran controversy, the liberals, progressives, or moderates — call them what you will — have insisted on the distinction between infallible and noninfallible or definitive and nondefinitive teachings, leaving room always for dissent from the latter.

In the debate regarding the authority of Catholic social doctrine, the progressives tend to follow a "seamless garment" approach.

We aren't supposed to excuse ourselves from accepting the Church's teaching on capital punishment, for example, just because it has less doctrinal weight than the official teaching on abortion.

In the Curran controversy, the conservatives, neoconservatives, and traditionalists reject or regard as irrelevant the distinction between infallible and noninfallible teachings. These conservative Catholics leave no room for dissent from either kind of teaching.

In the debate regarding the authority of Catholic social doctrine, however, these same conservatives take up the liberal line employed in Father Curran's defense; namely, that there are two levels of teaching and Catholics are only bound to accept the higher, or more

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definitive, level.

According to this argument, there is no room for disagreement with, much less dissent from, any aspect of the Church's teaching on abortion, but good Catholics can find all kinds of legitimate reasons for excusing themselves from adherence to the Church's official teachings on capital punishment, warfare, economic justice, and so forth.

What occurred at the recent synod in the Archdiocese of Boston is entirely typical of what seems to be going on today within the Catholic Church's conservative and neoconservative wings.

During a discussion of the Boston synod's proposed mission statement on peace and justice and anti-abortion activities, many delegates expressed disappointment that abortion was the subject of special emphasis, while issues such as capital punishment and gun control were not mentioned.

A Boston pastor objected to this lapse as well as to recent editorials in the archdiocesan newspaper and political literature mailed to priests — all of which seemed to give support, he said, to "one national political party and one individual candidate."

Cardinal Bernard Law, one of the national episcopal conference's least enthusiastic supporters of the "seamless garment" approach to life issues, assured the delegates that he identified himself with those who would like to see these other matters dealt with.

However, he continued, these "other issues are of another order. I am opposed to capital punishment, as are the other bishops of the United States, but at the same time I could not say that every Catholic must agree with me."

"There is no warrant for anybody in the Catholic Church to argue for abortion, and I certainly want to see the synod reflect the attitude of the bishops on abortion."

In a slightly different form, that's Father Curran's argument.

Politics does indeed make strange bed-fellows.

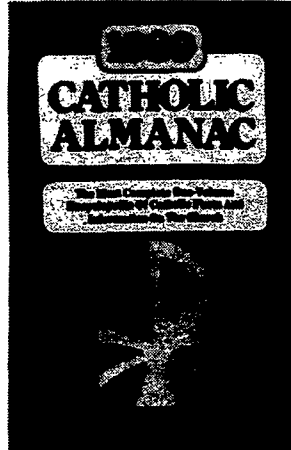


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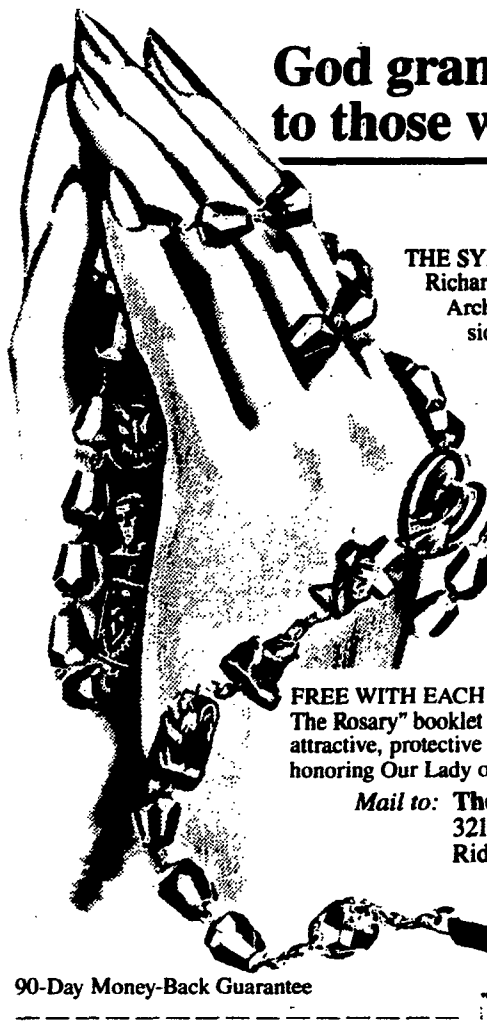
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