

Church is called to reform on women's issues

I was at Colgate University last week. The occasion of my first visit to Bishop Hickey's alma mater in Hamilton was a program on women in our church co-sponsored by the university's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and the Newman Community. I was the third presenter in a series of three evenings on the subject. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Sister Theresa Kane, RSM, participated on the two previous Tuesdays respectively.

It was a most interesting evening. We began at 4:30 with a pre-dinner conversation which lasted for an hour and a quarter. Seven or eight students came by to get acquainted and to talk about their faith, the church and especially about the condition of women among us. Following that conversation, a few others joined us for dinner in the same area and the conversation continued. At 7:30, we began the formal part of the evening. That consisted of my 50-minute presentation, followed by another 35 or 40 minutes of interaction between me and those who attended.

It was a most enjoyable experience. The students with whom I met earlier in the evening were a fascinating group. They came from such places as Scranton, Albany, New York, Syracuse and Buffalo. And there was a student among them from Hammondsport, in our own diocese. All had a strong interest in religion and they

had clearly made the study of religion and related topics a serious part of their lives. One is seriously interested in joining a congregation of religious women; another is experimenting with life in a Protestant denomination. And they all have a deep interest in the theme which brought us together that evening.

The latter part of the program attracted a wider group. Other students came, as did some faculty members, three members of the Commission on Women of the Diocese of Syracuse, and some parishioners from Saint Mary's in Hamilton. They were all very much interested in the work of our committee on "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption."

On the drive back from Hamilton on Tuesday, I had time to reflect on the experience of that evening and on my experience of its theme over the past eight or 10 years. I remain convinced that the church is strongly being urged to reform in this area of her life, not by whim or passing fancy, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. And I believe that the longer this reform is delayed, the more pain and confusion will be caused. The reasons we offer to explain the exclusion of women from ordination are simply not well understood or accepted. Women do not have a proper place at those events and moments when decisions that affect them very deeply are being

made. Women and men are growing more restless in a community that in so many ways undervalues women. One indication of this is the growing number of women who have either formally left our community of faith or who have become so demoralized that they have withdrawn from an active sharing in our common life. Both directions come from pain in their lives and leave us weaker.

There are no easy solutions to these problems, but I believe that they will grow more serious if we do not do something about them. I believe it would help enormously if our Holy Father would invite a gathering of women to Rome to hear from them firsthand the story of their experience in the church. It would also do great good if the community of Catholic scholars were invited to participate in a full and open in-depth exploration of the ordination issue and of the church's reasons for holding the positions she does about this matter. It would help if all of us encouraged and welcomed all qualified women and men to exercise all ministries in the church which do not require ordination.

Seven years ago last Saturday, April 29, we published "Fire In the Thornbush," our pastoral letter on women. I was looking through that letter again last week and remembering the experience of the years. As I did, it came home to me that my expe-



Along The Way

rience at Colgate was not an unusual, atypical moment. Rather, it represented a ferment in the church which is widespread and real and, in my opinion, growing more urgent each day.
Peace to all.

'Punishment' of jail time turns out to be revelation for pro-life activist

To the editor:

During the weekends of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, three of us went to jail because we attempted to stop abortions at a local death chamber in October with 65 other rescuers. I consider those two weekends a precious gift from God.

Not ever having spent time in jail, I didn't know what to expect. We had talked to some good folks who had served time earlier in the year, but nothing could have prepared me for what was about to take place.

I thought that we would go in there as rescuers of another sort, but the women took care of us. They offered us their most

precious possessions, a candy bar, writing paper, a big Styrofoam cup so we could have a bigger ration of whatever drink was served with meals. They hungered to talk with someone who would really listen — and they did. They talked about their children, their husbands and about life experiences that made my heart ache. They talked about their pain, their joys and the road that led them to jail, often repeatedly. So many of these women had been victims in some way or another, often from childhood, and accepted this as a fact of life. I would listen at night lying in my bunk as they talked casually of the beatings by their husbands or partners and then listened as

these women took the "blame" because of some offense they had committed, real or imagined. I listened and prayed more fervently than I can remember.

Being ignorant of what jail life was like I had imagined confrontations with other inmates or guards. None of that took place. The only confrontation I had was with myself. During a period when we were locked in for 16 hours straight, between intense prayer and Scripture reading. I came face-to-face with my life. Relationships, prejudices, misplaced priorities, lost opportunities to make a difference, often putting God "on hold" while I carried on with "my" life all seemed to rush at me in painful clar-

ity. On the eve of the Resurrection the pain necessary for healing took place.

When I found out we would be in jail for two weekends as "punishment" for trying to prevent the taking of innocent lives, I had no idea that this "punishment" would be such a gift. Instead of restraining me from participation in future rescue missions, this experience has strengthened my conviction that what we are doing is right and very necessary and should continue until the slaughter of the unborn is stopped.

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Truth that comes from God is indestructable

To the editor:

John Wagner wrote to you on March 30 in defense of Catholics United for the Faith ("CUF representative clarifies organization's objectives"). I was bemused by his reference to the "smoke of Satan" entering into the church during the post-Vatican II period. I prefer to call it the fresh air of the Holy Spirit, here to blow away the smoke!

Why are these people so afraid the church is going to fall apart? Where's their faith — and hope? Today's church is not the same as it was at the time of the apostles. It has gradually evolved, with the Holy Spirit working not only through the titular head of the church but through its members as well. The church is stronger than ever.

I'm not a very bright person, and cannot match arguments with learned people like Father McBrien or people like Mr. Wagner, but it seems to make sense that we should listen to ideas that might be contrary to our own and to pray that God will lead us to truth. To seek truth is not easy. It takes courage and perseverance. Academic freedom is important — in the church, as elsewhere.

I would suggest that Mr. Wagner refer to the April 7 scriptural reading, Acts 5:34-42. Gamaliel, a great and respected teacher of the law recommended that the apostles be allowed to preach "for if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself, but if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourself fighting against God."

So, if what Father McBrien is saying is wrong, it will perish by itself. The same goes for CUF.

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New York needs a governor like pro-life football player

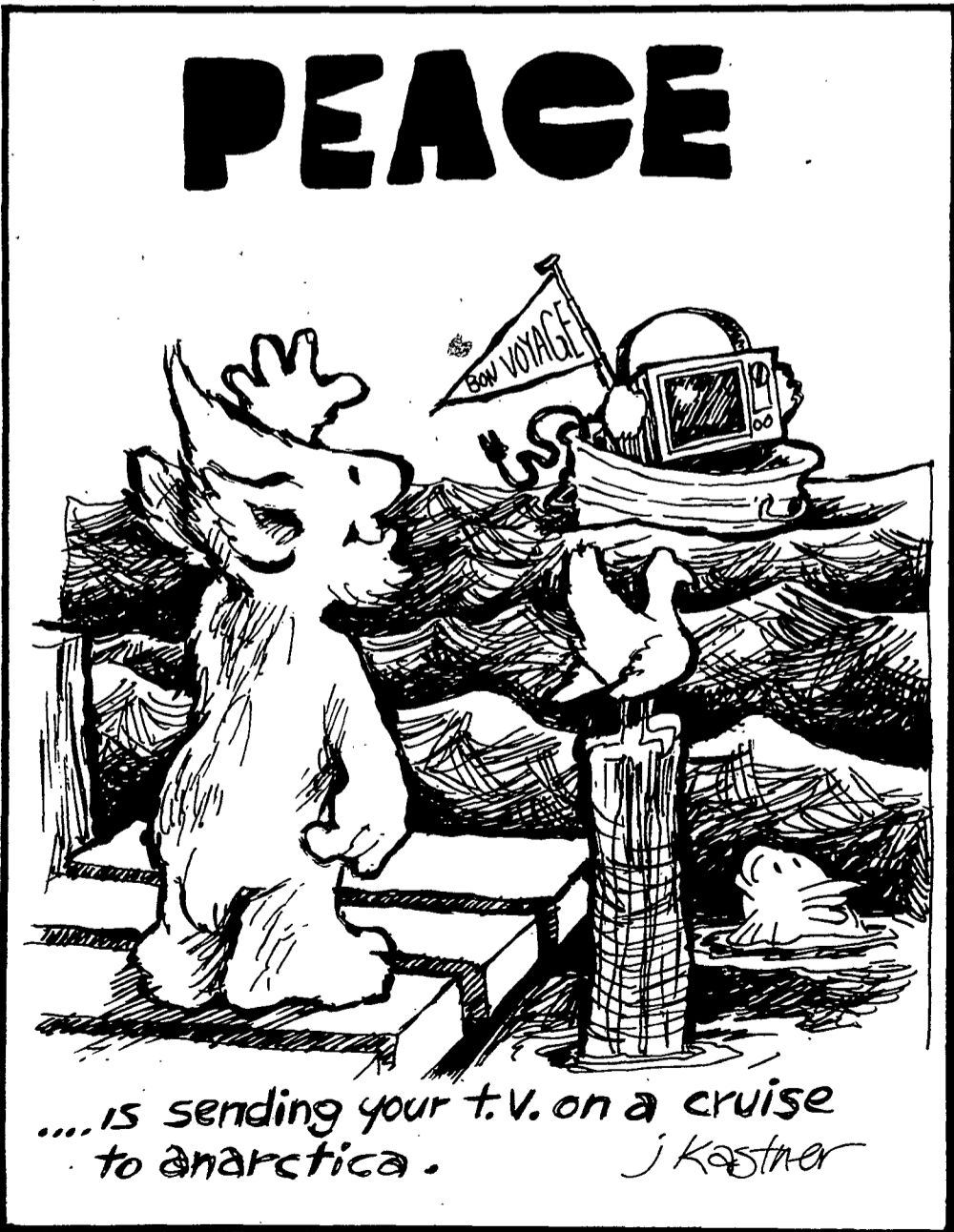
To the editor:

What a joy it was to read of New York Giants' Mark Bavaro receiving a pro-life award (*Catholic Courier*, March 30). This outstanding Catholic man has been giving witness at Operation Rescue Missions. Interestingly, Mark credits his faith commitment to born-again Protestants from Notre Dame, not Father McBrien's theology department.

Contrastingly, in the same *Courier* issue, Father McBrien's crony, Governor Mario Cuomo, predictably refused the slightest anti-abortion gesture while vetoing the death penalty bill ("Cuomo prepares for fight on death-penalty override"). This shrewd politician continues his cowardly stance in an effort to appease his pro-abortion constituency. Fortunately for him, dead babies never grow up to vote.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if Mark Bavaro entered politics, and aspired to be governor of this great state after football? We'd finally have a governor who would be part of the solution, instead of the problem.

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