

## Vatican II affirmed value of monastic life

To the editor:

Responding to my letter (8-31-89) asking for recognition and mention of monastic contemplative communities along with those of active ministry in this paper's vocational articles, Grace Carnes expressed some negative views (10-5-89) which I believe should be addressed.

She seriously questions the value of monastic contemplative life today ... We find this adequately expressed in at least three of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, for example: "Members of those communities which are totally dedicated to contemplation give themselves to God alone in solitude and silence and through constant prayer and ready penance. No matter how urgent may be the needs of the active apostolate, such communities will always have a distinguished part to play in Christ's Mystical Body, where all members have not the same function" (Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life) ...

At no point did I suggest that something was "lacking in active ministry" but only that there is a diversity of functions and charisms in the Church and that the monastic contemplative life is complementary to the active ministry ...

Sister Catherine Wolfe, O.P.  
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## Church can't prove when life 'ensouled'

To the editor:

This is in reference to letters of Jane Mead and Jean Smith of October 26.

It is not true that the Catholic Church "has always held that life begins at conception and that all life is sacred." There has always been doubt as to when life becomes human — i.e. ensouled. Between the 12th century and 1869, the Church made a distinction between ensouled and unensouled fetus. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that ensoulment occurred when the fetus was "formed."

There is no way to prove or disprove when a life is ensouled. Our Church takes a reasonable and cautious position — that the risk of grievous sin is too great at any time to have an abortion. As a Catholic (and liberal) I have no problem with this except where greater risk may be involved — but is this moral position enough to preempt by law the rights of others to choose based on their moral beliefs?

I greatly admire the two women who were raped and chose to bear the children — what great strength and courage! I suggest to Jean Smith that the result could be very different when a raped woman conceived because the state preempted her choice.

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# Wave of change no cause for triumph

Americans are feeling righteous of late.

Even as we mourned the tragic crushing of China's Beijing Spring, the emergence of a pro-democracy movement in China seemed to confirm our belief that the value of freedom is contagious.

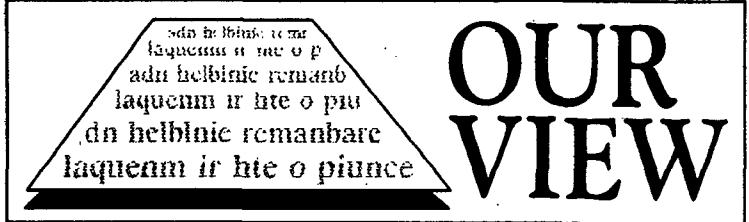
Meanwhile, the Soviet bloc, whose leader once threatened "We will bury you," is crumbling from within, as the peoples of Eastern Europe clamor for change.

The Berlin Wall can no longer contain East Germans' hunger for freedom. A recent wave of more than 50,000 emigrants helped sweep Communist Party leader Eric Honecker out of office.

As communist parties in Hungary and Poland scurry to shed their names and ideologies, opposition groups are scrambling to make the switch from underground movements to mainstream political parties — and in Solidarity's case, to leading Poland's government.

The shift in Eastern Europe's political tides is good news for religious leaders and for the thousands who remained faithful to their beliefs and devotions in spite of official denial and even persecution. In particular, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's planned visit with Pope John Paul II at the end of this month promises new freedom for Ukrainian Catholics — perhaps even legalization of their underground church.

While we rejoice at the lightening of oppression in Eastern Europe, let's not reach too far in patting ourselves on the back.



ves on the back.

Triumphalism would be out of place in a country where barely half of us bothered to vote last Tuesday. And we can hardly stand as an example to the world when in the United States, today and every day, 1,000 infants will be born addicted to crack cocaine; when, in New York state, one in five women are reportedly victims of rape or attempted rape during their college years; when children out for a night of trick-or-treat in Rochester are robbed of their candy at gunpoint.

Nor can our churches be complacent when so many are half-empty, torn by doctrinal dissension, and closed in urban and remote rural areas where they are arguably most needed.

Instead of congratulating ourselves on the virtues of our political system, we ought to look hard at the faces of those Chinese students and East European refugees. We could use some of their spirit in the face of adversity if we're to preserve the fruits of an open society without falling victim to its perils.

— The Editors

## Catholic youth need to hear positive aspects of Christianity stressed

To the editor:

Your article "Groups give teens a foothold on church" (Courier 9-7-89), provides an overview of the attitudes and substance permeating our youth ministry programs today.

Cited as a basis or "blueprint for youth ministry," is the document "The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith," developed by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. This document "stated that adolescent catechesis must promote three dimensions of a student's faith — trusting, believing, and doing. It continues, "the loving relationship adolescents develop with God will shape and be shaped by their relationship with other people."

So what's wrong with the foregoing? It lacks specificity, i.e. how to attain this relationship with God and in that lies its sterility.

In addition the tone emanating from the article itself is one of hesitation, uncer-

tainty, and frankly, befuddlement. ... And then we have the remarks of Patrick Fox, director of the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry, to the effect that "the Mass is repetitive — it is boring. Why is that such a surprise? It's meant to be a centering act to bring us to God." That is an explanation of the Mass? And then we wonder about the lack of vocations!

To me such reactions as those of Sister Thero and Mr. Fox encapsulate the malaise that afflicts so much of the Church today. Our outlook is fundamentally negative and this translates into actions which stifle success. We seem to be constantly on the defensive, seeking adaptation in the extreme, concentrating on quantity (attempting to please the most) to the detriment of quality in our message. ...

This condition which in effect amounts to a lack of drive in proclaiming the message of Christianity, the message of Christ, evolved from an attitude that says the basic elements of moral formation are cons-

science and freedom. A conscience that is not subject to external rules or to knowledge from a higher form of knowledge but to self determination by which each person decides for himself what is moral in a given situation. ...

How do we overcome this lack of excitement, this inability to be positive about your "product?" A business will soon fail if its sales force does not believe in the merits of its product(s). They must feel positive if they are to succeed.

And how do we gain this positive feeling? I think it is a result of what may be called interiority — a reversion to silence which will create the conduit for reflection and communication with the Holy Spirit — prayer. Article 30 of the Constitution on the Liturgy speaks of silence as a mode of active participation. In the present milieu the emphasis is much too great on the aspects of faith discussion, dialogue or whatever you want to call it. This is not to demean such activities for they certainly have their merits, but I think they must be based on interiority in order to blossom strongly. ...

Fortunately the Catholic Church, the originator of Christian culture, can supply a positivism, a sense of direction, that is innate in its doctrinal and moral expositions. These are based on the building blocks of its foundation — blocks such as the Incarnation, Our Redemption, the Ten Commandments, and the Seven Sacraments, etc.

William T. Hammill  
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## Priestly vocation grants father's fondest wish

To the editor:

The comments you related in your recent column from parents who have sons who are interested in the priesthood are most regrettable. These types of comments, however, can be expected as a result of the materialistic view of many people in contemporary society, a society which bases its values on money and prestige.

The most important issue in all of our lives is our relationship with God. What higher status could parents wish for their son than a life's vocation as a priest? A son in the family that has been ordained in the service of Jesus Christ and who has the ability to consecrate ordinary bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, our Savior, is the most outstanding and satisfying experience that a parent can have.

Thomas Monaghan, owner of Domino's Pizza, who has accumulated great wealth, stated last week that "material things don't mean a darn thing anymore, now that I've got everything I ever dreamed about — it's not a big deal." Many other examples could be given concerning the false god of materialism.

I sincerely pray that you, your brother priests and other members of the Diocese of Rochester will be successful in your efforts to attract young men into the priesthood. I especially believe that the latest diocesan campaign to identify young men

who may consider a priestly vocation is an excellent step in the right direction. I would be particularly honored and pleased to be used as a reference for any parent who would like to hear from someone who has experienced the great joy and satisfaction of having a son as an ordained priest.

Robert D. Brown  
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Editor's note: Mr. Brown has been blessed with not one, but two sons who are serving as diocesan priests — Fathers Michael R. and Timothy T. Brown.

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