

Seeking a cure for evil's contagion



Last week threatened to make cynics of us all. Before us paraded a monstrous series of men and events that jaded the promise of the 1990s almost before the decade had begun.

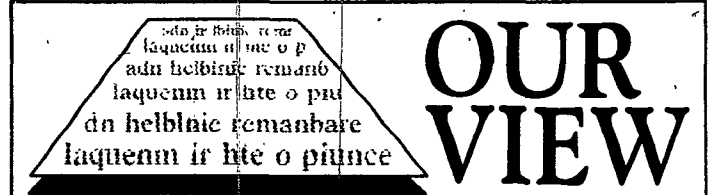
Having failed to capture General Manuel Antonio Noriega during a full-scale invasion of Panama, the U.S. Army was reduced to trying to blast its former ally out of the apostolic nunciature in Panama City with rock music.

Noriega's capture had cost hundreds of lives, and his prosecution on drug-trafficking charges promises to cost millions of dollars. But in spite of his general's uniform and still-military bearing, the Panamanian "strongman" has hardly lived up to his billing. During his surrender and departure from the Vatican embassy Jan. 3 and in a police photo taken thereafter, Noriega — the "monster" who proclaimed war on the United States, reportedly relied on occult rites for protection and called Adolf Hitler his hero — looked the part of "a lonely man, a broken man," according to Panamanian Archbishop Marcos G. McGrath.

A day later, in Rochester, police apprehended Arthur J. Shawcross in Sweden's Northampton Park and later charged the 44-year-old Watertown native with killing 8 women and sought indictments in the killings of three more during the past two years — most of them by strangulation.

Horror turned to outrage as Rochesterians learned that Shawcross had been convicted of killing one child and had confessed to killing another 17 years ago in Watertown. Sentenced in 1972 to serve 25 years to life on manslaughter charges, Shawcross was released on parole in 1987.

From Boston, meanwhile, came word that Charles Stuart had jumped to his death off a Boston Harbor bridge after being implicated in the murders of his wife and pre-born son. Months earlier in October, Stuart had led police via his car phone to the scene of his own and his wife's shooting, which he claimed happened in the course of a robbery by a



black man.

Who can comprehend what would drive someone to shoot his pregnant wife and himself, then claim to have been robbed? To squeeze and batter the life out of woman after woman? To rejoice in the plunder of one's own nation and gleefully poison its neighbors with cocaine and other drugs?

"Evil is not explainable," author Morris L. West asserts in the December 23 issue of *America* magazine: "It is not even understandable."

Like the Black Death in the Middle Ages or AIDS today, West writes, "evil is contagious ... When it breaks out of its capsule, it becomes a wildfire infection. Violence begets violence. Daily exposure to cruelty or pornography desensitizes the human person to the pain of others, to guilt, to the grossest indecencies."

A small voice within each of us responds to a Noriega, a Shawcross, a Charles Stuart in kind, tempting us to believe in nothing and no one, to accept "that what we call God is a cruel absurdist, presiding over a chaos of His own making."

But the antidote to evil's contagion, West asserts, begins with the voice of a single believer in good.

A voice like that of Rev. Javier Villanueva, who reportedly persuaded General Noriega to surrender, then bid him goodbye at the embassy gates with a promise: "I will pray for you every day."

— The Editors

Dialogue explains church's view on homosexuality

To the editor:

In your lead article on AIDS (11/23/89), one person was quoted as saying "I would wish that the condemnation of homosexuality would cease."

In an effort to respond, I would like to refer anyone interested to the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, a Church Doctor. The Dialogue reflects some of St. Catherine's letters and recorded mystical experiences in the form of an exchange between God and herself. Whenever she lifts the "words of God" from her accounting of them she leaves the original wording intact.

In Chapter 124, page 237 (Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue — The Classics of Western Spirituality*, pub. Paulist Press, 1980, Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 75-56755), God was talking to her about the demand for the greatest purity in the sacrament of the Eucharist, especially for the ministers of the sacrament. In reference to some, He said that instead of coming in purity "they do just the opposite to me, for they come to this mystery wholly impure — and not simply with the sort of impurity and weakness to which you are all naturally inclined because of your weak nature (although reason can calm its rebel-

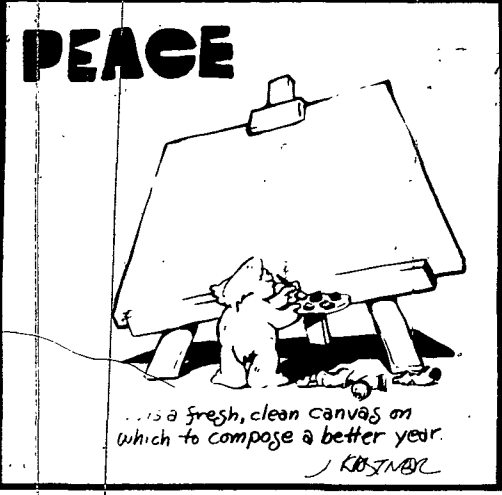
lion if free choice so wills). No, these wretches not only do not restrain their weakness; they make it worse by committing that cursed unnatural sin. As if they were blind and stupid, with the light of their understanding extinguished, they do not recognize what miserable filth they are wallowing in. The Stench reaches up even to me, Supreme Purity, and is so hateful to me that for this sin alone five cities (Wisdom 10:6) were struck down by my divine judgment. For my divine justice could no longer tolerate it, so despicable to me is this abominable sin. But the stench displeases not only me, as I have said, but the devils as well, those very devils these wretches have made their masters. It is not its sinfulness that displeases them, for it is like nothing that is good. But because their nature was angelic, that nature still loathes the sight of that horrendous sin actually being committed. It is true that it was they who in the beginning shot the poisoned arrows of concupiscence, but when it comes to the sinful act itself they run away."

The message follows how Catherine was permitted to see this sin on all levels of society; how the world was corrupted by it; how she could not stand the stench of it and how by prayer for these wretches and ref-

uge in the side of His only son, Christ crucified, she could "flee and escape the leprosy." "So you see, dearest daughter, how abominable this sin is to me in any person" (page 239).

God is immutable. If His disgust for homosexuality existed in the 1300's, it existed before, and exists now. That is the reason the condemnation of homosexuality, not homosexuals, cannot cease.

James M. White
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Rochester



Catholics must condemn sin, love the sinner

To the editor:

In reference to the front page article of Nov. 23, 1989, "Diocese Evokes Mixed Messages," I feel the people interviewed fail to understand the church's role and position in society. All of those interviewed said the church condemns them or those they care for or minister to. This is not the case. The church condemns the sin not the person. Jesus picked up the pieces of broken peoples' lives and reclaimed them. This is our job as church!

Sin is a personal and free will conscious decision and we all have to deal with the consequences of it. If a person decides to have an affair out of wedlock (as Adam admittedly did), commits a homosexual act or takes drugs and AIDS is the terrible consequence we can hardly blame the church for not accepting our transgression. We should instead be thankful that we have a loving God and church that forgives us, takes us in and cares for us. The church deals in

telling people how to live moral lives not instructing them on how to live immoral ones. Expecting the church to tell us it's OK to use condoms is like expecting it to say, "Sin, but be careful," which is totally un-Christianlike. It's the job of our health agencies and disease prevention systems to intensively instruct the public about condoms.

I happen to be very liberal politically, but that does not make me lose sight of, or soft soap the consequences of sinful lifestyles. Love is the answer — a seamless garment. We as church must love much, but not condone sinful acts. Jesus loved the lady caught in adultery, but he said "Go and sin no more." He was condemning her lifestyle, but setting her FREE! That is our job as church.

Jean M. Premo
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Plan's narrow vision threatens Gates school

To the editor:

Is the Diocese of Rochester intent on bringing about the demise of our once extensive parochial system? In the effort to ostensibly reorganize the schools in the Southwest Quadrant, the Planning Board has voted to recommend that St. Theodore's elementary school be transformed into the Quadrant's junior high school by the fall of 1990. The proposed changes have come about as an attempt to resolve the problems of a number of faltering schools in the quadrant, and a desire to bring conformity to Bishop Clark's System Framework Plan. The quadrant representatives have opted to sacrifice St. Theodore's successful elementary program in the hope of saving their own faltering programs. This action is neither fair nor wise.

What will happen to the 272 K-6 students

now attending St. Theodore's? The board proposes to disrupt their education and separate them from many of their peers by dispersing them to several other schools. Yet, there is no plan on how they will be dispersed. As parents, we have supported St. Theodore's with tuition, fundraisers, and the commitment of our time and talents to secure excellence in education for our children. We will not have our children treated as pawns by the self serving opportunists on the board. Like many other parents, our efforts rebuffed, we will transfer our children where their well-being cannot be subjected to the narrow vision of Bishop Clark and the planning board, a vision that seems intent on destroying what we have built.

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