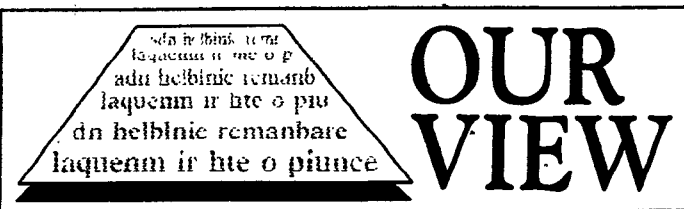


# Annulments are easy target minus the facts



The letter came to the *Catholic Courier* from a 65-year-old who "always has been and always will be a Catholic."

She — only the handwriting suggests that the letter's author was a woman — was more blunt than many of us would dare to be in discussing her disputes with the church. Yet, we fear, her questions will strike a tiny chord of common discontent inside too many readers.

"There are so many things I do not understand, along with a lot of other faithful Catholics," the woman wrote.

Some might say the woman's anonymous grievance deserves no response. But we feel obliged to offer some answer, since the questions she expressed are echoed by many other nameless complaints sent regularly to the *Catholic Courier*.

The first of her questions (we'll discuss others in the coming weeks) arose from an article in the daily press, recounting the third marriage of a prominent former Rochesterian. The new bride's second husband — well-known himself — had obtained a church annulment, even though he and his former wife had

two children.

"Other people can't (get annulments)," the woman wrote, "and I know many that are turned away from the church because they can't get an annulment even though they have good reason ..."

Referring to an international figure of extreme wealth who was married years ago — following a church annulment, she believed — our correspondent then asserted that the church readily grants annulments to the rich.

The writer's bewilderment stems from a combination of two common misunderstandings about 1) the meaning of the word "annulment" as it is used by the church; and 2) the notion that annulments can be bought.

The church defines "annulment" as a declaration that no valid church marriage ever existed.

Yet, our correspondent would ask, how can the church say a valid marriage never existed when a couple has lived together for years and produced children? Here we stumble upon yet another area of confusion — the equation of consummation with validity.

While the civil authorities may use consummation as a determiner — allowing a couple to annul a civil marriage that has not been consummated — church law operates far differently.

Consummated or not, a marriage isn't valid in the eyes of the church when a condition is proven to have existed prior to the marriage that prevented one or both partners from fully committing to their union.

Among the common conditions the church recognizes as invalidating a marriage are inability to form interpersonal relationships or a lack of discretion or judgment regarding the rights and obligations of marriage.

To obtain obtain an annulment, every petitioner — from the wealthiest to the poorest — must meet at least one of the church's criteria. In 1989, 394 of 439 requests for annulments were granted in the Diocese of Rochester, indicating that the diocesan Tribunal helps nearly nine out of every 10 people who turn to it.

Nor can it be claimed that the annulment process is beyond the financial reach of the ordinary person, since the fee is no more than \$300 per annulment in this diocese.

This is not to say that the process is perfect. The real difficulty of obtaining an annulment lies in proving that a nullifying condition existed prior to the marriage ceremony. Some people who appear to have legitimate grounds for annulment are unable to document their cases. Thus we all hear horror stories of seemingly deserving people unable to reconcile their marriages within the church.

Conceivably, one could obtain documentation by "buying" cooperation from a witness. But decisions are rendered by the diocesan Tribunal "in the name of God."

And as the diocesan official, Father William Laird, pointed out, "If I would sell my soul for \$300, I would be a very poor person indeed."

— The Editors

## Bishop not at fault for TGA woes

To the editor:

Instead of blaming Bishop Clark's policies for the low returns in the Thanks Giving Appeal (letter of Feb. 1, 1990), we should blame our lack of generosity. While Bishop Clark is setting an example of compassion and generosity toward those with differing viewpoints, letters are written criticizing his decisions — decisions that are as painful for him to make as they are difficult for us to accept.

The financial problems of our diocese are being repeated across this nation. It is no secret that Catholic giving has not kept pace with increasing expenses. Catholics as a group are no longer an immigrant population with only low-income-producing jobs, but the proportion of income given to the church has dropped. According to a study of the Ft. Wayne, Ind., diocese, Catholics there gave only 1.1 percent of their income in 1984 as compared to 2.2 percent in 1963 and 1.6 percent in 1974. The same situation exists in other dioceses across the country. Therefore, no one bishop's policies are to blame.

While Catholics generally are giving less of their income to the church, needs are increasing and there are fewer people entering the church.

### Politician denied faith

To the editor:

Instead of your placing the responsibility for communion refusal on Bishop Leo Maher, you ought to place the responsibility at the foot of the politician who supports through tax-payer money the mass slaughter of the unborn. It is understood by those that are familiar with the rules of the Catholic church that a person who is a baptized Catholic who denies or doubts any of the truths of the faith is a heretic. She has already severed herself from the Body of the church. This means that she, by her own free will, has excluded herself from the privilege of receiving the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist until she repents through the sacrament of Penance. The Bishop incurred the corrective punishment not so much to punish her but to better her. He has the responsibility to teach others the faith whether they are able to live it or not. To not admonish a Catholic person who actively supports what Vatican II has called "an abominable crime" would make him an accomplice in the abomination.

Adele Lester  
S. Main Street  
Pittsford

ing religious life to do the necessary work, forcing the diocese to hire lay people.

Instead of blaming Bishop Clark we should be very grateful we have a leader who does not point at our penurious tendencies. He is struggling with difficulties faced by many bishops in this country. Why not follow his example by being compassionate toward him personally and generous both in our attitudes and in our giving?

Dorothy S. Dickieson  
Seneca Falls

### Rescues save babies

To the editor:

In regards to recent *Courier* reports about the dialoguing and debating with "abortion rights" people, I'd like to clarify a point and offer a solution.

The point to be clarified: Rescuers do not rescue primarily to draw attention to their cause but to save babies scheduled to be killed.

The solution to guaranteeing access to women seeking medical care without the interference from rescuers: Have the abortionists agree not to mix patients — in other words, don't take care of regular medical patients on the same day you kill babies.

Better yet — stop killing babies!

Judith Donoghue  
Eugene Street  
Rochester

### Grace gained at great price

To the editor:

Regarding Father McBrien's column concerning grace gained at no price is enemy of Church. While I'm not a martyr like Bonhoeffer, there have been numerous occasions for me to obtain services only a priest could perform. The advice part of the service was hardly what I'd consider cheap grace — it demanded picking up my cross daily and still does.

I was called upon to put into practice the very principle I'd learned in Catechism instructions as a convert 38 years ago this February.

I assure you, I intend to persevere. I'll stumble and fall, pick myself up again and go on carrying the Cross God fashioned for me. Hoping eventually to reach my heavenly home. Cheap grace indeed!

Mrs. Donald W. Camblin  
Meadow Drive  
Palmyra



### Cut verbiage to make more space for letters, reader urges

To the editor:

I always look forward to the Opinion section of the *Catholic Courier* because it contains so many intelligent, interesting and inspiring letters from correspondents who are thoughtful, responsible, and articulate. The Feb. 1, 1990, issue was no exception. I believe, however, that there are many more intelligent, interesting, and inspiring letters which are never published because of lack of space. You state in your "Letters Policy:" "We reserve the right to edit all letters." Let me illustrate how you might have edited the letters in the February 1 issue to provide more room for other letters:

1. A correspondent is upset because Bishop Clark did not do enough to save

Cardinal Mooney High School.

2. A correspondent is upset because St. Rita's School may close.

3. A correspondent is dismayed that Catholics are disunited over the school issue.

4. A correspondent has great devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

5. A correspondent believes that Bishop Clark is soft on contraception.

6. A correspondent believes that Bishop Clark is soft on contraception.

7. A correspondent believes that Father Cuddy is a menace behind the wheel.

I hope you will give my suggestion the attention it merits.

Father Robert L. Collins  
St. Thomas More Church