

# Cuomo takes up Commonweal's challenge

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

In its editorial of February 23, *Commonweal* magazine issued an invitation — indeed a challenge — to public officials to join a reasoned debate about abortion.

It is time, the editorial suggested, to wrest the primary initiative from church leaders who rely more on moral assertions than moral arguments, and from advocacy groups who accept no departure from their own cherished orthodoxies.

New York's Governor Mario Cuomo accepted the challenge in a lengthy letter published in the March 23 issue.

The governor's harshest detractors, for whom he is akin to the Beast of the Apocalypse, will not be appeased, and even fair-minded critics may not be satisfied completely. His letter, however, is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion and it deserves a wider reading beyond the subscription list of *Commonweal* magazine.

It may surprise some of the governor's critics that he agrees with *Commonweal's* complaint that alternatives to abortion are too often withheld from the pregnant woman.

He notes that if Catholic family planning

centers are required by law in the State of New York to provide information, either through counseling or referral, about the full range of options available, including birth control and abortion, "then it would seem reasonable that other such centers, regardless of auspices, be likewise required to assure that their clients understand the full range of options, including adoption."

Governor Cuomo also addresses the charge that his position on capital punishment is inconsistent with his position on abortion.

"If it were my judgment," he writes,



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

"that theoretically doable legal restrictions on abortion (for example, limitation of Medicaid funding) were fair and would engender a greater respect for life in our state, then I would have to be predisposed to advocate for such a change.

"I say theoretically doable," he continues, "because it remains my judgment that, as I state in my Notre Dame speech, 'the equal protection clause in New York's Constitution has been interpreted by the courts as a standard of fairness that would preclude us from denying only the poor — by a cut-off of funds — the practical use of the constitutional right given by *Roe vs. Wade*."

"Likewise, if it were my judgment that the imposition of a death penalty would save innocent lives and make our state a safer, better place, then I would have to be disposed to acquiesce in the Legislature's judgment," Gov. Cuomo writes. "But in each case, my prudential political judgment, formed by examining all the available evidence, is that these actions would not have such desirable effects.

Regarding the role of Catholic bishops in the abortion debate, Governor Cuomo has some especially surprising and challenging things to say.

Surprising (at least for some of his critics), because he applauds the bishop's efforts "to keep abortion from becoming a non-issue ... For that I believe they deserve our gratitude."

Challenging, because the governor also faults those bishops who cross the line into the political realm, creating "the public perception ... that they are not simply exercising their teaching role for Catholics, but trying to influence the outcome of an election ..."

He notes the bishops' claim that their opposition to abortion is not based just on Catholic teaching but on natural law ("norms accessible and available to members of the human family").

If this is truly the case, he asks, why don't the bishops also put pressure on, or criticize, non-Catholic politicians whose position on abortion differs from their own?

What the abortion debate needs now, the *Commonweal* editorial of February 23 insisted, are moral arguments rather than moral assertions, and participants who are "willing to work toward a consensus favoring compromise, to settle for half a loaf rather than to insist on having their particular orthodoxy made into the law of the land."

# Jesus' frightened followers doubt good news

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

Mary Magdalene's knocking at the door was insistent. She had run to this house in Jerusalem all the way back from the tomb. Her own emotions nearly overwhelmed her.

She had gone to the tomb of Jesus in anguish. But she had left there so filled with joy that if she had a bell she would have rung it as she ran through the empty streets. Mary wanted to share her news about Jesus with everyone, especially His detractors. The first thing was to find those closest to Jesus: His apostles.

At first, no one came to answer Mary's pounding at the door. Those inside the house thought the Roman soldiers had come. Mary was undaunted. She began calling each of the apostles by name.

"John, Peter, James come quickly! I have something to tell you!" she said.

Finally, after several minutes, Mary heard someone come to unbolt the door. It opened just far enough for a hand to



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emerge and pull her into a darkened room.

"Awake, all of you!" Mary cried as she rushed to pull the cloth from the window.

"This is not the time for mourning."

It was Peter who spoke first. "Mary, please lower your voice. We are in danger. The Roman soldiers are posted on every street corner in Jerusalem," he said.

"Let them come," she proclaimed. "We owe our allegiance to a different king."

"Mary, this morning we heard that Pilate, at the urging of the temple priests, may arrest all of the followers of Jesus," John said. "If we are arrested, then all that Jesus tried to do will be for nothing."

"Don't you understand? None of that

matters now," Mary said. "Jesus is alive!"

"Early this morning, I went to the tomb with Mary and Joanna to anoint the body of Jesus," Mary explained. "All we could think about was that heavy stone. It had taken two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, to place the stone over the opening of the tomb. But, when we arrived, there was no stone, just a huge gaping hole."

"We rushed in to see. Jesus was gone. The only thing that remained were the linens that Joseph had wrapped around the body before placing it in the tomb," she continued. "We were still puzzling over this when we noticed two men sitting on the hillside. They reminded us of what Jesus had said."

"Jesus said many things," Peter interrupted. "And we will hold his words in our heart always. I know how much you loved Jesus, Mary, but he is gone."

"Jesus said that all of this would happen to him," Mary continued. "That wasn't the end of the story. Today on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, just as he had promised."

Silence filled the room. No one said anything to Mary, but she saw the doubts clearly on their faces.

"You don't believe me, do you?" she snapped. "How could I expect you to believe? Where were you all when Jesus needed you most? You denied him as much as Judas by what you didn't do."

She turned around to confront Peter, but he was gone. He was running for his life all the way to the tomb.

Scripture reference: Luke, Chapter 24:1-12.

Meditation: Does my life reflect a belief in the risen Savior or a dead Jesus?

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## An Open Letter to the Laity and Clergy of the Rochester Diocese

The Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) recently held a news conference in which we presented a counter-proposal to the System Framework Plan offered by the Diocese of Rochester. The central feature of the ACE quadrant plan is that it retains parish-based control of schools while allowing for diocesan oversight in areas such as financing, enrollment and facilities. Schools would choose their own principals, determine tuitions, and administer their finances. They would participate on quadrant boards which would collaborate to strengthen the schools' finances, enrollment, academics and other programs. Our plan also calls for fundraising initiatives and for the more aggressive marketing of Catholic Schools.

There have been a number of problems pointed out with regard to the diocesan plan for reorganization and the process which has been employed in its promotion. Although diocesan spokesmen have alleged that a dialogue has taken place with parents regarding this issue, the plan has remained unchanged since the quadrant hearings in which widespread disapproval was expressed. Though the diocese offered a delay with regard to closing or reconfiguration of particular schools, it has proceeded with its original plan to take control away from parishes; thus, the issue of what configuration schools retain one year has no necessary bearing on what configuration the schools will possess in two or three years. The issue of governance is the only real issue in the quadrant equation, and so far there have been no changes in diocesan governance plans. We should recall that the Universal Church solicits and incorporates changes suggested by theologians and bishops when formulating and expressing theologies and governance policies. It seems incongruous that our diocese — which considers itself open-minded when it comes to receptivity to dialogue with those who have lethal businesses to defend (abortionists) — will not countenance such consideration toward Catholics who question the prudence of its school plan. Obedience to Church authority, it must be noted, does not entail silence with regard to logistical matters — which are more often the expertise of the laity — but such co-operation is rather specifically called for by Vatican II.

Secondly, there is strong support for Catholic Schools among most diocesan Catholics, perhaps exceeding the willingness of diocesan administrators to channel it. A yearly Catholic Schools Appeal would likely be well accepted by many, and go a long way to supplementing teacher salaries, subsidizing qualified schools, and providing financial aid to the needy. This would also free TGA monies for other programs. Taking control away from those with the most proximate concern for Catholic schools, however — parents and pastors — such that the very existence of their school is out of their hands, will likely disenfranchise these parties who otherwise would spend themselves for the schools which would be there for their children and faith communities.

The antipathy displayed to the very suggestion of such an appeal by diocesan spokesman Fr. George Norton, who said that such an appeal would "doubly-tax" Catholics — in view of diocesan plans to raise tuitions by hundreds of dollars — strikes the hearer as illogical, when an average contribution of \$40 per year per family could provide \$3 million annually for Catholic school needs. Perhaps the diocese underestimates the mathematical prowess of our Catholic people. The planned substantial tuition increases, on the other hand, can be expected to result in decreased enrollment. Moreover, families who wish to remain in Catholic schools at all costs may have to decrease their Church contribution due to tuition increases, further hampering their parish's ability to make the mandated contributions to the quadrant system.

Due to the shift from parish schools to support of individual students by parishes, the quadrant system may result in enforced parish boundaries. Children will represent a specific financial levy against the parish. Parishes, in fairness, may forbid those outside their legal parish boundaries — with or without young children — from registering in their parishes. The quadrant system, moreover, juxtaposes the infinite value of individual children against their educational costs, while in a parochial system most parishes are happy to support a school which they administer, and which contributes to the spiritual community of the parish.

Although it has been remarked that some pastors are happy to be relieved of the burden of running schools, such a view is not to be commended. Canon law delegates to pastors the role of overseeing the religious formation of the young. What if pastors wanted to be relieved of the "burden" of offering Mass? Nor is it within the legitimacy of Catholic morality for divinely-chosen leaders (priests) to fail to speak out with regard to the good of the many, when that good might be seriously endangered in a shortsighted attempt to gain favor with diocesan authorities, and thus to keep one's own school building open. It would seem that such consideration has been a motive in some cases, and in one instance the diocese appears to have precipitated that mindset. A parish whose opposition to centralization was the strongest in the diocese was approached by the diocese for a private meeting, after which the sentiment of parishioners was transformed such that most deemed it "prudent" to abandon their vocal opposition to centralization.

While the diocese has been unwilling to openly dialogue with diocesan Catholics on the issue of the future of their Catholic schools, they have engaged in private meetings in which the impression is conveyed that conformity might be rewarded. Pastors, on the other hand, have been threatened with removal from their parishes for opposing the school plan. Openness, dialogue, and flexibility have thus far not been part of this diocesan process. It is to be hoped that the legitimate concerns of our Catholic laity and courageous clergy will be considered, as expressed in this counterproposal offered to the diocese by ACE and to be offered to parishes for their endorsement.

Good faith in the minds of many is still a commendation that has to be earned. It is our hope that justice and good faith will be evidenced in more than mere words by those in positions of diocesan leadership, as well as by all Catholic parents and pastors who have been charged with a solemn obligation to ensure the Catholic education for the many. Our God, after all, is a God of justice.

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## Book tells how to avoid injury in fall

Their hip bones will stay connected to their leg bones if seniors follow the techniques presented in the new book *How To Prevent Falls — A Comprehensive Guide to Better Balance*, by Betty Perkins-Carpenter (Senior Fitness Productions). Mrs. Carpenter has also written another book for seniors, *The Fun of Fitness*. Both are available at most local bookstores and Wegmans, or by calling 586-7980.

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