

Delay judging apparitions until the harvest

A few years ago, the *Catholic Courier* received in the mail an instant photograph of a young girl receiving her First Communion while kneeling at an altar rail. Shining down upon her was what appeared to be a ray of brilliant light.

Enclosed in the envelope was a rapturous letter — which clearly had been photocopied for mass mailing — asserting that the Lord had rewarded the girl's piety by shining His face upon her in a quite literal manner.

As journalists who deal with photographs on a daily basis, we recognized immediately that the photograph's "supernatural" effect had been produced by bending the film while loading the camera or after exposure. Film experts have shown that many other photographic "apparitions" were the result of light leaks, thumbs placed in front of lenses, and inadvertent or intentional multiple exposures.

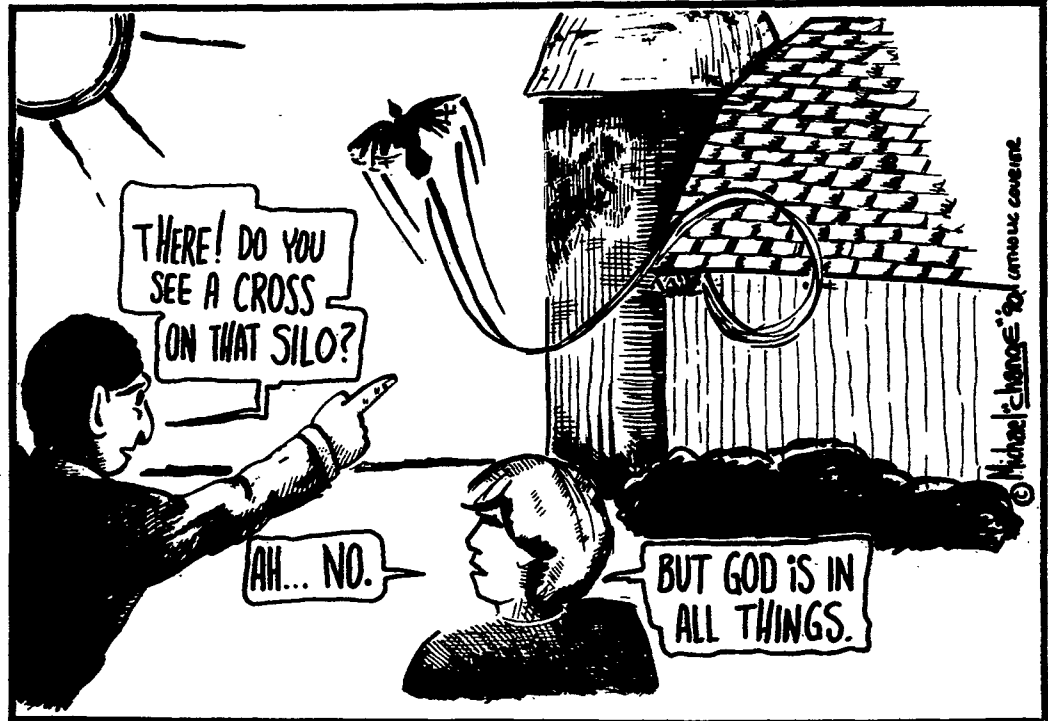
Although the church has long held that no phenomenon should be attributed to supernatural causes until all other explanations have been



exhausted, the sender of the photograph and countless others who regularly write about their mystical experiences ask us to see apparitions in even the most simply explained occurrences. Some believers, moreover, seem to regard acceptance of their claims as a bench mark of the listener's Catholicity.

Such extreme zeal — and its mirror image, cynicism — is counterproductive, because it promotes the societal tendency to write off all people of faith as crackpots, neurotics or victims of highly suggestible minds. It also tends to divide the faithful, as evidenced by the intramural squabbling between Bishops Franic and Zanic of Yugoslavia over the reported events at Medjugorje.

The church has always taken the middle ground on alleged supernatural phenomena in the modern era, noting



that even the apparitions it has ruled valid are not essential to Catholicism. While the handful of validated apparitions are worthy of belief, the church has stated, such belief is not required of Catholics.

When confronted by seemingly

mystical events, a little healthy skepticism might be in order. After all, the church maintains that one key to the validity of any supernatural phenomenon is its spiritual fruit. And it is unwise to harvest before the fruit has ripened.

— The Editors

Conscientious preparation vital for effective preaching

To the editors:

There is a motto which I am sure we have all heard or read at some time or other — "Be prepared." This advice is probably the best one ever given to a human being.

Preparation is a must in almost every way of life. We must be prepared for our exams, special medical tests, meals, etc. The most important preparation to be made by each one of us is for our journey into eternity.

Father Paul Cuddy one of the best columnists around with his down to earth messages hit the nail on the head for priests to prepare carefully before they preach. I believe the majority of them do.

Have you ever noticed in church how many hear but do not listen by either talking to a friend or star gazing around the church, etc. It must be terribly discouraging and frustrating for a preacher to try and give a sermon after having prepared himself to such people.

I believe the only person I have ever listened to give talks for a half hour or more and hold the people's attention was Bishop Sheen.

I heard a good speaker once start his talk by saying, "I will talk for about ten minutes or so, as I am not a Bishop Sheen." He further stated, "I don't want you to fall asleep on me or walk out." No truer words were ever spoken.

In making a speech of any nature, may I respectfully present the following suggestions to all public speakers.

Prepare yourself. Bishop Sheen always did. Make it a ten or fifteen minute talk. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Do not use words that are out of the ordinary and most people do not understand. I used to read William F. Buckley and had to refer to the dictionary too often to learn the meaning of so many words. I stopped reading his column.

Tape your speech and listen to yourself so as to improve your delivery, articulation, tone, etc. Speak with authority and sincerity to the people...not down to them.

I might add for those who regularly make speeches besides taping their messages for self improvement, it would be wise to buy a full length door mirror and look at yourself while delivering your speech. Bishop Sheen did. To tell you the truth, I do too, whenever I am called upon to speak...

Preaching the Word of Our Father is one of the most important tasks a priest or any clergyman has to do. Back to the basic advice, be prepared whether it be at the seminary or in the rectory for any sermon to be presented to the people.

I know two people who left our church

Christ's body and blood are Eucharist's real 'stars'

To the editors:

I am becoming increasingly impatient with those who feel a need to continually convey their dissatisfaction with homilies, or more specifically, homilists. Recent examples appeared in Father Cuddy's column and the opinion page of your September 6 edition.

Can it be that some of us have the mistaken notion that the homily is the principal part of the Mass and therefore "makes it or breaks it" for us? Has constant exposure to the media and entertainment menu conditioned us to expect a polished and inspiring performance à la Billy Graham or Fulton J. Sheen? Maybe

Federal government should discontinue offering funding for the arts

To the editors:

Taxpayers should ask their congressmen to withdraw President Bush's proposal of a budget increase for the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), and instead, stop funding for the NEA, which funds could be used to reduce the Federal deficit.

It is not the function of the Federal government to fund the arts, good or bad and this controversial issue may well go into October and November.

It is an outrage that our government is using our tax dollars to pay for so-called works of art by "artists" to display material that is pornographic, blasphemous, sexually explicit, and very offensive to religion.

All Christians should ban together, for an attack on one religion is an attack on all religions, like the portrayal of the following, to name a few:

The Christ child is seen wielding a pistol in a work, "Madonna and Child with a gun." Funds were given to help fund an exhibition which included a bust of Jesus in woman's clothes, with a crown of thorns on His head, makeup around his eyes, and female breasts; Wojnarowicz's "Tongues

for a nondenominational religion because they told me they got more from hearing the word of God from that preacher than they did from their priest. All this despite the fact we have the true presence of Jesus in our tabernacles...

As Father Cuddy advocates

we need to be reminded that the only real 'stars' present during Mass are the Body and Blood of Christ. Perhaps it is time we took more of the responsibility for what we glean from a sermon and, even more important, what we put into the entire Eucharistic celebration.

We can do this with a little prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts — not to mention our eyes and ears — to the message or lesson the homilist is trying to convey. We can put more spirit into what should be a joyous celebration by responding more vigorously, singing with more volume and more feeling, and generally acting as if we enjoy worshipping as

of Flame" featured Christ as a drug addict in the process of injecting drugs into his arm via a syringe. The tightly wound cord around his upper arm is used by addicts to raise veins in order to make injection easier; an essay where the artist calls Cardinal John O'Connor "that creep in black skirts;" Attacks on the Catholic church laced with four letter words and a series of extremely graphic homoerotic photos.

If you and I and thousands of others tell the president we are outraged to be paying for this sick "art" which is also shown at

tax supported colleges, and ask that it be defunded, I believe he will listen and will do it.

George Bush is a decent, family man. I can't believe he will tolerate the use of our tax dollars for such trash if you and I will call this outrage to his attention, especially with such serious items needing our tax dollars now.

The Power Of The People Is On Our Side — The Taxpayers Side.

Candida Cange
Rochester

Biographer seeks contacts with Sister Wegman's family

To the editors:

Sister Bridget Marie Engelmeyer, assistant archivist of the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, is writing a biographical article about a Rochester-born School Sister of Notre Dame who was one of the founders of that Baltimore college. She was Sister Ildefonsa (Louise) Wegman (1836-1880), the daughter of Johann Wegmann (one of the organizers of St. Joseph's, Rochester's first German Catholic Church, 1836) and Mary Margaret Ernst Wegmann.

In her search for Sister Ildefonsa's family background, Sister Bridget Marie would

"preparation" will bring results for a greater and better informed Catholic Church!

Francis J. Mastropietro
Clark Street Auburn

EDITORS' NOTE: This letter has been edited to comply with space limitations.

a community — as the mystical Body of Christ. We should never underestimate how much our presence and participation serves as a source of faith support and sustenance for those with whom we share the sacred meal.

At a time when more and more Catholics are finding reasons to stay away from Mass, we should be trying to build up and encourage a greater spirit of community worship that will persuade marginal or fallen-away Catholics to come back into a fuller participation in the Church. Let us first look inside ourselves to see if we are doing all we can to make this so.

Ronald J. Tocci
West Church Street Fairport

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like to contact present-day Rochester-area descendants of Johann Wegmann/Wegman or relatives of his wife Mary Margaret Ernst. Local members of these two families are therefore earnestly requested to write to Sister Bridget Marie Engelmeyer, SSND, at 4701 Charles Street, Baltimore, MD, 21210, or to communicate with the undersigned at 4536 St. Paul Blvd., Rochester, 14617 (telephone 716/338-1602).

Rev. Robert F. McNamara
Archivist
Diocese of Rochester