

# Flags symbolize 'divinely established' authority

To the editors:

In response to the letter published in the Oct. 11 issue, page 23, entitled "Flag a needless intrusion of state in churches":

I read with mounting concern the letter of Michael F. Larson regarding the placement of American flags in Christian churches. ... The philosophical and theological underpinnings of Mr. Larson's argument provide valuable symptomatic evidence of the common confusion over interpretation of the Biblical and constitutional doctrines which apply in any discussion of church-state relations.

As we say in the Pledge of Allegiance, the flag is inherently a symbol of the "republic for which it stands." As such, it means many things to many people. Fundamentally, however, it is an objective symbol of the nation of which we are citizens ... Mr. Larson's argument would seem to imply that by removing the flag we could forget the state and its shortcomings for a time and thereby concentrate exclusively on our worship. Unfortunately, both this conclusion and the logic behind it are flawed.

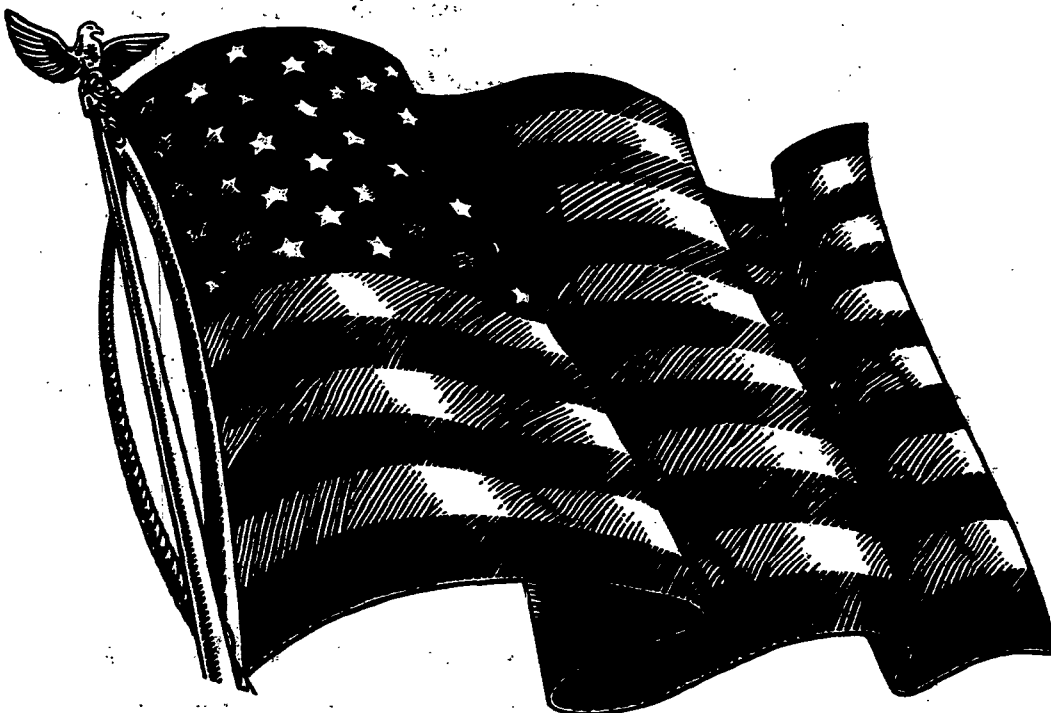
It is always dangerous to suppress symbols. Symbols stand for ideas, and removing or denigrating symbols reflects directly on the ideas for which they stand. ...

As Christians, we owe allegiance to two divinely established authorities: the Church and the State. Since God has instituted both, we must seek our service and role in both. ... We cannot compartmentalize our lives into citizenships in the "sacred" and the "profane." ... We do not go to church to escape the realities of the world, but in order to receive strength and to be equipped by the Word so that we can deal with this world's problems as God would have us deal with them. ...

... I take strong issue with Mr. Larson's comment that he "commend(s) those churches around the world that have set themselves above 'local politics.'" To be sure, the church is not to seek a role in ruling over or determining the affairs of the state. There seems to be in Mr. Larson's comments, however, an implicit statement that the church is somehow morally "above" politics, as though politics is by its very nature morally deficient. Quite to the contrary, the church is made up of individuals, and nothing could be more un-Biblical than for individual Christians to forsake involvement in the peaceful, civilized ordering of their temporal affairs ... Even Jesus paid His taxes, and St. Paul reminds us to do the same.

The oft-quoted and even more often misunderstood First Amendment to the United States Constitution says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..." Having a flag in a church does not contravene this injunction in any way. The separation of church and state means only that the state cannot control or determine the course of the church, and vice versa. Thus, as Christians we are absolutely free ... to bring our

Christian convictions into the public debate on the proper role, function and execution of government. ... (T)he presence of our national symbol in our places of worship serves as a useful reminder of our God-given responsibilities to respect and serve the state and, most importantly, to pray for it and its leaders.



Some see the American flag as a naked symbol of martial arrogance. Their view, I fear, is occluded by their own political and ideological predispositions. ... I prefer to think as the flag as, among other things, a

reminder. Even in the context of worship, the flag in my church reminds me of my special role as a Christian citizen, of my responsibility to intercede before God on behalf of the state, and of the many things I am thankful for to the great God who has provided such abundant blessings to me through our country and its government.

Jerry Helffer  
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Rochester

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

# Don't alter church's divine aspects for man's objectives

To the editors:

Anne Bartholomew's letter in the Oct. 4 issue of the *Catholic Courier* ("Forced celibacy counters God's values") appears at face value to be a well thought out and organized analysis of the celibacy problem. I thought it would be appropriate to point out the other side of the coin.

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ was the turning point for the Old Testament Law. It was at this time in history that Our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection established a new Covenant between God and man to replace the old Mosaic Law. What may have been "right" in the Old Testament, i.e., (Ms. Bartholomew's) reference to the marriage of rabbis, may not necessarily be right under the new law of our Lord.

Was it not our Lord who called the apostles to leave *everything* they had and follow Him? He didn't say go get married first and then come with Me or do what you have to first and then come and see Me. No, He required of His apostles — Priests — their complete and immediate commitment to Him.

As I see it, there is no issue of forced celibacy, just an issue of commitment to our Lord and His Church, the Catholic

Church. Just like the commitment in a marriage to be true to your spouse and only your spouse How many marriages today are ending in divorce or adultery? Just like the commitment to your children to bring them up in today's society with a good solid Catholic faith When is the last time you reviewed your Catholic beliefs with your children or previewed the movies that your children are viewing at the theater? We all make our decisions in life; some of us stick by them and some of us don't.

As far as the ability of "celibate" leaders to run the Church, counsel married couples or handle all the preaching and teaching functions of the Church, I say celibacy has nothing to do with this. The education of our priests on historical, Biblical and moral teachings is probably unequalled in any other religion. Their knowledge is more than Anne, I or most of the lay population can ever hope to have. And yes, it is because of the commitments and everyday life that we must deal with that we don't have the time for such an education. Who better to provide it to us than those who are called to spend their lives devoted to it.

The issues and concerns raised in Anne's letter can very easily be traced to the at-

titudes and lifestyle that our society "forces" on all of us, not our Church, i.e., I want what I want when I want it. Our Catholic faith offers us an alternative to this attitude. We believe in the true presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, Body and Soul; go visit Him every day and talk to Him about these issues that trouble you. We believe that the Pope is the direct successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, who was appointed as the guardian of our Lord's Church; be true to the teachings of the Church and don't undermine them. It is through our prayers and devotion to our

Lord and through our union with the Pope and the teachings of the Church that God will make all things right.

I don't condone a policy of ignoring problems and concerns of the human aspect of the Catholic Church, but I also don't condone the reforming of our religion on an individual basis to meet man's objectives when it is man who should conform to meet God's objectives, the Divine aspect of the Catholic Church.

Michael A. Gallagher  
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Fairport

## Political committee offers hotline

To the editors:

Abortion is probably the most widely discussed and polarizing issue in America today.

The idea that life is a gift from God, and sacred, is contrasted by the humanist concepts of materialism, selfishness and pride. The lack of sanctity for life has eroded and continues to erode our society.

If our elected representatives were courageous Pro-Lifers — and many are, although in the minority — Pro-Life legislation abolishing the evil of abortion would be enacted.

New York State, under Gov. Mario Cuomo, is hostile to the Pro-Life cause. Unfortunately, the New York State Senate has not responded as it should.

The Political Action Committee (PAC) of the New York State Right to Life Committee sent a questionnaire to every can-

didate running for State office. Based upon the return of signed questionnaires from the candidates, and other considerations, the New York PAC has recommended a list of candidates who support our position.

We seek repeal of permissive abortions, we seek parental consent before a minor can obtain an abortion, and we oppose our tax dollars being used for abortions.

Mario Cuomo and Pierre Rinfret did not have the courtesy to respond to the questionnaire.

We ask that voters acquaint themselves with the Pro-Life candidates in their district. Contact your local Pro-Life or call our office at 518/434-1293.

Harold K. Grune, Chairman  
Political Action Committee  
New York State Right to Life  
Committee, Inc.  
Albany

## Bishop should call annual appeal 'Thanksgiving Tax'

To the editors:

Once again it is time for Bishop Clark's Annual Thanksgiving Appeal. There is no doubt that the money raised by the annual high point of the diocesan year does much good — and it helps pay for the bureaucratic minions of the Diocesan Office.

One question — why doesn't the Bishop tell it like it is and refer to it as the Annual Thanksgiving TAX? The parishes have to

pay up, no matter what. Remember the medieval lords and serfs?

Marc Zicari  
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Rochester

EDITORS' NOTE: This year, parishes will not be required to make up shortfalls on the appeal unless such shortfalls exceed 15 percent of the parishes' assigned quotas. See *Courier*, Oct. 18, page 3.

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