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## CATHOLIC COURIER

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NY

1150 Buffalo Road  
Rochester, NY 14624  
716/328-4340

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### Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letters writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters for length as well as legal concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable.

Mail letters to: **Catholic Courier, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.** Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification purposes.

## Opinion

# Priest responds to conscience query

### To the editors:

Mr. Michael Gallagher's letter ("Process leaves great room for error") in the *Catholic Courier* of November 25, 1993 asks me some questions based on my letter to the editor of October 21, 1993. I would appreciate the opportunity to reply to them.

First of all, my Webster's dictionary defines dissent as "difference of opinion as a) religious nonconformity b) a justice's nonconcurrence with a decision of the majority." Perhaps, I quibble, but I perceive a subtle difference between rejection and nonconformity. I do not reject the doctrine of the Church; I interpret it. I am assisted in doing so by the

responsible theologians who teach at Nazareth College, St. John Fisher College, and St. Bernard's Institute. I am assisted by good Christian friends such as my fellow priests who challenge my thinking and keep me honest. I am also assisted by my parishioners who encourage me in my search for the truth. I find truth in the consensus of all these good Catholic people. If such a process makes me a nonconformist, I rejoice in the label.

Secondly, I do not down play the Magisterium as the source of truth in our Church. I accept the Magisterium as the most important source of truth in our Church, but not the only source.

Truth is found not just in the words of papal and episcopal documents but in the lived experience of the Catholic people who seek to apply these words to the ambiguities and uncertainties of their daily lives. They sometimes find that the truth contained in documents simply does not fit the realities of their daily lives. They do the best they can, assisted by God's grace, the intelligence that God gave them and nonconformists like me. That is how I as a Catholic Priest am promoting the proper formation of conscience.

**Rev. Robert L. Collins**  
St. Thomas More Parish  
East Avenue, Rochester



File photo

The U.S. Postal Service issues two Christmas stamps each year. One features secular art, while the other features a Madonna and Child. This painting by Raphael graced a first-class stamp in 1973 — which cost 8 just cents!

## Priests, religious need our prayers and support today more than ever

### To the editors:

These are not the happiest times to be wearing a badge or a Roman collar. We've all read the recent stories of painful transgressions. And we all agree, I'm sure, that in cases where the justice system has found someone guilty, the debt to society must be paid.

But, while it is appropriate that offenders be rooted out, it is not fair to judge or condemn an entire profession based on the actions of a few. Every day our police risk their lives for us and some lose them. And almost every Catholic remembers with gratitude the good influence of a priest, nun or brother on his or her life. I have been privileged to know many who have dedicated their lives to God. They do so with joy, enthusiasm and grace day in and day out seeking — and for the most part receiving — no credit or applause. My

years at St. Monica's parish in South Jamaica and later at St. John's Prep and University were filled with positive experiences.

The overwhelming number of men and women in the clergy and religious life make enormous sacrifices, with forsaking having their own family high among them. These prayerful, dedicated people do not deserve to be vilified or categorized because fallen colleagues prove that we are all human.

The police and the clergy need our support and prayers more than ever. It's a good time to let them know it.

**Mario M. Cuomo, Governor**  
State of New York

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Gov. Cuomo sent this letter to all *Catholic newspapers* in New York state. Although we generally publish only original letters, his message seemed especially relevant.

## Merton was one of rare few who transcend barriers between ideologies, religious groups

### To the editors:

THANK YOU so much for the wonderful cover story (*Catholic Courier*, Nov. 18: "Merton's words still touch many") on Thomas Merton. He is one of my heroes, and spiritual mentors. He represents to me, what is critical to any honest, living, faith, and that is: contemplation. What makes his books so powerful is that, he publicly prayed with his prose.

His heart and mind were so open that his faith grew by question and examination, not by rote participation. Our hearts need to be as open as his, and our questioning attitudes not taken as

heresy, but as a living, growing, faith.

There were few people who have embodied such a transcendental spirituality as his. I can think of Black Elk, the Oglala Sioux, who was buried with a peace pipe and a rosary, as being another spiritual pioneer whose life united ideologies instead of dividing them.

Thomas Merton's work is as relevant today as it was when it was written. Let's airdrop thousands of his books over Yugoslavia, and let his words of peace live in the hearts of ALL Catholics!!!!

**Patrick Filliben**  
West Washington Avenue, Elmira

## Let cards, stamps help keep focus on Christ

### To the editors:

The Christmas is already here, judging by the holiday items displayed in the stores since October.

If you feel Christmas has become too commercialized, consider the following. This year when you purchase cards to send holiday greetings, make a choice that reflects the real reason for and meaning of Christmas. Cute teddy bears, jolly Santas, and snow covered houses are nice, but the birth of Christ is what we are celebrating.

Pick a greeting card that shows the Baby Jesus and speaks of God's love and peace. When you purchase stamps from the Post Office, request the one depicting Christ and his mother.

Perhaps sending these cards and stamps will help remind all of us who send and receive holiday cards of the real meaning of Christmas.

**J. Lavell**  
Chestnut Crescent, Rochester

## Eliminating abortion will require education on sacredness of life

### To the editors:

A suggestion was made in a local newspaper recently that the opposing pro-life and abortion groups analyze the causes of abortion. As a pro-life person I offer the following:

I feel that with a burdensome pregnancy: if the woman is poor, is perhaps being abused, already has several children, and with no family or friendly support, then abortion seems to be the answer. Now the causes mentioned are generally in the process of being solved, or relieved, by government or private groups but this can, and surely will, take a great deal of time and meanwhile the taking of the lives of the unborn babies goes on.

It seems there should be a strong effort to educate people in general as to the sacredness of human life and also encourage them to aid in the plight of this pregnant woman.

Of course there are abortions undertaken as a matter of convenience for the woman or family, and here again, more education is needed as to what abortion is really about.

**Mary M. Studier**  
Mosely Road  
Rochester