

OPINION COMMENTARY

Catholic Courier

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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 letter 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.

Merton advised us to act in silence

To the editors:

With all the raucous bickering about definitions of what and how to believe as a Catholic that continues to go on in this religion of "love, peace and reconciliation!" and that gets frequently reflected in these letters to the editors, I can't think of a better voice of reason, calm and wisdom than that of Thomas Merton, perhaps recent Christianity's most missed, yet unheeded, prophet.

In a letter of April 10, 1965, to the former Venezuelan poet, Ludovico Silva, and his wife Rosita, included in the latest of the Merton Letters Series, *The Courage For Truth*, 1993, and edited by Rochester's own William Shannon and Christine Bohen, Merton wrote:

"The religion of our time, to be authentic needs to be the kind that escapes practically all religious definition. Because there has been endless definition, endless verbalizing, and words have become gods. There are so many words that one cannot get to God as long as He is thought to be on the other side of the words." (And when He is thought to be found there, "...the words multiply like flies and there is a great buzzing religion, very profitable, very holy, very spurious. One tries to escape it by acts of truth that fail. One's whole being must be an act for which there can be found



no word. This is the primary meaning of faith.

"On this basis, other dimensions of belief can be made credible. Otherwise not. My whole being must be a yes and an amen and an exclamation that is not heard ... One's acts must be part of the same silent exclamation. It is because this is dimly and unconsciously recognized by everyone, and because no one can reconcile this with the state of division and alienation in which we find our-

selves, that they all without meaning it gravitate toward the big exclamation that means nothing and says nothing: Boom. The triumph of speech, when all the words have worn out, and when everybody still thinks that there remain an infinite amount of truths to be uttered. If only they could realize that nothing has to be uttered. Utterance makes sense only when it is spontaneous and free ...

"That is where the silence of the woods comes in. Not that there is something new to be thought and discovered in the woods, but only that the trees are all sufficient exclamations of silence, and one works there, cutting wood, clearing ground, cutting grass, cooking soup, drinking fruit juice, sweating, washing, making fire, smelling smoke, sweeping, etc. This is religion. The fur-

ther one gets away from this, the more one sinks in the mud of words and gestures. The flies gather.

"Blessings and peace. May Christ's love be with you in silence and peace."

I offer these comments, thoughts and wishes as a penitent living and dying in the faithful and forgiving silence of another of Earth's woods.

John Gormley
Logan Road
Burdett, N.Y.

Skeptics can use assistance, not rejection

To the editors:

The continual squabbling with Mr. Gallagher over his letters to the editor of the *Catholic Courier* is becoming very tiring to me. Why must we be subjected to the constant whining of this fellow and others who just can't bring themselves to understand that we are living in 1994?

The type of Church Mr. Gallagher seems to wish for may have existed, perhaps around 1935, in a simpler world when there was a great deal more innocence, and naivete, to boot. Richard M. Nixon was but a child and at that time American people still trusted their government. Talk of exotic "opium dens" in far-away China was about the only drug problem, except for fringe musicians like Gene Krupa.

It was a time just before the second world war, when people were poor around the world, Hitler was still unknown to most people, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as Viet Nam and Sarajevo were still intact and beautiful places. There had still been no Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI or either of the John Pauls.

What is interesting, exciting about our world, 1994 style, is that much has changed. Change brings anxiety, even ambiguity, but it is not our enemy, nor are the insights change inspires. Behold; Galileo is no longer banned! Let it not frighten you that most illnesses are not caused by too much blood in the system. Marvel that slavery is repudiated, even by the Church as not becoming the dignity of human beings made in the image of God. Gasp, if you will, that females of our species are not "ill-formed males!"

While we will admit together that not all change is welcome or necessarily good, we should also admit that a) It DOES happen and b) it is to be reckoned with.

The world has changed, Mr. Gallagher. Generations now have to deal

with a world that is less naive about war, drugs, violence, and government corruption, about living daily with the clear and present danger of nuclear annihilation. And in that world, we have learned to question — yes, question — what we are told. Sometimes we even agree with what we hear — and sometimes we have to do some harder thinking before we'll buy it.

You may not like it, but this is the reality of the generations "born under the bomb." It would be a good thing to assist these skeptical generations in forming a properly-informed conscience rather than writing them off and thus abdicating to whatever conscience they may oth-

erwise be left with. People of these generations don't simply accept categorical statements on another's authority, especially when the statements deal with the careful moral teaching of our Church, but these same young people can be brought into the dialogue as respected interlocutors.

That's just the way it is these days. So don't excommunicate Father Collins or Bishop Clark or anyone else who seems too pastoral for your tastes. Good morning! It's 1994!

Father Paul F. English, CSB
Basilian Fathers
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Rochester

Council's documents promote teaching authority of the church

To the editors:

In reading your March 24 article on Pope John Paul's new encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* ("Diocesan Catholics consider papal encyclical's firm attribute"), I came across a comment you attributed to a St. Bernard's student. The statement was that the encyclical's "emphasis on the Church's possession of certainty in relating moral truths (was) at odds with the Vatican II image of a pilgrim church."

Whether by intention or not, you captured in this comment the kernel of error and misunderstanding among Catholics today which was the very motive for the Pope's writing this encyclical.

The Church's authority and role in teaching matters of faith and morals are clear, certain and apostolic — as the Council document themselves state. The Council's description of the pilgrim church in no manner applies to the authority of the magisterium to teach doctrine and morals with certainty; it rather

describes the state of us as we collectively and individually seek how to enhance these truths while living in the very secular and selfish environment which is our world.

While it is clear enough what the Council says about the teaching authority of the Church, I was surprised that the *Courier* did not clearly state the Council's assertions. Might it be said that, in the 30 years since Vatican II, you are no longer aware of the actual conclusions of the Council itself, but are substituting in their place the many popular — if erroneous — treatises and commentaries that are being written about them? If that is the case, brothers and sisters, then I offer you the challenge of reading the actual documents on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church — perhaps for the first time — and see whether some of today's "progressive" theologians have not rather missed the mark.

David J. Valone
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