

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.



No authority can replace conscience

To the editors:

When one decides to take issue with a scholar, that person must come armed with more than personal opinions. It appears though, that this is exactly what George A. Goodwin Jr. (letter to the editor, 6/22/95) did when he decided to question some aspects of Dr. Schoelles' article on the formation of conscience and the teaching authority of the Church.

Dr. Schoelles was exactly right in interpreting the sentence, "The Christian faithful ought to form their consciences according to the teaching of the church," as more restrictive than the phrase "In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the church." In fact, the Theological Commission at Vatican II, which was responsible for the final text, wrote on this topic that, "the proposed formula (according to) seems excessively restrictive. The obligation binding on the faithful is

sufficiently expressed in the text as it stands (attend to)" (Acta Synodalia Concilii Vatican II, IV/6, p.769.) For those interested in learning more on this topic, I would recommend two fine texts: "Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church" by Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. (Paulist Press, 1983) and "Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality" by Richard M. Gula, S.S. (Paulist Press, 1989). Both authors concur with Dr. Schoelles' perspective on the quotations in question.

Whether one phrase is more or less restrictive than another though, matters very little. The larger issue here is the relationship of conscience and church teachings. As I read Mr. Goodwin's assessment, morality is simply a matter of finding out what the church says and aligning our conscience accordingly. If people see conscience as simply a cognitive process, this is one conclusion they might draw. Conscience however, is so much more. Conscience involves the

whole person; the cognitive, volitional, affective, intuitive, and attitudinal features.

While it is true that conscience cannot be properly formed without the help of authority, it is also certain that no external authority can ever replace conscience. Reliance upon church teachings must never give rise to a lazy conscience. Vatican II confirmed the dignity and inviolability of conscience since "in his conscience man is alone with God." The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World states it best, "... enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role (in moral decision making)." The responsibilities of following one's conscience can never be abdicated, even to the weighty teaching authority of the church.

Richard J. McCorry
Whitney Street
Rochester

Both papacy, sacred tradition are necessary

To the editors:

I don't want to pick on Father McBrien, but a recent column he wrote has been pricking me to respond, and I'll not shoo it away any longer.

It concerned the reliance on either the Bible or the Pope as an individual's standard of truth, and also briefly discussed our reasons for becoming and remaining Christians.

We are one body. Though the same Scripture can and does speak to us in many different ways and on several levels, we are being fed by one Holy Spirit,

and what He speaks to one person will always be in harmony with what He speaks to another. If there is disagreement, it's because one person or another is not allowing the Holy Spirit to open his understanding, but is using his own intellect to interpret the Scripture's meaning. This will invariably lead to internal conflict and dissension in the church.

The Magisterium should ideally resolve such disharmony, but in cases where the teachings of the church are themselves the product of human reasoning rather than revelation, we are

confronted with a situation in which the final arbiter must be the Bible, as taken literally. In any disagreement, that which is contained in or in harmony with the Scriptures must take precedence over that which has no Scriptural basis or even conflicts with it. This is conducive to harmony and growth among Christians, and at the same time validates the vast core of Catholic teaching, everything from divorce to Christ's Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist.

So why do we need the Pope or Sacred Tradition? Because though the Bible is entirely truth, it is not all truth, and religions that ignore this deprive themselves of the fullness of revelation given the Church. As for the Papacy, Pope John Paul II is a living testament to the necessity of a consecrated spiritual leader with the strength and graces to stand firm in spiritual and moral absolutes. He is truly a blessing, and though there are issues in which I'm not in agreement with him, I do thank God for sending him.

Regarding why we become and remain Christians: Although Christianity does indeed give direction and meaning to our lives, these are "perks" to be cherished. The reason we embrace Christ is because The Holy Spirit testifies to our spirits that He is truth, and His ways are truth. Only a fool would discover the truth and then reject it or turn from it.

Sandra Dunn
Mattie Street, Auburn

Column serves as wake up call

To the editors:

Patricia Schoelles' June 8th column on lay ministry was outstanding in a uniformly excellent series.

The Sacraments of initiation do indeed call everyone to ministry. All the baptized are given gifts for the building up of the church, the people of God. It is sad to realize that more than a generation after the Second Vatican Council many Catholics still function as consumers of institutional services and do not recognize their own giftedness. We still have much to learn about the theology of ministry and what baptism really is.

Professionals in ministry, both clergy and lay people, are part of the problem when we think we have to do everything

and are reluctant to let our brothers and sisters have ownership and responsibility for the church's work. Professionals must learn to let go but also insist on sound sacramental catechesis for all adults and young people.

In my parish we have wonderful Christians with a deep love for Jesus and a true understanding of ministry. The Diocesan Synod has helped them recognize their gifts and their vocations. Yet too many of us still see church as one more activity to cram into our busy lives.

Dr. Schoelles' column is a wake up call. I hope she will continue her discussion of lay ministry and connect it to the moral issues that concern us today.

Sheryl B. Zabel
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