

COLUMNISTS

Of 'walls' and Web sites

On our Opinion page this week, a reader takes the *Courier* to task for poor editing and insensitivity in publishing — in the June 26 edition an editorial challenging readers to re-evaluate their consumption of Disney products and an advertisement inducing them to take a Disney cruise.

Essentially, she asserts, the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. And you know what? She's right.

The right hand, our editorial staff, didn't know that a travel agency planned to run an ad for the Disney cruise. The left hand, our advertising department, didn't know the editorial folks planned to chastise Disney for its less wholesome subsidiary enterprises.

With one foot in both camps, as it were, I knew about the plans of each, but didn't tell a soul. Why? To comply with the norms of journalistic ethics.

The ethics of our profession require the erection of a symbolic "wall" between the editorial staff and their counterparts in advertising in order to ensure that editorial content is not influenced by commercial pressures.

Companies naturally hope that the publications in which they advertise will carry lots of positive material about them



between the lines

By KAREN M. FRANZ

but not report any bad news. Given fierce competition among publications, therefore, advertisers can exert a great deal of pressure to obtain what is euphemistically called "editorial consideration."

Thus publications that insist on journalistic integrity insulate their editorial staffs from news of negotiations going on in other departments. Likewise they shield the list of in-progress articles from the eyes of those outside the editorial staff.

Our advertising department has been very conscientious in educating clients about the *Courier's* editorial policy, so we don't have too many problems in this area. But just in case clients get a bit too assertive, we keep the ad staff out of edi-

torial decisions so they can tell clients — quite truthfully — that they have no idea about or influence over what the editorial staff is planning.

One other point: Our editorial positions aren't infallible. Since many readers may reasonably disagree with us (see Christine Bravo-Cullen's letter this week), refusing to run ads for legitimate products would unfairly deny useful information to those who see things differently.

Web site FAQs

For those of you who don't encounter a lot of computer jargon, "FAQ" stands for "frequently asked questions." We've gotten a lot of positive feedback on our Web site since it opened this spring, but the same two or three problems have been posed by a number of people. Since it's a fair bet that more of you have encountered the same glitches but didn't take time to write, I'd like to use the rest of this column to address those few concerns.

The first concerns the width of the site, especially its opening screen. Several visitors to the site have complained that the screen is too wide, requiring them to scroll right and left to read the stories. Ac-

tually the screen is set up for a fairly modest monitor resolution of 800 pixels by 600 pixels (800x600). If our Web site seems too wide for your computer screen, try increasing your monitor resolution.

A few other visitors have complained that the site's graphics take too long to load onto their computers. Anticipating that problem, we made sure that the site could be read in text-only mode as well as with images. If your monitor is slower than 14.4 kbps, try setting your browser software to view pages without images. If you find an image you want to view, you can turn images back on just for that page. Also, take a look at your browser's cache settings. The cache should store images from sites you've visited recently, making pages download much more quickly on repeat visits. Meanwhile, we'll keep working on speeding up the download process.

I hope these comments are helpful to those of you who are using the Web site and that they'll encourage more of you to try it. Thank you for the feedback and the many kind words.

Franz is general manager/editor of the Catholic Courier.

Key passages highlight church's vision for life

I am currently teaching a summer course in basic moral-theology. At our last class meeting, students asked me which passages from recent church documents I thought would have the most lasting importance for moral theology. Off the top of my head, I cited the following three.

The first is from the 1971 document "Justice in the World," from the World Synod of Bishops. The passage reads, "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the (G)ospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

This is the first magisterial statement that places social action at the very center of the church's mission. Action on behalf of justice is recognized as part of the very definition of Christianity, and not a secondary or derivative aspect of it. It articulates the belief that the Gospel is not simply a matter of individual, interior, spiritual "redemption" for which we strive.



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

Salvation and redemption have to do with making the world better for all of us.

A second important passage is from the Declaration on Religious Liberty from the council. That passage, in section three, reads, "It is through our conscience that we see and recognize the demands of the divine law. We are bound to follow our conscience faithfully in all our activities so that we may come to God, who is our last end. Therefore we must not be forced to act contrary to our conscience."

This passage affirms that conscience is the highest principle in human action.

Everyone struggling to be a Christian today needs to reflect on this passage often, and to cultivate a life that will support the formation and exercise of conscience in making decisions.

Another key passage comes from Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical on the 80th anniversary of modern Catholic social teaching, "On the development of peoples."

That letter includes this passage: "In the face of widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church."

This passage remains significant because it articulates the principle that the regions of the world are different in many ways — culture, social situation, economic

systems, heritage and history. The various regions cannot live according to a single way of applying the moral principles that underlie the decisions we all make. Moral principles have to be known and understood, but they also must apply in concrete circumstances.

I read these passages with a sense of pride. They name such strong and wonderful foundations for moral living, and they come from my own church.

But I also read them with sadness, too. While the major directions of the church in its documents over the last years have concerned "the big picture" of our corporate social, economic and cultural life, so much of our energy is diverted addressing the petty divisiveness caused by some Catholics unwilling to recognize the truths that underlie these passages.

These are great passages from a great church that has, at its heart, a great vision for life.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

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