

COLUMNISTS

Be open to the mystery of God

There's something "quirky" about every single job and occupation on this planet. One of the more paradoxical sides of trying to be a moral theologian is that one aspect of the "job" is helping people understand why the "rules" of our church are important and good. At the same time, though, we also have to point out that the essence of faith is not "keeping the rules."

The essence of faith, of course, is union with God. We are made "to know, love and serve God in this life and the next." The essence of faith is ultimately mystery. God, and our relationship with God, transcends all the words we use to talk about it, all the rules we set to uphold it, all the teachings our church adopts to explain it and live it. Trying to reduce God and our relationship with God to rules and teachings always gets us into trouble.

But human beings love to get into trouble. We love to take parts of whole truths and make them into the whole truth. We do this in religion all the time. In fact, the definition of "heresy" really is just that: taking some part of a truth and making it into the whole truth.

And every religion has its own central temptation in this regard. Some versions



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By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

of the Protestant religions, for example, seem tempted to take Scripture and make it "the whole truth." Other versions of Protestantism deify human experience and reduce all truth and certainty to that. Catholicism avoids those two temptations. We rarely identify all certainty and truth with Scripture or experience. But we shouldn't feel bad: We, too, have a main temptation. For us, the tendency is to take church teaching, sometimes using its magnificent Latin name of "The Magisterium," and make it into the whole, or the essence of faith.

But church teaching, even its important "rules of our faith," the moral teachings, is not the essence of our faith. God is. And God absolutely cannot be reduced to rules.

Salvation is simply not earned because we "keep the rules." Salvation is about the love in our hearts for one another and for God. The Catholic religion isn't, ultimately, about keeping a set of rules — even if we took that impression from our early religious education. Neither is our religion about accepting a set of intellectual truths. It's about opening ourselves to a living, loving friendship with God.

For those whose hobby it is to write outraged letters to the editor of this paper, I need to add: I'm NOT saying "the rules" aren't important. I'm NOT saying that the truths of faith aren't important. I AM saying that neither law-abiding behavior nor right intellectual understanding constitutes the essence and point of faith. God, and our relationship with God, alone stand at the center of our faith. God transcends all behavior and all expressions of truth. But we are always tempted to make those partial realities into the whole reality. Human beings long for certainty so much, that we often reduce "the whole truth" to some partial aspect of the whole. Americans have never been particularly at home with "mystery" to begin with, so if we can grasp hold of some pragmatic "formula for salvation" we are nearly ec-

static. Our national heritage seems to have instilled in us a pattern of finding salvation in behaviorism: "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

The point of this column is not to excite people into lawlessness and misbehavior. The point of this column, coming as it is at the beginning of Advent, is simply to suggest that the enormous amount of "Catholic energy" that we spend shouting rules at one another and defending our own (too-often misinformed and simplistic) interpretation of church moral teaching is of no ultimate importance. Furthermore, it distracts us from what is of ultimate importance.

Advent is the season of waiting for the fullness of God's self-revelation to us. Wouldn't it be lovely if we all stopped pushing our own self-righteous versions of right behavior and simply opened ourselves to the profound imagery of the season, with its power to point to the "really real" mystery of a God whose love for us is so profound as to choose to be God-with-us "even while we are yet sinners."

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Biography of pope seems clueless

Jonathan Kwitny, a former investigative reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, is clearly an admirer of Pope John Paul II, whom he dubs, in a new biography, the "man of the century." No argument there. But Kwitny never defines the crux of the 20th-century crisis to which the Holy Father has offered a compelling answer. Thus we have a "man of the century" defined in political terms, which is hardly how the pope understands himself, his life, or his mission.

Kwitny does a service by demolishing the "Holy Alliance" theory perpetrated by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi in *His Holiness*, last year's entry into the papal biography sweepstakes. But Kwitny seems at least as eager to deny the Reagan administration any credit for the communist crack-up as he is to celebrate John Paul II as a nonviolent revolutionary of Gandhian proportions. And Kwitny's obsession with the CIA — a topic he has agitated before, in print and on television — makes one wonder, at times, whether the real subject of his book is Bill Casey (and his predecessors) or John Paul II.

Papal biographers need not be theologians. But it surely helps to know something about Catholic social doctrine if you are trying to describe the distinctive social magisterium of this pope. Kwitny's in-



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difference

By GEORGE WEIGEL

nocence of the tradition of Catholic social thought leads him down two blind allies. He unfairly disparages prior pontiffs (Pius XI is reduced to a figure who allegedly compromised with Fascism — news to Mussolini and Hitler, I'm sure) and he misreads what is truly radical about John Paul II's contributions to the church's social doctrine.

Kwitny makes much of what he describes as a previously unknown manuscript written when the pope was a young priest teaching Cracow seminarians. In fact, the manuscript is well-known to serious students of Karol Wojtyla's thought and is primarily a set of course notes developed by Father Jan Piwowarczyk, Karol Wojtyla's predecessor as lecturer in social ethics at the Cracow seminary.

The things in the manuscript that strike Kwitny as breathtakingly original — the rejection of individualism and laissez-faire economics, the emphasis on the rights of labor, the critique of the disparities caused by the industrial revolution — were staples of Catholic social thought in the 1950s and were largely derived from the teaching of (you guessed it) Pope Pius XI.

This lack of essential background knowledge means that Kwitny misses what is genuinely original in this pontificate's social doctrine. As both philosopher and pope, Karol Wojtyla has stressed that culture is the main engine of history, not politics or economics. John Paul II has developed Catholic social teaching by describing a morally-grounded democracy as the form of government most congruent with the dignity of human persons created in the *imago Dei*, with intelligence and free will.

He has also put papal thinking about economics on a more secure empirical footing by taking a hard look at real functioning markets and then linking the best of the capitalist system — its capacity to give scope to human creativity by providing opportunities for initiative, entrepreneurship, and cooperative enterprise — to the church's theological anthropology, its

teaching about the nature of man.

But what really animates Karol Wojtyla's imagination is culture. What, he asks, are the moral foundations that allow any economic or political system to serve the ends of human flourishing? The question of foundations, not technical solutions, is where the church best enters the debate over public life.

The crisis of the 20th century is the twin crisis of truth and freedom. To deny that human beings can know the truth of things, including the moral truth of things, is freedom's undoing. If your truth is as good as my truth and neither one of us recognizes a standard by which we can judge whose truth is truer (so to speak), then freedom eventually collapses into chaos, chaos leads to anarchy, and anarchy leads to the imposition of authoritarian rule.

John Paul II has put truth and freedom back together, in a triptych of historic documents: the encyclicals *Centesimus Annus*, *Veritatis Splendor*, and *Evangelium Vitae*. That signal accomplishment is why he is not simply the man of the century, but the prophet of a new springtime of the human spirit.

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Women Needed for Hormone Therapy Research

As they search for the combinations of hormone replacement therapy that are both safe and effective, the Reproductive Endocrinology Unit and Menopause Center at the University of Rochester Medical Center seek women to participate in a study.

Volunteers must be healthy, post-menopausal women between the ages of 40 and 65. After a physical examination, women will be randomized to one of 8 treatment groups and receive various combinations of an FDA-approved estrogen and/or progestin, or placebo.

During this one-year study, volunteers are seen every three months. Benefits to volunteers include free Pap smears and lab tests, free mammogram, and possible relief of menopausal symptoms based on the medication(s) they receive. Compensation of \$450 is available. Women who have had a hysterectomy are not eligible.

Women interested in participating can call Kathy DeRider at 275-4149.