

OPINIONS

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 letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

Chasing 'miracles' not reverent to holy God

To the editors:

Your article (from Catholic News Service, July 8 issue) on Katie Kiesel's "miracle" at Lourdes didn't describe how the Church confirms the occurrence of a miracle. Is there a committee? Do they vote on it? Are non-Catholics involved? Medical experts?

It's a miracle, you say, when a person "has remained in remission from illness for 10 years." If the illness reappears after nine and a half years, no miracle? What if it reappears 12 years later? Does passing the 10-year threshold automatically constitute a miracle? What if some new and different fatal illness arises during the 10 years and kills the person in the 11th?

Are miracles — official ones — confined to unexpected recoveries from fatal illnesses? Suppose an amazing car wreck occurs in which a man walks unharmed from a pile of twisted, burning metal. Is that a miracle?

Is winning the lottery a miracle? I know a woman who doesn't play the lottery because she figures if she won, it would be a miracle, and if God wants her to have a miracle, He can cause her to win even if she doesn't play, one miracle being as good as another! Are miracles only positive events? If the engine of a 747 falls from 30,000 feet and lands on someone, is that a miracle? Can Satan perform miracles?

If the Church has printed anything official on the subject of miracles, I'd appreciate having the reference.

You say that although "millions" of pilgrims have visited Lourdes in the last 140 years, only "65 healings have been qualified as miracles by the church." Millions of diseases, 65 healings. This abysmally poor record does not improve upon mere chance! Spontaneous remissions of cancer occur, at approximately the same low rate, in atheists and lab mice, without benefit of visits to Lourdes or belief in anything in particular. Moreover, curing one suffering pilgrim in a million, while the remaining 999,999 languish and die, hardly sounds like the work of a loving and merciful God.

One final observation. These recent spectacles of Mary in the clouds, images of Christ in taco shells and oak trees, bleeding statues, bodiless voices that some poor soul hears in the night, comatose but supposedly blessed little girls, breathless swarmings to France, Georgia, etc. seeking miraculous cures, divine visitations that almost no one actually witnesses, transformations of rosaries into gold, shifts in the sun's glare, all these tricks and displays — what real use are they?

It seems to me that indulging in such stuff demeans us to God, who is Perfection Itself if He's anything at all, and does not dabble in theatrics. We turn God into a cheap, unpredictable magician who occasionally does but mostly does not heal us, and who likes to tease and entertain with little contrivances of nature most of which, when you get down to it, are less impressive than some of the stunts of our better human magicians. We should have more respect for the profoundly mysterious, the truly holy.

Peter Dzwonkoski
Westmoreland Drive
Rochester

EDITORS' NOTE: We addressed some of these questions in a previous cover story on miracles April 30, 1998, but plan to revisit the subject in the near future.



Columnist will change tune if liberal pope wins election

To the editors:

In his recent column Father Richard McBrien deplores the authority exercised by the Holy Father over the bishops, but you can bet that if a liberal Pope someday occupies the Holy See, Father McBrien will loudly clamor for him to rein in the conservative bishops who don't subscribe to the liberal agenda embraced by Father McBrien.

Just what is that agenda? It is not decentralization of Rome's authority. That argument is a means to an end. The end is disbelief in all things supernatural. A church with no miracles, no Marian apparitions, no Real Presence in the Eucharist, no inherent power in the sacraments — other than their purely symbolic value — no hell and no heaven, too, and

above all, no Revealed Word.

What are the other means? Take away the bells, the vestments, the Missal, the priest's authority, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, rewrite the New Testament according to your personal preference, etc., and all the other "innovations" taking place at your local parish.

But a church without its focus on the supernatural existence of God is no church at all. It has at its center an existential dead zone, a "sickness unto death," to quote Kierkegaard, and will eventually be ignored. Those who subscribe to Father McBrien's view should know what they are buying.

Christopher Ciaccio
Caversham Woods
Pittsford

Sees three questions on leadership

To the editors:

After reading Father McBrien's column, "Saints surrender power easily" in the July 2 issue of the *Catholic Courier*, I asked myself three questions. First, setting aside all issues regarding the structure of the hierarchy in Rome — because I am ignorant of how that structure is arranged — and because we know that our church is constantly under the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit, is it not possible that the difference that Father McBrien sees between Karol Wojtyla and Pope John Paul II may be that Pope John Paul II has been, and still is, being guided by the Holy Spirit in ways that neither Karol Wojtyla could have anticipated, nor

Father McBrien, nor we can begin to understand?

Second, given the many pressures on the church both from without and within, isn't it necessary for a strong central leadership to keep the church united on its true path?

Third, are the goals of strong central leadership and diversity mutually exclusive? If, in defining diversity we mean that we can all do our own thing, then I think they are. If we are talking about the ways in which different cultures color and flavor the church, then they certainly are not.

Robert F. Carson
Walker-Lake Ontario Road, Hilton

Honoring veterans doesn't glorify warfare

To the editors:

Just at the Fourth of July was to be celebrated, Sister Schoelles' column was published in the July 1 issue of the *Courier*.

In rereading it, I was more able to understand what she was saying to us.

However, I do disagree that the mention or honoring of those who have served our country is somehow out of place in the Catholic Church.

Whenever I attend Mass on a national holiday, I always look for some connection to the occasion. It may be a prayer, a mention in the homily, or, as Sister suggested, the flag flown more prominently. I look forward to this reminder of what

we owe our countrymen and don't see it as glorification of war.

In the same issue, the letter concerning behavior did mention some serious issues. Once again, however, I disagree with the writer regarding the time when the altar is cleared by "non-ordained persons." Ms. Heiman objects to this and finds it to be irreverent.

I find it just the opposite. It seems to be one more moment when the clergy and the laity are all one as we go forth. Recently, this has become a very rewarding moment to me.

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E-mail your letters to the editor to:
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