

OPINIONS

The 'luxury' of stewardship

Catholic Courier

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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.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following commentary is reprinted from the Nov. 11 edition of *The Record*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky. It was written by Editor Joseph Duerr.

As much talk as there has been about the proper use of resources — of the importance of practicing both communal and personal stewardship — one would think individuals would give second thoughts to flagrant misuse of their resources. But this apparently didn't cross the minds of those who paid outlandish prices for some of the personal possessions of the late actress Marilyn Monroe at a recent auction at Rockefeller Center in New York.

Someone paid \$1.2 million for a dress Monroe wore in 1962 when she sang "Happy Birthday" to President Kennedy at Madison Square Garden. Or consider a pair of her blue jeans, which went for \$37,000; a plaster floor lamp for \$21,850; her wedding ring from Joe DiMaggio for \$700,000 (the auctioneer had expected the ring to bring between \$30,000 and \$50,000); \$600,000 for a baby grand piano; and \$9,000 for a black-and-white photo of DiMaggio.

The buying frenzy even extended to some of Monroe's religious items. Her Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship sold for \$40,000; her Bible, with a few pencil markings in the text, went for \$33,000. One wonders if the person who purchased the Bible checked to see what the text has to say about such an extravagant expenditure, such as these words from St. Luke's Gospel: "You cannot give yourself to God and money," and "What man thinks important, God holds in contempt."

One might say that too much is being made of this, that people who can afford it have the right to dispose of their money as they see fit. It's no one else's business and no one else is getting hurt. True, to some degree. However, there comes a point when use of one's resources can get so out of kilter that it makes a mockery of any sense of responsible stewardship. And paying \$1.2 million for a dress, \$700,000 for a ring or \$33,000 for a Bible exceeds responsible stewardship.

The issue is not telling people what to do with their money.

GUEST EDITORIAL

The issue is that personal resources (money included) are not given to us for our exclusive benefit, but are intended for the good of all. This is what stewardship is about. It doesn't mean denying ourselves a luxury if we can afford it. It simply means being responsible for the resources we have been given and using them well.

The point of responsible use of resources was underscored by Bishop Adrianus Herman van Luyn of Rotterdam at the recent Synod of Bishops for Europe. To be faithful to the Gospel, he said, people in Western societies need to examine their spending habits and cut back on unnecessary items.

Noting the "egotistical use of the Earth's goods," Bishop Van Luyn said 16 percent of the world's population consumes 80 percent of the planet's resources. The U.S. World Resources Institute said that Americans, who account for 4 percent of the world's population, produce one-third of the world's automobiles and consume one-fourth of all the world's energy.

"The abyss between the rich and the poor is becoming even wider," Bishop van Luyn said. In many countries, people "cannot satisfy the primary needs of human life, while we satisfy one desire after the next" — like spending obscene amounts of money at an auction to satisfy our desire to have some personal item which once belonged to a celebrity.

One can only imagine the public good that could be done with a total amount of money paid for "things" at the Monroe auction and at other celebrity auctions in recent years.

In calling for an examination of spending habits, Bishop van Luyn said, "I can't tell someone, 'You can't have a second house.' What I'm suggesting is that everyone who wants to follow the Gospel frequently examine the level of their daily lives. ... The Gospel is full of recommendations for a moderate, even poor, life. If we Catholics want to follow the Gospel, we must each ask ourselves if our style of life corresponds in some way to it — and then, draw the conclusions."

Call it moderation, temperance or good stewardship. Whatever, the Monroe auction was the antithesis of what the Gospel teaches.

Letters show no outrage over deaths

To the editors:

(Regarding the two letters Nov. 25 (about) the U.S. Army School of the Americas, I must cite Jesus who said, "... I came into this world to divide it, to make the sightless see and the seeing blind" (John 9:39).

The writer from Ithaca stated, "The only war I'm aware of that has U.S. support is the war being waged against the unborn..." but he omits the war on those in poverty — welfare reform; forgets the war on the poor — capital punishment; neglects the war on the aged and ill — euthanasia; and ignores the war on third world — bombing of Iraq, sanctions as a weapon, and many low-intensity conflicts supported by our government. We must be consistent on all life issues to be considered pro-life. I was part of the anti-abortion life chain back in October.

As to the writer's Unibomber reference, I would call for Harvard's closure if it taught bomb making and turned out as many killers as the SOA has done.

The Rochester writer asks, "Has anyone proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the students in the SOA are taught anything other than professionalism and respect for human rights?" Perhaps he should read Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's book *School of Assassins* (Orbis, 1997). He wrote, "... of the disappointing results of one human rights training exercise carried out at the school. ... During the exercise ... the priest and catechists were either killed or roughed up seventy-five percent of the time. The frequent death of a priest was treated as a joke which circulated around the School."

Thousands of soldiers from across Latin America have trained at the SOA. The SOA Watch web site (www.soawatch.org) provides lists of soldiers, who comprise some of the worst human rights abusers in Latin America. By focusing on the 19, the Rochester writer trivializes the horror caused by the SOA and its graduates.

Neither letter writer expressed outrage at the Jesuit murders or any of the other atrocities linked to SOA graduates. They defend an institution which they believe protests human rights. If the Army is so

proud of the SOA's human rights curriculum then why has Army Secretary Louis Caldera proposed changing the name of the SOA to the "Center for Inter-American Security Cooperation?" If the SOA did nothing wrong, why change the name? Why defend an institution over the lives of the poor and the oppressed?

The picture accompanying the two letters speaks volumes. Father Dan Berrigan is on the right and behind him ... is Father John Dear. Both are Jesuits and they broke the law to commemorate the lives of six brother priests who were murdered

with the support of our nation. These two priests have risked arrest and have been imprisoned for their belief in Gospel non-violence taught to us by our Lord. It was an honor to cross with them onto Ft. Benning and risk the wrath of my government because we did only what Christ asks of us, which is to love our neighbor. How can we love if we allow our government to kill in our name?

John W. Honeck
Bankside Drive, Hamlin

EDITORS' NOTE: This letter has been edited to comply with length limitations.



Liz Quirin/CNS

Thousands gather at the gates of U.S. Army's School of the Americas to urge its closing in Fort Benning, Ga., Nov. 21. The demonstration was organized by SOA Watch, a nonprofit group that charges that graduates from the school have been implicated and indicted for torture, murder and massacres in Latin American countries.

Praises writers for debating SOA criticism

To the editors:

Hurray for Robert Bart's and Ramon G. Becker's letters in the *Catholic Courier*, Nov. 25 ("Close Unibomber's college?" and "Why focus on activity of 19 grads?"

respectively).

We need much more of this kind of wisdom!

Helen Shultz
- Main Street, Newfield