



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

MORE LETTERS

the bickering among various Protestant denominations regarding doctrine, etc. But the Church today bears little resemblance to the Church I so proudly embraced in 1971.

The president's critics say that war should be a last resort; yet not one of them put forth a viable alternative. President Bush exhibited great patience throughout the debacle at the U.N. and great courage in making a decision he had to know would be unpopular. He even offered Saddam 48 hours to go into exile.

There was no "peaceful" way to handle Saddam any more than there was a "peaceful" way to handle Hitler.

Shirley J. Schooler
 Crittenden Road
 Rochester

Letters noted other issues

To the editor:

Among the values of Dr. D'Amico's letters are the responses of others and the identification of other issues in the diocese.

Specifically, Joanne Lepkowski's (April 3) letter noting a lack of spirituality focus versus an accent on social issues, is, in my view, right on!

In addition letters addressing the lack of essay content from "traditionalist" theologians versus "progressive" types identify clearly an editorial bias, promoted by the *Courier* and diocesan leadership.

More letters from "the silent majority" are needed to encourage more balance and receptivity to traditional Catholic voices.

Dorrance M. Davies
 Harrington Drive
 Fairport

Western duel?

To the editor:

Recent articles and letters during our war weeks were entertaining. I imagined two people in the old wild West of the 1800s ready to duel. The meek guy asks the other guy to please tell him when it's OK to draw his gun.

Joseph E. Judge
 Crow Hill Drive
 Fairport

'Magisterium' is church's teaching function

I would like to poll Catholics about what they think when they hear the word "magisterium." It is a funny-sounding word and can be filled with all sorts of political connotations. It is often used mistakenly, as if there is some sort of committee that constitutes the magisterium and has as its purpose issuing official church teachings.

Actually, the term refers to the teaching function of the church rather than to anyone who may be charged to do that. The church offers its teaching on moral matters to both members of the church and those beyond it. The church offers its teaching as a help to the faithful. As we struggle to form our consciences on various matters, the church provides this help for us. Magisterium derives from the Latin "to teach" or "teacher." Teachers function in any number of ways, and good teaching is a notion that can shift according to educational goals.

I always find it helpful to distinguish good teaching from good parenting, though parents do indeed function as teachers. Still, the church has never purported by its moral teachings to be our parents — that is, stepping in to make decisions for us. The church offers us help as we make the decisions.

Even from the earliest times of the church, teachers rose up to offer catechetical instruction, which attempted to explain particular moral teachings and



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

other matters of faith. In the course of the Middle Ages, actual schools rose up wherein the tenets of faith were subjected to theological speculation leading to further development and to a sort of "supplementary" consideration of matters of faith and morals.

By the time of the Second Vatican Council and beyond, theologians began to articulate the way in which both the "official magisterium" and the "theological magisterium" play legitimate roles in explicating what our beliefs are. This happens in matters that are relatively uncontroversial and in matters that do carry some measure of disagreement. The document on *The Church in the Modern World* states, for example, that "it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter" (n. 43).

It is helpful to view the work of theology and theologians as a positive contribution to the life of the church. Schools like St. Bernard's and faculties like ours help the church to "do its thinking." We become an-

other source of wisdom for Catholics as we struggle together to understand and live our faith.

My musings on the office of teacher relate to a program that St. Bernard's is offering this summer. As part of our response to the church scandals arising from the sexual abuse of children, we have developed three courses that will try to address some of the issues attending to the scandal. Various schools around the country are now offering similar programs.

The first course we will offer is on the topic of "Psychosexual Development: The Norm, The Problematic, the Pathological." A second course will deal with "Sexual Ethics in New Testament Perspective." A third course called "Sex and Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition" will explore the way moral argument and the Catholic moral tradition respond to contemporary issues like feminism, women, gender studies, marriage breakdown, cohabitation and premarital sex, and questions relating to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual issues.

I think these courses exemplify one way in which theology can assist us in trying to make sense of faith as it relates to real life. I think programs like this are helpful to the whole church. Why not test the waters and try some of this yourself?

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Letters Policy

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters 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 expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 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, NY 14624 or e-mail to letters@catholiccourier.com. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification.