



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

MORE LETTERS

gious or political expression." And yet, is anything more imbecile than a policy such as this? Don't these corporate types have anything better to do than dream up rules to protect the over-wrought, brink teetering sensibilities of the very few? Do they hire some poor blokes to sit at mall doors and censor T-shirts as they enter? Would anyone ever actually drag a mall into court because some shopper sported a "Jesus Saves!" or some such slogan? Would any jury find against the mall? Have we come to this? The founding fathers would be ashamed.

If religious discrimination is the concern — Jesus saves, but what about Allah, Zeus, etc.? — why not just let any T-shirt say anything it wants? We've all read much more offensive T-shirt messages than "Jesus saves!" And if someone thinks Allah also saves and wants that on his T-shirt, that's fine with me, and I believe it's fine with anyone who is not deranged and probably dangerous. Any religious slogan improves immeasurably upon "What the f— are you looking at?", a sunny little message I noted on a T-shirt recently. At the mall.

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Follow lead of disciples

To the editor:

In Father. Albert Shamon's column "Easter sig-

nals life eternal" (*Courier*, April 17), he states "Our Lord's first appearance was to His mother, Mary ... Jesus' next appearance was to Mary Magdalene." Nowhere in the Scriptures does it teach this. The Scripture teaches in the Gospel of Mark 16:9: "Now when He rose on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene out of whom He cast seven demons."

The second-to-last time that Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned in the Bible is in John 19:25: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." The last time Jesus' mother Mary is mentioned is in the book of Acts 1:14: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." The Scripture teaches that Jesus' first appearance was to Mary Magdalene, not to His mother.

We need to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 when Paul and Silas were teaching in the synagogue "... they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." We should also be diligent about studying the Scriptures to confirm that what is being preached is in fact from the Holy Word of GOD.

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New view of moral theology

For the last few weeks I've been discussing a book called *Liberating Conscience* with groups of students in my class. The book, published in 1996, is written by Anne Patrick, a theologian teaching at Carleton College in Minnesota. Each time I read it I derive something different from the experience.

This time I am especially taken by the title and by a few passages in the introduction. The title seems to issue an invitation, or perhaps even a command. In Patrick's terms, the task of moral theology is to help people liberate their consciences. In fact, she thinks a big part of the church's mission is to provide incentive and means for people to liberate their consciences.

What she means by this phrase can require a little explanation. She provides a key to this fuller explanation in a few passages at the very outset of the book. She writes, "I believe the challenges to the discipline (of moral theology) are deeply religious and moral ones. Moral theology is being called, on the one hand, to foster a more radical trust in God and, on the other, to develop a more radical and thoroughgoing ethic of justice."

Moral theology ought to take on a specifically religious task, in Patrick's terms. It ought to foster our relationship with God and help us move into more radical trust in him. It should also foster an ethic of justice. Another way of thinking about "justice" is to see it as the central virtue and imperative toward forming



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The Moral Life

right relationships with others. For Patrick, justice isn't only about international relations or even public ones. Justice extends and even begins in our personal and even our intimate relationships.

She makes some great points here. Moral theology for a long time hardly even referred to one's relationship with God. The decisions we make actually can be our way to God. A lifetime lived in companionship with God wherein the decisions we make form the basis and expression of that friendship is a much better vision of moral theology.

In another passage, Patrick writes about a twofold need for moral theology today. "First, the universal call to holiness, which was so rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Council, must be seen to entail that all believers bear responsibility for discerning the moral obligations of our lives." Each one of us bears responsibility for discerning the particular moral obligations that are our own. It isn't the church's job to do this. The church offers us help and assistance, but discerning the moral obliga-

tions of my life is my responsibility.

She goes on. "Second, moral theology should provide leadership in helping Catholics become more confident and competent and ethical decision makers." I wonder how many of us get the sense that our pastoral ministers take as their *duty* helping us to become more confident and competent ethical decision makers. Patrick faults moral theology for doing precisely the opposite of this. She writes "A major inadequacy of un-renewed moral theology has been the way it reduced the mystery of Christian living to a matter of obeying rules that earlier generations developed as they strove to live as faithful disciples of Jesus in times and circumstances different from our own."

We can look at some of the ways in which we and other Catholics have taken on new and different ways of responding to the Gospel. Anne Patrick offers us some serious challenges along with some intriguing possibilities. Imagine if we really thought our job was to help others become more confident and competent ethical decision makers. Imagine if we lived every day embracing our moral responsibility to discern the particular moral obligations that are ours. Imagine if the whole church and all its ministers undertook the challenge of "liberating conscience" for radical trust in God and justice toward one another.

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