



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

LETTERS

Catholic faith should come before culture

To the editor:

Father McBrien's column of Aug. 21 left me wondering just what he meant by the fact that 83 percent of foreign seminarians who study in the United States and intend to remain here, "do not fully understand our culture." Perhaps he thinks we are too "advanced" for the rest of the world and that other countries haven't caught up with us. Or maybe, since we are a multicultural society, we have failed to include representations of all cultures at every Mass. Would Father consider that discrimination on our part? Worldwide differences didn't seem to matter before Latin was dropped from the Mass and we all had a universal Faith.

This summer we have been blessed with a visiting priest who is staying at our parish. He is from India and has spent three years in Africa. We have had no problems with "culture!" This just could be attributed to the fact that Father is, first and foremost, CATHOLIC!

Mary Lou Reifsnnyder
Mountain Rise, Fairport

Program open to immigrants

To the editor:

Starting October 1 low-in-

come legal immigrant children not already receiving food stamps will become eligible for benefits no matter how long they have been in the United States.

Also, as of April 1 low-income immigrants who have legally lived in the United States for five years or longer could begin receiving food stamp benefits.

Eligible immigrants can start the application process immediately.

In circumstances where a child is eligible but the parent is not, the program allows the ineligible person to apply on behalf of any eligible household members. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the program. Receiving food stamps does not affect an immigrant's Immigration and Naturalization Service or citizenship status.

For more information and a confidential screening, call the Nutrition Outreach Project of the Finger Lakes at 866/781-5235.

Judith Peters,
Coordinator, Nutritional
Outreach Program
Legal Assistance of the
Finger Lakes
Geneva

Sin reflects a state of life, not an act

I read an article this past week written by the late German theologian, Dorothee Solle. Her topic was sin. Many of the points she made are ones I've tried to make in my classes over the years.

One of the flaws of Catholic catechetical teaching has been that we tend to reduce sin to a matter of externals. We associate sin with breaking a rule, violating a law, transgressing some taboo against particular acts or actions. In truth, however, the Catholic tradition has always taught that "sin" involves God. In its most profound teaching, Christian tradition holds that sin involves a destruction of our relationship with God. God is at the core of sin, not rule violations. For us to associate sin with anything other than God is to trivialize its meaning.

While it is certainly true that sin — destroying our relationship with God — does involve breaking rules and even hurting other people, those aspects simply do not touch on the essence of sin. Sin is not about keeping communal order or making society run well. It isn't even about keeping other people's lives free from hurt. Sin is about God, and God alone. Furthermore, sin is less about individual pieces of behavior, individual acts, as it is a matter of "being," or a condition of the whole person.

Solle's article made these points in a slightly different way. She states "When the



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

tradition says that sin is the destruction of our relationship with God, it doesn't mean individual 'sins' but rather a general condition, the destruction of our capacity for relatedness. Everything seems to us to become shadowy, unimportant; life loses its taste, we can take it or leave it. Sin means being separated from the ground of life; it means having a disturbed relationship to ourselves, our neighbor, the creation, and the human family."

Solle's words, and the theology of sin that stands behind them, suggest that rooting out sin from one's life demands more than simply changing external behavior. It involves leaving the condition of emptiness that has come to characterize our lives. It means changing one's entire life pattern.

Solle uses the image of the Ice Age in her article, and compares living in sin with a gradual "freezing over" of one's consciousness. She talks about letting ourselves be governed by social and cultural trends "in which we have no say but to which we simply submit," letting our

lives be shaped by goals that have little or nothing to do with what we really want or need.

Solle offers examples of how sin can take root in human life. She speaks about a woman, Marianne, who feels depressed and unconnected, but whose life patterns provide at least a little insight into the kind of condition that can seep into modern consciousness, leading to separation from "the ground and meaning of life."

Solle talks about Marianne's attitude toward others, and her determined attempts to stay isolated from others, especially those who are culturally or economically different from her. Marianne has come to view others as objects of competition and envy. "Look what they can afford!" (rather than "What do they need that for?"); "Why do your friends do better than you in school?" (rather than "What are you really interested in at the moment?"); "Why was your colleague promoted before you?" (rather than "How can we have more time for each other?").

This example helps us move beyond more superficial notions of sin. Instead of focussing on individual acts that violate a rule of order, perhaps we should examine ways in which we cut ourselves off from our relationship with God, through one another.

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