

Conservatives, liberals duel over leaking barque

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE
GRISEZ

CONSERVATIVES THINK that, although the contemporary world is in deep trouble, the church had no serious problems until Vatican II opened the liberals' Pandora's box. Liberals think the church was behind the times until Vatican II started a long-overdue process of updating — which conservatives frustrated. Both views, even in their nuanced versions, could be wrong.

The really fundamental problem in the church could be confusion about what Christians and Christian life are. Christians and Christian life have divine and human aspects. These ought to be distinguished but not separated, united but not commingled. However, where Christians and Christian life are concerned, the divine and human often are either compartmentalized or blended in ways orthodox faith and devotion long ago learned to avoid where Jesus and his life are concerned.

This situation is partly due to the influence of Greek philosophy on traditional theology and spirituality. All fallen human hearts are restless, because sin and its consequences frustrate aspirations for natural human fulfillment; believing hearts also are restless, because the hopes God's promises arouse remain to be fulfilled. St. Augustine confused these two real sources of restlessness with another, unreal rest-

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lessness: that of a neo-Platonic heart, naturally akin to the divine, restless for union with God. St. Thomas escaped neo-Platonism, but the concurrence of Aristotle with Augustine led him to posit a natural desire for the beatific vision.

Confusion between the Christian's humanity and divinity generated un-



necessary tension between legitimate aspirations for human and this-worldly fulfillment and God's call to divine and everlasting life. This tension, together with other factors, led to disrespect for the "merely" human, and this disrespect fostered legalism in moral teaching and pastoral practice (human acts in themselves are not important), juridicism in ecclesial relationships (human communion in itself is not important) and formalism in liturgy (human experience and transformation in themselves are not important).

These weaknesses took their toll in the church as such and in individual Christians' lives. In modern times, they provoked increasingly intense reactions, in the name of human self-re-

spect, against Christianity. During the past century, these reactions crystallized into various forms of secular humanism, which have steadily gained ground against Jesus and his church.

Vatican II tried to answer this challenge. *Gaudium et spes* makes it clear that Christian faith and life not only are consistent with humanistic values, but also demand their promotion; Christians should serve secular and this-worldly goods because these contribute to the heavenly fulfillment of all things in Jesus. This and other Vatican II documents work out this insight's many practical implications, which challenge false other-worldliness, legalism, juridicism and formalism.

Yet, the two decades since Vatican II have brought the church unprecedented conflicts, betrayals and losses. Many factors contributed to stunting the fruit of Vatican II: the depth of the problems, institutional inertia in the church, the cultural turmoil of the 1960s, the influence of secular media of communication on reflection and communication within the church, and widespread compromises between the way of the Lord Jesus and alternative life-styles.

However, there is another, widely ignored reason that Vatican II's aftermath has been so disappointing to almost everyone. Pope John XXIII did not fully appreciate the challenge facing the church. His optimism created an overconfident atmosphere for the council. But the radical character of the problems emerged. The council fathers encountered questions too vital to set aside but too undeveloped to resolve.

Lacking real consensus on these is-

ssues, the council fathers should in honesty have stated them, acknowledged both their inability to resolve them and the urgency of doing so and planned a post-conciliar process to complete this work. Instead, they papered over these problems with ambiguous formulas. Thus, the seeds of the church's turmoil since Vatican II were sown in the council's own flawed work.

Respect for Pope John and his council made it almost impossible to admit what had happened. Thus, it was necessary on all sides to deny the real situation. Pretending that Vatican II had settled things, both conservatives and liberals immediately read their own biases into the council's documents, rejected the alternative reading as gross misinterpretation and used political means to pursue dominance in the church for their views.

Neither John Paul II nor most other bishops admit the depth and gravity of the church's current crisis. Their efforts to maintain the appearance of unity prevent them from facing up to the reality of division. Pseudo-solidarity also serves as cover for tireless ecclesiastical politics, which is tearing the church apart.

We should pray that the coming session of the synod will be the occasion for the pope and other bishops to recognize the vanity of ecclesiastical politics, to admit that Vatican II was flawed and to begin facing up to the church's current extreme peril. Only the Lord Jesus and his Spirit can save the church, but they will do it by the efforts of the pope, bishops and/or others — because human acts in themselves really are important. ■

Cardinal Ratzinger's report may be too optimistic

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

MOST CRITICS of *The Ratzinger Report* consider Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger too pessimistic. But in some respects, he is too optimistic.

For example, he offers a simple explanation of theological dissent from received Catholic moral teaching: It is compromise with the permissiveness of secular liberalism. So Ratzinger thinks the "new" moral is geographically centered in the western hemisphere, especially in the affluent United States, where the replacement of traditional moral absolutes with a morality of consequences "is particularly developed and diffused" (page 90).

Again, the cardinal thinks that in great part the entire crisis in the church since Vatican II is due to misunderstandings and errors about what the church really is — namely, divinely constituted, sacramental and hierarchical. "Only if this perspective is acquired anew will it be possible to rediscover the necessity and fruitfulness of obedience to the legitimate ecclesiastical hierarchies," he asserts (page 49). The clear implication is that obedience would correct most everything now troubling the church.

Finally, Ratzinger considers Vatican II itself entirely unproblematic. Conflicts have broken out since the council,

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but "Vatican II in its official promulgations, in its authentic documents, cannot be held responsible for this development" (page 30). The "true council" — as contrasted with the false "spirit of the council" — has the answers the church needs today. For Ratzinger, Vat-



ican II is "a base on which to build solidly" (page 34).

Would that it were so. For, then, Pope John Paul II might succeed in his effort to use Vatican II as cement to renew solidarity among the hierarchy and as stimulus to renew obedience by others to the hierarchy. But only the rosiest of rose-colored glasses can conceal the ruins of previous efforts, especially Paul VI's, to build up the church on Vatican II's foundations.

The trouble is that these foundations are not solid. As soon as the council began to break ground for its work, it uncovered unexpected obstacles — layers of rock and large areas of seemingly bottomless quicksand. Not organized to deal with such obstacles, the "pastoral" council nevertheless laid out footings, some of which quickly cracked or even sank entirely out of sight.

Consider "collegiality." For the

"spirit of the council," it came to mean that the church is becoming a democracy. But collegiality is unclear even in Vatican II's authentic documents, where it refers exclusively to the constitutional relationships among the pope, other bishops and groups of bishops. Does "collegiality" mean that a pope should never act unless he is quite sure he has most of the other bishops with him? Or does it mean that other bishops should rally round when a pope sees fit to act without their previous consensus, perhaps even despite their antecedent disagreement? Both views find support in Vatican II's authentic documents and in the conciliar process — the struggle between the council's factions, in which the pope was sometimes embroiled.

In 1968, Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*. He expected other bishops to rally in support. Many did; some did not. This situation made clear the ambiguity of collegiality. The division has not gone away, and it never will go away by itself. Only a pope and the other bishops, working together, will be able to find the resolution. But that work cannot even begin until the current unsatisfactory situation is honestly admitted and squarely faced.

The question of obedience Ratzinger thinks is central also has far deeper roots than he admits. For a longer time before Vatican II than anyone then living could remember, stern discipline had maintained within the church the appearance of monolithic unity on all important matters of faith and morals. When debates in the council and the relaxation of discipline removed the illusion of complete unity, an amazing de-

facto variety of incompatible views surfaced.

Some would like to reinstitute strict discipline. But discipline cannot resolve substantive issues and would merely transform existing disagreements into schisms. Others would like all the disagreeing views to be treated as legitimate. But such latitudinarianism would leave the church with no unified message to preach and teach, no common theoretical base for service to humankind and, ultimately, no identity. Limitless toleration is ideological AIDS, which makes its victims unable to resist even what will certainly destroy them.

Obedience to hierarchical authority presupposes unity in faith, and unity in faith is precisely what the Catholic church (as a human society accessible to sociological inspection) no longer has.

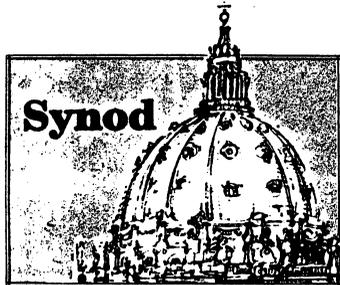
As for the morality of consequences Ratzinger deplors, it has been expounded and increasingly widely adopted by some believers and many nonbelievers throughout modern times. And recent theological dissent from received Catholic moral teaching owes far more to several Germans — including Bernard Häring, Josef Fuchs and Karl Rahner — than to any American.

The new moral probably can best be understood as an inept attempt to solve real problems raised by certain inadequacies in classical Christian moral theology and spirituality. But even if its roots are not so deep as that, American culture has provided no more than a favorable climate for a set of opinions of European origin. ■

Synod endorses thrust of Ratzinger Report

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

IF ONE HAD to characterize John Paul II as liberal or conservative in relation to Vatican II, one could say he is an unreconstructed preconciliar liberal. He called the extraordinary session of the synod to turn the clock back, not, as some hoped and others feared, to Oct. 9, 1958 (when Pius XII died), but to Dec. 8, 1965 (when Vatican II ended). Thus, in his Dec. 7 address



to the synod, the pope said the session had been "necessary, indeed absolutely demanded," so that its participants would "express their judgment on Vatican II in order to avoid divergent interpretations."

The "Message of the Synod to the People of God" unqualifiedly reaffirms Vatican II as it was and sweeps aside the view that it was the first stage of a continuing revolution: "In full adherence to the council, we see in it a wellspring offered by the Holy Spirit to the church, for the present and the future. We do not fix upon the errors, confusions and defects which, because of sin and human weakness, have been the occasion of suffering in the midst of the people of God. We firmly believe, and we see, that the church finds today in the council the light and strength that Christ has promised to give his followers in each period of history" (emphasis added).

Influenced by the Ratzinger Report, the synod's message, addressed to "the people of God," goes on to speak of the church not under that title but as the body of Christ and the mystery of the love of God present to humanity — as communion with God through faith and sacraments. Thus, the synod emphasizes the church's transcendent dimension against populist readings of Vatican II. In this context, the council's most original contribution (part one of *Gaudium et Spes*) is strikingly reformulated: "From Vatican II the church received with certitude a new light: The joy and hope which come from God can help mankind already on this earth to overcome every sadness and anguish if men lift their gaze to the heavenly city" (emphasis added).

Similarly, the synod's final document clearly and forcefully expresses the participants' consensus in solidarity with the pope and endorses much of the

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outlook expressed in the Ratzinger Report. Vatican II is reaffirmed conservatively: "The council is a legitimate and valid expression of the deposit of faith as it is found in sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the church" (I, 2). "It is not legitimate to separate the spirit and the letter of the council. Moreover, the council must be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the church" (I, 5). Again, the strategy of bending doctrine in pastoral practice is rejected (I, 5; II, B, 1).

Pluralism (toleration of fundamentally opposed positions) is condemned; pluriformity (minor differences among local churches in communion with Rome) is approved (II, C, 2). So *aggiornamento* means "a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world," which does not license churches in the wealthy nations to compromise with secularism (II, D, 3). Moreover, inculturation is mainly a one-way street; it means that what is positive in various cultures is to be transformed by integration into Christianity (II, D, 4).

The synod's final document is less optimistic than Vatican II. The signs of the times have changed for the worse (II, A, 1; II, D, 2). So the synod calls for renewed emphasis on "the value, the importance and the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ" (II, D, 2). In other words: Toughen up; Christianity means hard work, self-denial and suffering in

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this life; its real payoff begins only with resurrection.

Absent from the synodal documents is an appreciation of the depth of the trouble the church is in. Vatican II's defects and inadequacies are unacknowledged. Radical theological dissent from traditional teaching on faith and morals is virtually ignored. Hence, the synod's results offer little hope that John Paul II and his fellow bishops are about to begin dealing more effectively with the constitutional crisis of collegiality, which has crippled their effective cooperation, or with the profound crises of faith that pervade the church. Amid its celebration, the synod needed but lacked a small child to announce the absence of some of the



THE SYNOD officially opens at St. Peter's Basilica.

wonderful garments everyone was admiring.

Still, two of the synod's suggestions are interesting.

One is the consensus that "a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in the various regions" (II, B, 4). Work on such a universal catechism has been in progress almost since John Paul II became pope. Evidently, this project's time has come. The question is whether the pope will be able to develop a wide and deep enough consensus among his fellow bishops behind his catechism to make it any

more effective than was Paul VI's "Credo of the People of God" as a tool for dismissing conflicting teachings.

The other important suggestion is that there be a study of the theological status and doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences (II, C, 8). That study just might begin to resolve the constitutional crisis of collegiality. Conflicts between the Roman Curia and national conference bureaucrats are only symptoms of that crisis. But perhaps a close look at the symptoms will draw attention to the deeper problems.

Who knows? Perhaps these two suggestions are the seeds of Vatican III. ■

Pastoral on economy needs gospel radicalism

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

A THIRD DRAFT of the projected U.S. bishops' pastoral on the economy is being prepared. We hope it will be less optimistic than previous drafts, more radical in its call for economic justice and more clearly addressed to a relevant audience.

The second draft drew an analogy between the democratic "American experiment" for protecting civil and political rights and a projected "new American experiment" for securing economic rights — "an order that guarantees the



minimum conditions of human dignity in the economic sphere for every person" (No. 96).

The analogy is overly optimistic; it ignores the fact that America's experiment in democracy usually had the support of the wealthy and powerful, whose interests it secured, while any attempt to promote economic justice is sure to be opposed by the wealthy and powerful whose greed and status it will threaten. And people seeking election or reelection to federal offices need such vast amounts of money to carry on their campaigns that they are necessarily subservient to some of the wealthy and powerful — at least to well-organized interest groups of the wealthy, such as the big unions.

The second draft points out some just goals. It calls for expensive federal programs to eliminate domestic unemployment, poverty and the failure of small farms, and to greatly increase foreign economic aid. But it offers no radical proposals of ways the costs are to be met. Current huge federal deficits are mentioned, but the draft blandly suggests that some tax reforms and cuts in defense spending could pay for everything (No. 282).

A more radical approach would begin by recognizing current federal deficits themselves as a tremendous injustice. Government deficits now — when there is no great emergency and debt repayment is in order — will be a crippling burden on later generations. We are stealing from those unborn whom we are not killing.

Tax reforms and closing loopholes will be opposed by those in whose interests inequitable tax structures and loopholes have been created. Defense spending might well increase if the United States were to carry out the demand of *The Challenge of Peace* to elimi-

nate NATO's threat of first use of nuclear weapons in Europe. For a credible substitute for that threat would be a vast buildup of conventional forces, whose great cost is the main reason NATO has a policy of threatening to use nuclear weapons against a conventional Soviet attack.

Realistically, the U.S. government will not balance its budget and pay for the programs needed to pursue economic justice without vastly increasing taxes not only on the very wealthy, but also on the upper middle class.

The draft restates traditional Christian teaching that people who have what they do not need owe it in justice to those who lack necessities (No. 113). It also cites the evidence that some people have a great deal more than they need: "In 1983, 54 percent of the total net financial assets were held by two percent of all families" (No. 181). The principle together with the facts point to a requirement in strict justice that most of the assets of the very wealthy be transferred to the very poor. But the draft nowhere draws this obvious conclusion, much less offers any radical proposal to implement what justice requires — for example, by a new tax on the net worth of the wealthy, say of 20 percent a year on anyone's net worth in excess of \$1 million.

Taxes on the poor deepen their poverty; taxes on the lower middle class press them toward poverty and lessen incentives both for them and the poor. Justice demands that those whose incomes are above the median should bear the burden of government expenditures.

Political realism will rule out proposals for a confiscatory tax on the net worth of the very wealthy and for much heavier income taxes on the comfortably well-off. But the bishops should teach these requirements of justice clearly to those who take seriously their authority to speak in Jesus' name. Thus, although the exploitative structures of our unjust society will block governmental action for economic justice, at least we Catholics who have more than we need might be moved individually to transfer our excess wealth to those who lack necessities, and so escape the fate of Dives. Bishops should be concerned to keep their people out of hell.

But the second draft seems to be addressed mainly to government officials, most of whom are practical nonbelievers, with no respect for God's word and episcopal authority. To them the bishops ought to address not a detailed instruction about the requirement of economic justice, but the basic message of the Gospel. For they need to repent and believe.

If the eventual pastoral on the economy is like the second draft, it will have only a mild political effect — to support liberal Democrats in 1987-1988. But liberal Democrats are not more interested in justice than right-wing Republicans. Both get rid of poverty by getting rid of poor people. Right-wing Republicans leave them to starve; liberal Democrats prefer to kill them, currently by subsidized abortions, eventually by other implementations of the constitution's "right of privacy." ■

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Communal confession easy, but what about the sins?

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

IN HIS DECEMBER 1984 post-synodal apostolic exhortation on "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today," Pope John Paul II once more tried to stop the abuse of general absolution. General absolution, the pope explains, is permissible only in cases of grave necessity. It should not become an ordinary form. When it is given in an emergency situation, those who receive it must be prepared



to confess all their sins when they have a chance — definitely before they receive general absolution again.

Nevertheless, in many places in the United States, people continue to be invited to come to communal penance services, where absolution is given everyone present without any individual confession of sins. In some places, couples who are divorced and civilly remarried, as well as others with habits of grave sin and no purpose of amendment, are explicitly encouraged to participate in such communal penance services. For such persons, the general absolution cannot possibly be valid and fruitful.

Perhaps some pastors are abusing general absolution because they are too lazy to administer the sacrament properly. But we suspect most of those who use this form when there is no grave necessity for it mean well and think they are helping the faithful.

But are they?

A certain physician, Dr. Kindly, always treated his patients in a warm and friendly manner, and they all liked him. One day John Jones came to Dr. Kindly, complaining of pains in his chest. The doctor made a thorough examination and found a suspicious lump in John's breast. He sent John for further tests and a biopsy.

When the results came back, Dr. Kindly's worst fears were confirmed: John had breast cancer, which is rare and usually fatal in men. With great sadness, Dr. Kindly prepared to give John the bad news. His only hope lay in radical chest surgery, harsh chemotherapy and castration. But when Dr. Kindly began to talk with his patient, it became clear that John also already suspected the worst, was very anxious about his condition and did not wish to hear the grave diagnosis and severe plan of treatment.

"Come on, Doc," John pleaded, "I just

need something for these chest pains. Can't you give me a prescription for some pain killers to help me over the next few weeks?"

Feeling great sympathy for John, Dr. Kindly thought, "This patient isn't ready to hear the bad news. Perhaps he will be in a few weeks. Anyway, maybe by then he'll have a spontaneous remission and get well without the surgery, chemotherapy and castration. After all, miracles still do happen."

So Dr. Kindly gave John the prescription he wanted. John got it filled at once, took the pain killers religiously and for a while felt much better. However, before long, John's condition worsened and the pain became unbearable. He sought treatment, but it was too late. Dr. Kindly came to John's funeral and cried more than anyone else.

Another man, Sam Smith, went to Dr. Severe with similar complaints. Dr. Severe was not by nature a warm and friendly person. Her patients didn't like her much, but they respected her competence and appreciated her careful treatment of their ills. Dr. Severe's examination of Sam Smith and the tests showed that Sam also had breast cancer, and that the same plan of treatment was indicated.

Dr. Severe knew that Sam would not want to hear the bad news and would not easily accept the required treatment. So when she met with the patient, Dr. Severe made a special effort to be warm and friendly, to explain the facts as gently as possible and to put the situation into the most optimistic light. Yet Sam also pleaded for a prescription for pain killers.

Dr. Severe refused and insisted that Sam enter the hospital at once to be readied for surgery. Only as part of that plan of treatment would pain-relieving drugs be administered. Sam very reluctantly accepted the diagnosis and plan of treatment.

Fortunately, it was successful, and every trace of cancer was eliminated. Even so, Sam was depressed at first about the price he'd had to pay for his survival. Dr. Severe helped him to adjust and begin life anew. Eventually, Sam came to see that, although not the man he once was, he is no less a person with a life to live and be thankful for. When Dr. Severe dies, Sam will go to her funeral.

Now, which of these physicians is truly merciful? Is Dr. Kindly or Dr. Severe more like the compassionate Jesus? Well, then, what sort of pastors does the church need — Father Kindlys or Father Severes?

Father Severes try to make people realize how deep they are in sin and how much they need to repent. Unless there is a real emergency, they do not administer general absolution without individual confession. For they know that helping people who are not really repentant to feel forgiven is to do them the gravest possible harm.

Father Kindlys encourage people who have no purpose of amendment to come to communal penance services. They administer general absolution without individual confession. And so Father Kindlys send people away feeling somewhat better — to die in their sins. ■

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Let dissidents on abortion shape up or be shipped out

By GERMAIN and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

WE BELIEVE THAT, no matter what the law says, the intentional (sometimes called "direct") killing of an innocent human being, including an embryo or fetus by abortion, morally is always objectively gravely wrong. Lack of sufficient reflection and/or full consent can mitigate or even prevent the guilt of *sin*, but nothing can ever make such killing a "lesser evil" and justify the *act* considered in itself.

We think any Catholic who is well-instructed, informed about the relevant facts, clearheaded and faithful must agree with us. For whatever the Cath-



olic church believes and teaches universally as an essential moral requirement for Christian life pertains to faith and is infallibly taught, even without a solemn definition. For a long time before current differences of opinion arose, the conditions for infallible teaching plainly ~~were met by received Catholic teaching~~ on killing in general and abortion in particular.

Oct. 7, 1984, 97 people subscribed to an ad in the *New York Times* that included as its foundation the following: "Statements of recent popes and the Catholic hierarchy have condemned the direct termination of prenatal life as morally wrong in all instances. There is the mistaken belief in American society that this is the only legitimate Catholic position. In fact, a diversity of opinions regarding abortion exists among committed Catholics: A large number of Catholic theologians hold that even direct abortion, though tragic, can sometimes be a moral choice." Church authorities tried to discipline some of the signers.

About 1,000 people subscribed to a follow-up ad, *New York Times*, March 2, saying: "We affirm our solidarity with all Catholics whose right to free speech is under attack." The ad mentions the attempted disciplinary actions, and goes on: "Such reprisals cannot be condoned or tolerated in church or society. We believe that Catholics who, in good conscience, take positions on the difficult questions of legal abortion and other controversial issues that differ from the official hierarchical positions act within their rights and responsibilities as Catholics and citizens."

Believing what we do about abortion and thinking as we do about Catholic teaching on killing the innocent, we hold that the only legitimate position regarding abortion is the "official hierarchical position." Those who do not

agree with it really ought to shape up or honestly admit they have already shipped out.

Moreover, the right of free speech is not at stake here. That right is a civil liberty against governments. It gives no right to children to tell their parents they are stupid, Ford employees to publish ads urging potential customers to prefer Chevrolets or Catholics to reject what the Catholic church believes and teaches.

Nevertheless, we confess feeling it isn't quite evenhanded to try to discipline those who subscribed to the 1984 ad. It's too much like the IRS's handling of tax cheats. Small cheaters are forced to pay every cent with interest and penalties; big cheaters, whom the government doesn't want to take on in court, receive negotiated settlements and often come out better than if they had paid their taxes as everyone should. Similarly here: Church authorities try to discipline signers of the 1984 *Times* ad, while the theologians who dissent in a more important way get away with it.

For example, as long ago as 1973, Father Charles E. Curran wrote in *New Perspectives in Moral Theology* that "there is a sizable and growing number of Catholic theologians who do disagree with some aspects of the officially proposed Catholic teaching that direct abortion from the time of conception is always wrong" (page 193). Curran personally held that "abortion could be justified to save the life of the mother or to avert very grave psychological or physical harm to the mother with the realization that this must truly be grave harm that will perdure over some time and not just a temporary depression" (page 191). Yet Curran still teaches moral theology to future priests and theologians in the pontifical faculty of theology of the Catholic University of America.

But if it is inappropriate to discipline some who draw out implications of theological dissent while tolerating that dissent itself, what should church authorities do? We think the pope and other bishops should make it unmistakably clear to dissenting theologians that they are gravely confused and to those who follow dissenting theological opinions that they have been terribly misled. How can this be done?

The pope and other bishops together should examine thoroughly the theological cases for both sides. We are confident that if they do, they will judge that the dissenting theological opinions not only are theories inconsistent with Catholic faith but licenses to kill, contrary to Christian love of neighbor. Then, with the advice and support of the other bishops, the pope can solemnly define two propositions: "The intentional killing of an innocent human being is always a grave matter," and "Every human organism, regardless of its age or condition, ought to be presumed to be a human being."

Once these propositions were defined, all Catholics, theologians included, would have a clear choice: to shape up by professing their faith in what the Catholic church has always believed and taught about killing, or to ship out by admitting their position is alien to Catholic faith and far from the way of the Lord Jesus. ■

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Divining the moral dilemma of dissent

By GERMAIN and
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SOME TRY to justify dissent from the church's constant and very firm moral teaching. They correctly note that the church has solemnly defined very little in the moral field. They go on to argue that, because a noninfallible teaching could be mistaken, dissent from any such teaching is permissible. They conclude that Catholics may dissent from all or almost all of the church's moral teachings.

This argument is doubly unsound. In



the first place, it rests on the assumption that whatever is not solemnly defined is not infallibly taught. However, both Vatican I and Vatican II make it clear that the ordinary magisterium also teaches infallibly when it universally proposes one and the same position on a matter of faith or morals as a truth—revealed or closely related to revelation—to be held definitively (Vatican I, *Dei filius*, DS 3011/1792; Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 25). Thus, if the whole Catholic church has in the past proposed some moral norm as one of the essential requirements of Christian life, then the church today must accept and teach that moral norm as certainly true. Although not solemnly defined, such moral teachings cannot now be brushed aside as noninfallible and possibly erroneous.

In the second place, even if it is uncertain whether the ordinary magisterium has infallibly taught some of the moral truths the faithful are asked to hold definitively, then still such teachings will receive the assent and practical acceptance of every faithful Catholic (*Lumen gentium*, 25). For whatever the church teaches as certain on moral questions very probably does pertain to divine revelation more or less directly. If a particular norm—for example, one regarding some new question—is not now infallibly taught, eventually it might well be, although possibly with some development and refinement no one can foresee today.

In seeking to minimize the body of teaching to which Catholics must assent, the argument that tries to defend the permissibility of dissent also manifests a legalistic outlook, according to which moral norms should be interpreted as narrowly as possible so that obligations will be minimized.

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In reality, like the whole Gospel, of which Christian moral norms are an integral part, the church's moral teaching is a splendid light, which believers should welcome with open hearts. Those who welcome this light and wish to live in it do not approach Catholic moral teaching looking for some loophole or excuse to set it aside. Hence, they are not primarily concerned with technical considerations about whether a particular norm has been proposed infallibly.

Because moral norms are a body of truths, the church proposes her moral teachings, just as she does other truths of faith, primarily by stating and explaining them, rather than by providing extrinsic motives for accepting them. The church's pastors exhort the faithful to live the truth in love. But such exhortation is not an extrinsic motive. Moral truths simply cannot be enforced directly, as laws can be, by disciplinary measures.

Therefore, just as a teacher in a classroom prefers to avoid disciplinary measures, the church's magisterium prefers to answer challenges to Christian moral truths by listening attentively and offering further explanations. Moreover, the magisterium respects the proper competence of moral theologians and recognizes their need to investigate difficult questions and share their findings with colleagues.

Nevertheless, when faced with dissenting theological opinions that are proposed to the faithful for practical application, the magisterium, like any teacher, can be forced to resort to the minimum of discipline that is absolutely essential to protect the integrity of the teaching office itself.

Some have argued: Because some Catholic theologians have dissented from moral teachings reaffirmed by the magisterium, and this dissent has been tolerated, the duty of religious assent that Vatican II teaches (*Lumen gentium*, 25) is no longer binding. From this, they further conclude that dissent has become a legitimate practice for theologians in their relation to the magisterium and that dissenting opinions may be followed in practice.

Confronted with this argument, after having repeatedly reaffirmed and clearly explained moral teachings from which some dissent, the magisterium has no choice but to take some disciplinary measures. Otherwise, by permitting those who dissent to misinterpret toleration of their acts as approval of their opinions, the magisterium itself would be expressly teaching one thing but tacitly teaching another.

The minimum disciplinary measure is to make it clear when persistent dissent is incompatible with someone's being a Catholic theologian. Making this clear in a single case is a way of teaching everyone where the boundaries lie. Nor is the magisterium unjust in using one case of dissent as an example, for the declaration concerning that case clarifies what really is true about it. As a form of teaching, that clarification applies equally to anyone who persists in holding the same erroneous opinions. ■

Theology within 'the certain gift of truth'

By GERMAINE and
JEANNETTE GRISEZ

IN DEFENDING Charles Curran in particular and theological dissent in general (*America*, April 5), Richard A. McCormick relies heavily, as he has in the past, on the authority of theologians who agree with him: "If Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's letter were to be applied to theologians throughout the world, it is clear that the vast majority would not qualify as Catholic theologians, for, as a matter of record, most theologians have found it impossible to agree with the central formulation of *Humanae Vitae*. Again, "It is generally admitted by theologians that the church's authentic teaching on concrete moral behavior does not, indeed cannot, fall into the category of definible doctrine." Against this claimed consensus, McCormick admits only, "There is a recent tiny pocket of resistance."

On the issues that divide Curran, McCormick and those who share their views from Pope John Paul II and Ratzinger, we agree with John Paul and Ratzinger. In this, we are not just agreeing with church authorities against theologians. John Paul and Ratzinger also are able theologians, and we think that they, and the many theologians who agree with them, have a case far better than that of Curran, McCormick and other dissenting theologians. But dissenting theologians habitually

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ignore arguments against their views. They prefer theological bootstrapping to serious debate of the issues.

In *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Christian Moral Principles*, which we pre-



pared with the help of eight coworkers and published more than two years ago, we devoted three entire chapters (6, 35 and 36) and parts of others to a critique of the theological principles shared by dissenting moralists. Virtually everything McCormick and other dissenting theologians are saying in defense of Curran finds its answer in the case we make. But not one of them has tried to deal with that case. Until they do, it seems plain that they prefer to avoid a debate they know they cannot win.

Moreover, the dissenting theologians' appeal to their own consensus is not only evasive, but also exaggerated. When McCormick claims a "vast majority" on their side and refers to the opposition as a "tiny pocket of resistance," he belies his own earlier description of the situation. Writing in 1984 of those who support the Holy See's defense of Catholic teaching, he said, "There are growing numbers of reactionary theo-

logians who support this type of thing with insistence on a verbal conformity that is utterly incredible to the modern — and, I would add, open — mind" (*Theological Studies*, vol. 45, p. 84). We dislike McCormick's adjectives, but were pleased by his unguarded admission that dissenting theologians confront substantial theological opposition.

The week after McCormick's article appeared in *America*, we participated in an international congress on moral theology (Rome, April 7-12). The timing was a coincidence; the congress was in preparation for two years. Because it was planned as a celebration of moral theology loyal to the church's teaching authority, Curran, McCormick and their friends were not invited to the party. So if they are the "vast majority," then the congress was the "tiny pocket of resistance."

But it wasn't so tiny. Students and spectators aside, those taking serious part in the work of the congress came from more than 20 countries and included more than 100 Catholic scholars — priests and layfolk, women and men — people with higher degrees, academic chairs and important publications. Many other like-minded scholars who were invited could not come because of other duties or the trip's cost.

The title of Germaine's paper was "The Definability of the Proposition: The Intentional Killing of an Innocent Human Being Is Always Grave Matter." Although McCormick claims that theologians generally, with only a "tiny pocket of resistance," reject the principle underlying this thesis, participants in the congress, without exception so far as we could tell, agreed that the prop-

osition already is infallibly taught and could be defined.

John Paul also received the congress in a special audience April 10. In his address (*English L'Osservatore Romano*, April 28), the pope rejected the proportionalist theory according to which all specific moral norms admit exceptions; he reaffirmed that there are absolute moral truths, for example, "the norm that prohibits contraception or that which forbids the direct killing of an innocent person." He said that to appeal to a "faith of the church — the so-called *sensus fidelium* — against the church's teaching office "is equivalent to denying the Catholic concept of revelation." The pope insisted that the church's moral teaching is not just one opinion, even an especially authoritative opinion, among others: "It enjoys the *charisma veritatis certum*," that is, the certain gift of truth — a phrase Irenaeus used to refer to what is now called "infallibility."

Participants in the congress applauded John Paul long and enthusiastically. This response so warmed the pope's heart that he greeted individually every one of the hundreds at the audience. Subsequent discussion in the lobbies of the congress made it clear that these theologians' consensus — so far as we could tell, unanimous — is behind the positions the pope blocked out.

McCormick's "vast majority" is not so vast after all. The "tiny pocket of resistance" contains a sizable and tough corps. The dissenting theologians are wise to avoid serious confrontations. ■

Liberal feminism equals church suicide

By GERMAINE and JEANNETTE
GRIZEZ

CHURCH LEADERS are beginning to respond — better late than never — to the various issues raised by contemporary women's movements. But we hope they'll avoid the mistake of letting the organized movements define all the issues. For these movements, including the most extreme of them, are liberal rather than radical. Except for the rectification of some blatant economic injustices, their successes are worsening rather than bettering the situation of women in the contemporary world and the post-Vatican II church.

That is the thesis of Mary Rosera Joyce in her remarkable compact book, *Women and Choice: A New Beginning* (LifeCom, Box 1832, St. Cloud, MN 56302, \$7.95). She points out that, thus far, women's movements have proceeded on assumptions loaded with the masculine biases of our culture. Such biases are hard to avoid, because Western secular humanism is dominated by masculine concerns for achievement, liberty and justice to the virtual exclusion of more typically feminine concerns about awareness, wholeness and sharing.

Egalitarians who think the differences between men and women have no greater human and Christian significance than the differences among the races will not like Joyce's argument. We ourselves don't agree with everything she says. But much of it rings true, and her sort of feminism is fresh and radical enough to deserve careful consideration.

Many women still devote their lives to the traditional roles of wife, mother and homemaker. For our own part, we're

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convinced that Jeannette's activities in these roles have been not only fulfilling for her but every bit as valuable in themselves as anything else either of us has done during our life together. But liberal feminism, sometimes despite itself, regularly devalues such activities. Joyce avoids that mistake.

Church leaders would be wise to pay attention to her. Religious women, lesbians and wives who don't want to be mothers are not going to carry the next generation of Christians home from the baptismal font. Consequently, a strategy making concessions to the demands of these groups *at the expense of* women who devote their lives to the traditional roles will only contribute to the church's decline. The church is dying out quickly enough without adopting so obviously suicidal a policy.

Clericalism still cripples the Catholic



church. Individual bishops and priests sometimes personally show the spirit of service to which Jesus called the apostles. But the clergy as club, in its structure and institutional patterns of behavior, is self-engrossed, self-serving and overbearing. Women, not least women religious, have suffered greatly under the hegemony of the clerical club. Naturally, they want rectification and restitution, if not retribution and revenge.

However, the clerical club also mis-

treats laymen and boys. Only a few priests are pederasts, but the clerical club stands condemned for tolerating and sheltering those who are, and many others degenerate to a lesser degree or in other ways. A still more effeminate church we don't need.

But that is exactly what we are likely to get if church leaders respond to salutary anticlericalism — which really frightens them — by making concessions to the organized group of feminists. For these groups, whether made up of women religious or others, are simply female counterparts of the clerical club. Their liberal feminism is crypto-clericalism.

The clerical club's strongest instinct is its self-protection. And so any concessions it is likely to make to liberal feminism will surrender nothing of its own but, instead, will lead to reverse discrimination against lay males. (We'll have altar girls *instead of* altar boys — that sort of thing.) That will only further alienate Catholic laymen and boys.

By contrast, the renewal demanded by Joyce's radical feminism would enhance the status of males who are not clerics no less than that of females in the church. Rather than merely making a few placating concessions to their female auxiliaries, members of the clerical club could begin to reform their own institutional arrangements according to sounder conceptions of men, women and their relationships than those that have prevailed — and still prevail today — in Catholic seminaries.

Joyce doesn't deal explicitly with the question of women's ordination. However, her views plainly lend no support to it. Perhaps she thinks, as we do, that where feminist theologians have gone beyond the question-begging assertion that women have the *right* to ordination, their arguments have turned into a *reductio* to absurdity. ■

Is the church greater than sum of its parts?

By GERMAINE and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

THE SYNOD of bishops last December called for a study to see whether the principle of subsidiarity can be applied to the church, and if so, how and to what extent.

Pope Pius XI articulated this principle as part of the church's social teaching. Its basis is that because political societies and large economic organizations have their origin and end in individual persons, these societies should serve persons, whose well-being must not become



a mere means to social goals. Therefore, social activities are only *subsidiary* — that is, a help to the lives of the individuals and small groups that make up the social body, not a substitute for them. The principle follows: What individuals and small groups can do for themselves, using their own abilities and resources, should not be taken over by larger social units.

Pius XII, addressing the cardinals (Feb. 20, 1946), said the principle is valid for social life generally, including the church's life. But he added: "without prejudice to her hierarchical structure." John Paul II, also addressing the cardinals (June 28), elaborates on Pius XII's qualification of subsidiarity in the church: "Nor must the nature of the primacy of the Roman pontiff be compromised."

People who prefer the ideas and decisions of their pastor to those of their bishop, or those of their bishop to those of Rome, or those of their bishop to those of the leadership of the Catholic bishops' conference, or those of the national conference to those of Rome, are likely to be strong (but probably not consistent) proponents of subsidiarity in the church. People whose preferences run in the opposite direction are likely to be its strong (but not consistent) opponents. We think both sides would do well to forget ecclesiastical politics, remember the underlying values and try to work out a coherent position they can apply consistently.

We don't yet have such a position, only some ideas moving toward one.

The qualification added by Popes Pius and John Paul can easily be interpreted as an attempt to closely control subsidiarity in the church. Yet rejection of their qualification would be a revolution challenging the church's constitution. So focusing debate on this qualification is sure to polarize it along the usual lines of ecclesiastical politics, and such a debate is sure to be fruitless. Hence, we think discussion should begin with considera-

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tions other than those bearing directly on the church's hierarchical constitution.

One such consideration is the radical difference between the church as a society and political-economic societies. Aristotle thought the common good of political society is greater and more godlike than the good of its members, but both liberal democratic political philosophy and Catholic social teaching challenge Aristotle's view. They agree that the common good of political-economic societies is only a set of conditions and instrumentalities for the full-being of persons: public peace, liberty, products, services and so forth.

The church's common good is the interpersonal communion in which its members share, and this good is an aspect of their intrinsic full-being as persons. Indeed, insofar as the church is the incipient heavenly kingdom, the church's eucharistic life is its members' supreme good and the principle of all their other goods: Seek first the kingdom, and the rest will be added.

Thus, insofar as the church is the body of Christ, its members do have their origin and end in it, not vice versa. Aristotle's dictum, false of political society, is true of the church: The flourishing of the whole Christ is greater and more godlike than the human flourishing and holiness of his members.

This consideration, we think, precludes any straightforward application of the principle of subsidiarity in the church. But it by no means follows that ideas and decisions in the church should always come down from above.

The most important reason why not is that the church's relationship to its members is absolutely unlike that of any other society. The ecclesial communion that is the common good of the *whole* church is not realized only in the church *universal*, but also in dioceses, parishes, religious communities, families and so on. Thus, while the church's members should subordinate themselves to it as parts to a whole, the church's wholeness must not be identified with what is universally common in it. The church's wholeness also is in all its diversity.

Moreover, while unity in belief and action is vital for the church's work of evangelization, which is crippled by dissent and division, much of that work can only be done or is surely done better if considerable scope is allowed for initiatives and adaptations at rather low levels. Probably this consideration is the strongest reason Rome should leave many matters to national conferences. Yet national conferences plainly are merely a diocesan institution, not *churches*, as dioceses and parishes and families are.

Finally, because members of the church are sanctified only by actively sharing in its life and work, more general and intense participation by church members is inherently valuable. But participation is discouraged by centralization. This consideration suggests there should be the greatest possible scope for initiatives and decisions at the lowest possible levels — the parish, the family and the particular religious community. ■

Will Modernist-traditionalist debate abate?

By GERMAIN
and JEANNETTE GRISEZ

MANY CATHOLICS — call them “traditionalists” but do not confuse them with the followers of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre — approve and support the policies Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger are following in dealing with dissenting theologians and theological issues on which there are conflicts in the church. Others — call them “modernists” — disapprove and object to the Holy See’s policies.

What fundamental issue divides traditionalists from modernists? We do not believe it is any particular moral question, such as the permissibility of masturbation or abortion, or even any general question of ecclesiology, such as the authority of the church’s teaching and the limits of licit dissent. We think the fundamental issue concerns the nature of faith itself.

Traditionalist Catholics think that individuals can have faith only by sharing in the church’s faith and that the church’s faith can be identified by official acts of the church’s leaders. Such Catholics think their faith embraces an objectively given and publicly accessible divine revelation. Although allowing for some development, they hold that revelation was completed in the public life, death and Resurrection of Jesus and appropriated in all its essentials by the apostles before they died.

Modernist Catholics think that individuals have faith as an unmediated divine gift and that the church’s faith sums up the faithful’s consensus. They think official acts of the church’s leaders should articulate and be governed by that consensus. They think that divine revelation is not objectively given and publicly accessible, but rather that it is in religious experi-

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ence and conscientious judgments. They think that revelation is only imperfectly symbolized in Scripture and traditional dogmas and that it is a continuing process, responsive to contemporary needs and opportunities.

The difference between traditionalists and modernists is manifested in arguments about the authority of the church’s teaching and the legitimacy of dissent.



Traditionalists argue that, because the whole hierarchy has in the past proposed certain moral norms as essential requirements of Christian life, the church today must continue to teach these moral norms as certainly true. Modernists argue that, because many Catholics today no longer find these moral norms acceptable, their view — based on their “Christian experience” and manifesting a *sensus fidelium* — must be approved, and the church’s “current official teaching” must change. Traditionalists cite magisterial documents; modernists cite public opinion polls.

Traditionalists will point out that the modernist’s position was considered and solemnly rejected by Vatican I. (The relevant document is *not* Vatican I’s teaching on papal primacy and infallibility, but its teaching on divine revelation.) Modernists will not be impressed, for they consider Vatican I’s teaching outdated and no longer relevant to today’s world.

Modernists will point out that the

traditionalist’s position has been considered and found wanting by the vast majority of theologians since 1800, beginning with Friedrich Schleiermacher. Traditionalists will not be impressed, for they find absolutely no ground in revelation (as they understand it) for the modernist position. Moreover, traditionalists think that arguments against church teaching that are drawn from sources independent of faith are simply expressions of nonbelief, and so they consider them of no theological consequence.

The controversy among Catholics between traditionalists and modernists did not arise in 1968 over *Humanae Vitae*. Rather, it arose about 1900, was suppressed by Pope Pius X, went underground and burst into the open again during Vatican II. Moral issues concerning sex and innocent life have been the occasion and vehicle of the controversy, but those issues would have been resolved long since had they not been symptoms of the far more fundamental division.

It remains to be seen whether the Catholic church has within herself resources to overcome the division over revelation and faith that has permanently divided Jews and Protestants. History makes it clear the hopes of both sides that the other will simply fade away are vain.

One thing seems clear to us: The constitution of the Catholic church, considered not theologically but simply from a sociological point of view, precludes any resolution of the conflict based on compromise or mutual tolerance — live and let live. So long as there is a traditionalist pope, whether John Paul II or any successor, modernists will be illegitimate, no matter how numerous and articulate they may be. However, if ever there were a modernist pope, traditionalism would ipso facto have been definitively falsified, and erstwhile traditionalist Catholics would have nowhere to go.

We, of course, do not expect that to happen soon. Indeed, we do not expect it to happen ever. ■

There may be hell to pay if rich don't share their wealth

By
GERMAIN AND JEANNETTE GRISEZ

COMPARED WITH most people who have ever lived, those who write and read columns such as this are rich. For most people lack the food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care required to live minimally decent lives. But we enjoy luxuries undreamed of even by the wealthiest members of societies such as the Israel of Jesus' time.

Jesus calls the poor "blessed" and promises them the kingdom (Luke 6:20). "But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows that the wealthy can sin simply by not using their wealth rightly. The rich man lives in luxury; on his doorstep, Lazarus dies in poverty.

Jesus teaches how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" (Luke 18:25). Commenting, John L.

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McKenzie says, "While this saying contains hyperbole, it can scarcely mean anything but moral impossibility; Jesus makes wealth an insuperable obstacle to salvation and offers no solution of the dif-



ficulty except that one should give away one's riches" (*Dictionary of the Bible*). Why should that be so? If for no other reason, because poverty is so widespread and the needs of the poor so pressing that to use wealth rightly we must part with it.

All the goods of God's creation, including the talents that enable us to earn good incomes, are given to meet the needs of all. Private property is not ours to do with as we please; it entails responsibili-

ty. Vatican II, after pointing this out, calls attention to worldwide hunger and reminds us of the saying of some early church fathers: "Feed those dying of hunger, because if you have not fed them, you have killed them" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69).

Because we live luxuriously by Jesus' standards, we should help the poor until we have only enough left to satisfy our needs and fulfill the responsibilities of our personal vocations. Jesus clearly warns us about the gravity of this matter: Salvation is at stake.

Anxiety leads us to save and insure for our possible future needs instead of serving others' urgent present needs. Insecurity about social status leads us to regard wealthier people's luxurious consumption as a standard we must meet. Flight from guilt and other suffering leads us to seek diverting enjoyment through expensive self-indulgence. If our hope for heaven were lively, such anxiety, insecurity and escapism would lose their grip on us. Firm faith would free us from the cave of the contemporary world.

Christian teaching on the use of wealth has been constant, as Pope John XXIII points out (*Mater et Magistra*, 119): "Our predecessors have insisted time and

again on the social function inherent in the right of private ownership, for it cannot be denied that in the plan of the creator all of this world's goods are primarily intended for the worthy support of the entire human race. Hence, as Leo XIII so wisely taught in *Rerum Novarum*, 'Whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and corporeal or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God's providence, for the benefit of others.'"

William F. Buckley impugned the right of the magisterium to make judgments on socioeconomic matters. Lecturing at Georgetown University, Buckley drew laughter and enthusiastic applause by summing up his dissenting view with the slogan, "*Mater, si! Magistra, no!*"

Those who dissent can point out that the church's social teaching has developed through the centuries and that sometimes specific proposals put forth by popes have been quietly withdrawn by later popes. But such defenses are mere sophistry, for their dissent really con-

cerns not mere details but the unchanging core of Catholic social teaching and the church's very right to insist upon it.

Although never solemnly defined, the principles of this social teaching surely are infallibly taught, for they have been proposed by the whole magisterium as binding and certain. As John XXIII says (*Mater et Magistra*, 218), "The permanent validity of the Catholic church's social teaching admits of no doubt." He also insists that "this Catholic social doctrine is an integral part of the Christian conception of life" (222).

We must, of course, follow our consciences on these matters, just as on every other moral question. But we must form our consciences in the light of faith,

If our consciences err through our own fault in this grave matter, we cannot hope to enter the kingdom and must expect to end like the parable's rich man. If we do, will we even in hell praise and defend the dissenters who encouraged our rationalizations? Or will we then at last realize the foolishness of the attitude toward the church's moral teaching expressed by the slogan "*Mater, si! Magistra, no?*"? ■

U.S. is wrong to intend to kill millions of people

By GERMAIN and
JEANNETTE GRISEZ

IN A BOOK published last year by Oxford University Press, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism*, John Finnis, Joseph Boyle and Germain Grisez examine nuclear deterrence and find it morally wanting. They conclude that it should be abandoned now — unilaterally.

The U.S. nuclear deterrent is a threat. It expresses a conditional choice to wipe



out the USSR. We Americans hope we won't "have to" do it. But we will if the USSR ever "makes it necessary."

U.S. officials often say we do not target people as such. The U.S. bishops were told that when they were preparing "The Challenge of Peace." They concluded that we don't intend to kill noncombatants.

But the conclusion doesn't follow. We intend what we want the Soviets to fear, and we want them to fear the destruction of their cities. If the time comes to carry out the threat, even the "military" targets at which U.S. H-bombs are aimed won't be destroyed as military targets. They will be destroyed as cherished by the Soviets, not as threatening to us.

We're not bluffing. A president could personally be bluffing. But Congress in voting money and ordinary citizens in supporting the deterrent can't be bluffing, for they will have no part in carrying out the threat. And if a president were bluffing, he'd still be leading others to intend to carry out the threat.

We cannot replace the immoral threat to kill people with a morally acceptable threat to destroy Soviet military power. If we could make a credible threat to do that, we would be in a position to win a nuclear war, and we wouldn't need the deterrent. If Star Wars existed as a nearly perfect defensive shield, we could fight and win a nuclear war. But Star Wars, thus conceived, is a dream that probably will never come true.

Meanwhile, we really intend to kill millions of people. Because morality is in the heart, we are already guilty of murdering them. The only way to get rid of this guilt is by repenting and resolving never to do what we now threaten. And, because bluffing is impossible, that means we should give up the deterrent.

John Paul II has said the deterrent

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"may still be judged morally acceptable" as a step on the way to mutual disarmament. But he is probably as confused as the U.S. bishops are about what the deterrent actually is. Anyway, there is no real prospect of mutual disarmament (as distinct from arms control). Indeed, the mutual hatred and terror essential to deterrence stimulate the arms race and block disarmament.

If we abandoned our deterrent, the Soviets would have no reason to launch a nuclear attack against us. The USSR could dominate and exploit a disarmed United States, and nobody kills healthy slaves. But enslavement by the Soviets is a horrible prospect.

There is no rational way of measuring whether it is a more or less horrible prospect than nuclear holocaust, which probably will occur eventually if the arms race continues indefinitely. Thus, the ultimate question is not whether it is better to be red or dead. Nobody knows. The ultimate question is whether sin is worse than any other evil. Anyone with faith knows the answer: Enslavement to Satan is even worse than enslavement to the Soviets.

The authors realize that the United States is unlikely to abandon its deterrent. So why write the book?

First, individual citizens can and should repent and put murder out of their hearts. With better hearts, they might be able not only to live better personal lives, but begin to change things so that real steps toward disarmament would become possible.

Second, there's a danger that our guilty consciences will make us so ambivalent that we will continue to oppose the Soviets, but do so ineffectively. Such half-heartedness in no way will lessen the immorality of the deterrent. Rather, it will add to it the immorality of irresponsibly destabilizing the balance of power and increasing the risk of nuclear holocaust.

Third, in trying to rationalize the deterrent, the magisterium has come awfully close to justifying mass murder as a necessary means to the good end of preventing Soviet domination. The authors hope that their case against the deterrent will help to overcome the temptation to be a better servant of NATO than of God.

Finally, evangelization of today's world is blocked by Western culture's concealment of human miseries, and by its panaceas — together with the Marxist panacea — for the miseries it can't conceal. One misery humankind shares: living under the threat of nuclear holocaust. To fail to denounce the murderous intent of the deterrent and to pretend we are on the way to escaping it by mutual disarmament is to hide this misery.

But honest talk about the real situation, in its human hopelessness and need for radical conversion, could occasion hope in the only possible escape from the balance of terror. Only God in his mercy can make our penance and prayer sincere and bless sincerity with the peace that nuclear weapons, political "realism" and moral compromises cannot give. ■