Correspondence

(from p. 2)

the regime to discredit it. The pictures and text of the *Newsweek* story cited in my article are a case in point.

Professor Pollock's analyses of the U.S. press have been useful; one of them done in late 1972 seems to have led directly to an improvement in the *New York Times* coverage of Chile. However, the journalistic theory on which he bases those analyses is pernicious and counterproductive.

Ethical Ghettos

To the Editors: I do not wish in any way to detract from the good intentions which no doubt motivated George Tavard's "Ethical Ghettos in the Ecumenical Age" (*Worldview*, March). It is, however, of more than passing interest that the churches seem to have the chief difficulty in the area of ethical authority, which, at least in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, is a kind of last refuge for the Church's authoritative grip on personal behavior. (In fact, of course, as is well known, most Roman Catholics seem rather indifferent to the Church's official position on, for example, birth control.)

The question that is raised is whether it is not easier for the churches, which have largely lost their intellectual nerve in the face of the modern world, to come to rather easy agreement on previously knotty problems (such as papal primacy) in part because they know that the intellectual (theological) substance of these questions is of little or no interest to the larger world. And, of course, the vast majority of lay people has never been familiar with, nor very interested in, such theological minutiae. When it comes to ethics, however, specifically ethics relating to sex and family behavior, the individual churches feel they can hardly let go without inviting the final coming apart of the whole institutional religious enterprise.

I write this as someone who cares about institutional religion, and I do not wish to be excessively cynical about the motivations shaping the several churches' behavior. It does seem unfortunate, however, that Father Tavard does not take into account this sociological dimension in his analysis of the contrast between doctrinal and ethical ecumenical progress.

James Karim

New York, N.Y.

George H. Tavard Responds:

While I appreciate James Karim's good intentions in pointing out some present weakness of the Christian churches, I share neither his pessimism nor his reading of our times. I do not think that the churches have largely lost their intellectual nerves in the face of the modern world: They are courageously engaged in the ever unfinished critical process of sorting out the conflicting ingredients which constitute the hodgepodge of the modern world. Nor do I believe that doctrinal agreement has become easy because such agreement is of no interest to the larger world. The interest or uninterest of the larger world is irrelevant in matters which the larger world does not understand. That the vast majority of lay people have never been familiar with such theological minutiae may be true of the present century; it was not true of the early Church or of the Reformation, and I suspect that interest will come back when we tire of the games and gimmicks which abound in our society and which are stifling our soul. I do not agree, either, that the field of ethics, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, is a refuge for the Church's authoritative grip on personal behavior. Such a grip cannot exist in the standard Thomist ethics of conscience which have shaped most official Roman Catholicism; it has come into being and it lingers on as a myth among persons who are unacquainted with the classical Catholic theory of law. Finally, I am quite sure the difficulty to start ecumenical dialogues in ethics does not derive from the churches' fear of "letting go." The institutional religious enterprise has lasted too long and it has survived too many deeper crises than the present one to be of such a flimsy nature as would be torn apart by a dialogue on ethical questions.

Of course, sociological dimensions are important. But we should make a correct analysis of their nature and of their impact on theological questions.

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