

## Arch of integrity

Catholic Relief Services.

For the theologian, "certain organizations can never have integrity by their very presuppositions. If an organization is not given to ethical behavior, it won't have integrity," he asserted.

In the Ku Klux Klan, people band together from "frustration, fear, paranoia — qualities on the dark side of the personality," Cunningham suggested.

It is quite different for Catholic Relief Services, which "starts with the notion that it's against the spirit of the Gospel for people to starve and live in subhuman conditions. CRS attempts to develop strategies and means to counter that," Cunningham said.

For the theologian, integrity is a hard word to define: "It's a large word, an umbrella word," he explained.

"Integrity means wholeness and harmony, a certain relation between thinking and willing," Cunningham said. Those with integrity have "balance and harmony and wholeness of character."

In classical theology, he added, the term applies to individuals "whose intellectual faculties were in control of their animal faculties. They lived according to reason and grace."

"The term also takes on a second meaning, that of persons

who are ethical, who have a sense that what they're doing is not dissonant with what their conscience is telling them," Cunningham said.

It's helpful to note that "no one ever has perfect integrity," he continued. "We grow in integrity" or fail to grow as we respond to the choices offered in life.

One way for Christians to get a handle on integrity is to look at the lives of saints. Cunningham pointed to St. Thomas Aquinas.

"St. Thomas had a passion for truth and devoted his life to it," Cunningham said. As the late Jesuit Father Karl Rahner said, he's "a towering intellect and yet a man of great humility."

For St. Thomas, prayer and study were not two separate compartments of life. St. Thomas "managed to turn a life of study into a life of prayer," the Florida professor said.

Dorothy Day is another example. "She never wavered from her vision of solidarity with the poor. Over the long term, she displayed a harmony between a life of action and of prayer," Cunningham noted.

*(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)*

## Triumph over fear

tionality a secret.

Enter now the villain Haman. He was appointed to a high government position, something like prime minister. Insufferably vain, he expected everyone to bow to the ground as he passed through the palace gate. And everyone did — except Mordecai, who had taken a strategic position at the gate.

His principled refusal on religious grounds to kowtow infuriated Haman. When he learned that the resister was a Jew, Haman used his influence with the king to arrange the extermination of all Jews in the country.

Horrified, Mordecai sent word to Esther that she owed it to her people to intervene with the king. The poor girl was scared to death. To enter the royal presence unbidden was a capital offense and she might not be as lucky as Vashti had been. Also she would have to reveal her Jewish identity and she would be in double jeopardy.

However, her uncle prevailed. At the risk of her life Esther succeeded in trapping Haman in a compromising position, thoroughly discrediting him and

his program with the king. This saved her people.

Once again, fidelity to principles triumphed over fear.

Integrity, faithfulness to one's convictions, is an essential of human dignity. To sacrifice it for security or selfish advantage is to lose part of oneself. One ceases to be a whole person and dooms oneself to living as an emotional and moral cripple. It poisons happiness.

Jesus himself was tempted to betray his integrity for immediate advantage. In the gospel drama of his temptation he was offered instant fame and worldwide political dominion if he would abandon his father's plan.

The prospect had to be exciting — temptation of its nature involves a difficult choice — but he chose the harder way.

He maintained integrity. And the greatness of this far transcended anything he might conceivably have gained by shoddy, self-serving compromise.

*(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)*

## FOOD...

...for thought

Father Eugene Hemrick is a researcher, a syndicated columnist — and a resolute jogger. We asked him why people feel so strongly about integrity, why they would feel so insulted if anyone challenged their integrity.

"Integrity is very important," he responded. "My professional reputation leans on it." Father Hemrick is U.S. Catholic Conference research director and is based at the Center for Youth Development at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Psychologists say integrity and dependability are related, Father Hemrick said. In a work situation, it is vital to find colleagues who "are responsible to their discipline" and maintain high standards. Father Hemrick told of a colleague who keeps a sharp eye out for that kind of researcher whose lack of integrity would allow him to "bend research data" in order to obtain a desired result.

The Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn talks about going "the final inch," Father Hemrick observed. And this tells us something about integrity.

In personal relationships, a person of integrity strives to be the kind of person others have faith in, said Father Hemrick. It means "following through" on

responsibilities toward others.

But this can be difficult if people lose faith in themselves — as can happen from time to time. Integrity somehow reflects a person's self-image — the belief that one is capable of becoming a person others might have faith in.

Integrity, Father Hemrick suggested, is a somewhat fragile thing. But others can help here — boosting one's sense of self-worth at moments when that sense wanes.

Father Hemrick told of training to run in a triathlon and developing serious doubts about his own ability to complete the grueling race. The triathlon combines swimming, biking and running.

But his sister encouraged him, saying, "You can do it. You're the iron man in the family."

Integrity is a quality people always work toward, Father Hemrick thinks. There is no point in life when people simply can sit back, deciding they have once and for all fulfilled integrity's demands.

A person is bound to encounter demands never met before and to experience needs never felt before. As this occurs, a person will be challenged in new and unexpected ways to act as a person of integrity.

### SECOND HELPINGS

"Confession Can Change Your Life" by Father David Knight. Did you ever "think about the morning after in the story of the Prodigal Son," after "the fatted calf is just a pleasant memory?" There's a lot more to the son's leaving "than just an abstract offense against his father. A whole network of relationships with other people had been broken off or altered...there was reconciling to do," Father Knight writes. He goes on to offer suggestions on how the sacrament involves forgiveness as well as reconciliation to repair broken relationships within Christ's body. "Reconciliation means that relationships are clarified and accepted again...to be reconciled with another is to feel you know that person again; you know what to expect of the other, what you can count on." So this sacrament has the potential to make a big impact on daily living, the writer suggests in this 60-page paperback. (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic St., Cincinnati, Ohio, 45210.)

### ...for discussion

1. Imagine that you have been asked to nominate someone for a "Person of Integrity" award. Persons nominated can be living or dead, public figures, saints or ordinary citizens, men, women or children. What person would you nominate? Why?

2. Imagine that someone has suggested you lack integrity. How do you think you would feel? Why do you think people feel so strongly about their personal integrity?

3. What do you consider the most important elements of integrity?

4. In Mercy Sister Prudence Allen's article, what did the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates teach his students about integrity? Was Socrates rewarded for his sterling teaching?