

The shame of failing to fight for educational rights

By Father Paul J. Cuddy
Catholic Courier columnist

The following is excerpted with permission from a November, 1988, editorial in *Columbia, the Knights of Columbus monthly magazine*.

"I don't care if I can't afford a new pair of shoes," Mrs. Emma Black, a widowed factory worker from Chicago told *The New York Times*. "I'll get that money for Catholic school somehow." She was explaining that she was willing to sacrifice to send her son, Tirrell, to Our Lady of the West Side School in Chicago. She must raise \$700 a year for tuition.

Mrs. Black is a Baptist. At Our Lady, each class day begins with prayer, and Tirrell must take religion class and attend Mass. *The Times* asked if this bothered her. Mrs. Black said that with the public schools held hostage to drugs, guns and gang violence, the last thing a parent worries about is "what a child might hear in a church pew."

Mrs. Black knows that if Tirrell is going to escape the inner city, he must have a good education. She also knows that nearly two-thirds of the students who graduate

from Chicago's inner-city Catholic schools go on to college. She knows that her son would be five times more likely to quit school in the public system than he is in the Catholic system.

So Mrs. Black sacrifices to come up with tuition payments. Her struggle is even greater than it should be because she must pay twice for Tirrell's education: once through tuition, and again through public taxes. Tirrell Black may not enjoy tax-funded educational benefits because his mother chose to send him to a non-government school.

This society penalizes Mrs. Black for fully exercising her constitutionally-guaranteed right to religious freedom by choosing the education her son will receive. This is absolute injustice. And as is usually true, the burden of this injustice falls most heavily on the shoulders of those who can least afford to pay the penalty.

The irony is that this situation is perpetrated by powerful secular interests that seem to think that religion, particularly Catholicism is far more hazardous to America's children than are the drugs and

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violence that haunt the public schools. Hence, they scream "unconstitutional" at every suggestion that parents who choose non-government schools for their children have a right to enjoy educational benefits purchased with their own tax dollars.

Will there ever be justice for Mrs. Black and others like her? Will she ever be able to choose a non-governmental school for her son without paying a financial penalty for her choice?

That will only come when Americans stand up and fight for it, when they demand it of their elected officials. And now is the time to start.

The above account from *Columbia* monthly magazine recalled an incident. In 1944, shortly after D Day in World War II, I was stationed with the 9th Air Force near Cambridge, England. One day I went to Cambridge and sought out the only Catholic school in the city. The teachers were all

laymen, not religious sisters or brothers. The headmaster showed me around. "How do you finance the school?" I asked.

"The institution has to put up the building and the facilities," he explained. "Then the government pays for teachers and maintenance of the school."

With complete stupidity I said: "Oh, in the States we don't bother with that. Our people take care of the school completely."

The Headmaster glared at me and said: "In the first place, we couldn't afford it. And in the second place, don't you believe in fighting for your rights?"

Because we have not fought for our rights, Mrs. Black is making a great sacrifice to give the best education possible for her son, Tirrell. Praise her. And let us blush for ourselves who have allowed ourselves to be doubly taxed to give our children that which is theirs by right.

The Good Shepherd leads us by example, not force

A WORD FOR SUNDAY



By Father Albert Shamon
Catholic Courier columnist

Sunday readings: (R3) John 10:27-30; (R1) Acts 13:14, 43-52; (R2) Revelation 7:9, 14-17.

The smaller the excerpt, the more important the context. Sunday's Gospel is only four verses — the conclusion of the discourse on the Good Shepherd. The focus, however, is not on the Good Shepherd, but on the sheep.

As sheep belonging to the Shepherd, we are invited to realize that we are protected, cared for and given life. We are invited to become aware that we have been created by love, have been known and loved forever. We are invited to follow the Shepherd who is one with the Father and who can thus bring us to the green pastures of eternal life.

But echoing throughout all of Sunday's readings is the fearful possibility that we all can choose not to follow the Good Shepherd.

Paul, as was his custom, preached first to the Jews. But when they rejected his good news, he turned to the gentiles. John speaks of those who had survived the great period of trial and were shepherded to the

springs of life-giving water. Many did not survive. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice ... they follow me." That was the eye of a storm. For just after these words, John says that some of the Jews reached for rocks to stone Him.

There will always be those who hear His voice and those who will not listen. For there is one gift God has given us; and He will not take it back till death. It is our free will!

Our Lady at Medjugorje plays again and again on this theme of free will. "Without you," she said, "the Lord cannot realize what He wishes. The Lord has given each one a free will, and you can dispose of it" (Jan. 30, 1986).

"I cannot deprive you of your free will" (Aug. 7, 1986).

"I wish to guide you everyday, more deeply into prayer — but I cannot force you" (Aug. 14, 1986).

Of the group she is guiding in mystical prayer, Our Lady said one day, "I cannot talk to you, your hearts are closed."

Thus, every one of Our Lady's messages at Medjugorje begin with "I invite you." Invitation demands a free-will response. The Gospel is an invitation. So there are those who respond and those who do not, as in the three readings.

Those who respond to the Good Shepherd and Our Lady are those who act here and now on what they hear. What would have happened if Mary did not respond to the angel at the moment of the Annunciation? Or if Joseph did not take Mary and

her child and flee into Egypt the very night the angel warned him? Or if St. Francis of Assisi did not immediately act on the words of Jesus, "Go rebuild my church"?

For over eight years, Our Lady has been urging us to make a decision for God and for love and against Satan. You must decide for God, she says, else you decide for Satan. For you cannot drive in neutral. You must decide! You must decide to go to monthly confession, to pray the rosary daily, to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays as best you can.

We must beware lest our hearts be hardened, like footpaths, through constantly shrugging off the messages of God and His mother; lest we become superficial, like rocky ground, through a false sense of being with it; lest we choke off the word by a naturalism that relies solely on human endeavor.

Another response to the words of the Good Shepherd is to become shepherds

ourselves: to help others in stormy weather.

Jesus said that where two or three gather in his name, there he is in their midst. Why two or three? Why not one?

Because, as Qoheleth put it, "Two are better than one ... If one falls the other will lift up his companion. Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

People who say, "Jesus, yes. The Church, no," do not understand the Gospel. Jesus established the church to be a support community, a family, whereby we can help and be helped, pray for and be prayed for, encourage others and be encouraged.

He said, "By this shall all know you are my sheep, if you love one another as I have loved you."

"See how these Christians love one another" has always been a witness of the church in an unloving world.



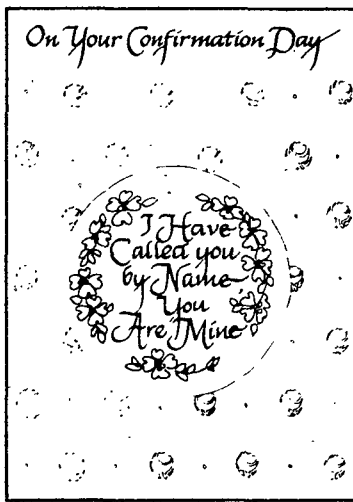
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