

# Traveling backward is the stuff of slapstick comedy

By Father Richard C. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Automobiles have several different gears, depending upon the model. Since all cars are designed for transportation, however, the most commonly used gear is "drive."

Nevertheless, trying to operate a car without a "reverse" gear would challenge the ingenuity of even the most experienced driver. In any event, a car that can't back up is a car that won't pass its next safety inspection.

On the other hand, cars that can operate only in "reverse" are the stuff of comedy films. An open automobile, racing backwards out of control, zigzagging through honking traffic and horrified pedestrians, is one of the oldest sight-gags in the movie business.

Many Catholics have the disturbing sensation these days of riding in a car whose gears have somehow been locked in "reverse." The landscape seems to be racing by them now in the opposite direction. Forgotten scenery, viewed miles and miles back, is suddenly reappearing. For such passengers there is a sense of disorientation, dizziness, and growing panic.

The sensation first arose nearly 10 years ago with an aggressive and highly publicized crackdown on some of the church's leading theologians: Hans Kung, Edward

Schillebeeckx, Leonardo Boff, and, most recently, Charles Curran.

The very same phenomenon had occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. Only the names were different: Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, M.J. Chehu, Karl Rahner, and John Courtney Murray.

Today the disciplining agency has a new name: the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Then it was simply called the Holy Office.

Vatican II had brought the Holy Office's campaign against theologians to an end — once and for all, many naively concluded.

The fateful day came on November 8, 1963, when Cardinal Joseph Frings of Cologne, West Germany, said plainly in St. Peter's Basilica what many had been saying privately for years; namely, that the procedures of the Holy Office were "out of harmony with modern times, were a source of harm to the faithful and of scandal to those outside the church."

"No Roman congregation," Cardinal Frings continued, "should have the authority to accuse, judge and condemn an individual who has had no opportunity to defend himself."

The ecclesiastical gears were clearly set in "drive" then.

As we continue now in what seems to be reverse motion, however, we pass other,

once familiar landmarks: the publication of new professions of faith and loyalty oaths, once common in the virulently anti-Modernist atmosphere of the pre-Vatican II era.

If imposed, these oaths would require all those entering upon a church office, including a professorship in theology, to accept everything taught by the magisterium, without distinction, "even if they proclaim those teachings in an act that is not definitive."

If the gears are, in fact, stuck temporarily in "reverse," should we expect as well a restoration of the Index of Forbidden Books, complete with locked library rooms and assorted canonical penalties?

Will Catholic ecumenists be forbidden once again, as they were in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to attend meetings of the World Council of Churches and to engage in formal dialogue with non-Catholic representatives?

If our imaginary auto should pick up speed in its reverse course, will we see again the secret spy networks that were created immediately after the official condemnations of Modernism during the pon-



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tificate of Pius X?

After that, were we to continue a backward course over the very same road we've been traveling upon since the Middle Ages, should we expect perhaps a late-20th century version of the Inquisition, complete with rack, tower, and stake?

Frivolous? To be sure. But where exactly will the present reverse course end? At what point will controls on dissident thought and behavior be deemed sufficient to guarantee purity of faith and morals? When will internal security be determined to have been fully and finally achieved?

A car in good working order needs a "reverse" gear to back out of a garage or out of a parking space. But a car that travels only in reverse is the stuff of slapstick comedy.

# Passover celebration recalls Jews' liberation from slavery

By Cindy Bassett  
Catholic Courier columnist

"Why do the Jewish people celebrate the holiday called 'Passover'?" the young boy asked his father.

"It is to commemorate the night that God freed them from their bondage as Pharaoh's slaves," his father replied. "On that night, God sent an Angel of Death to pass through Egypt and kill every first born, both human and animal. The Hebrews had placed a special mark on the doors of their houses. When the angel saw this sign, he 'passed over' their homes and they were spared this terrible punishment."

"Why would God punish them?" the child asked.

"Let's start at the beginning of the story," his father said. "Nearly 3,000 years ago, a cruel king came to rule in Egypt. When this Pharaoh saw so many Hebrews living there, he feared that they would join together and overthrow him. So he and every Pharaoh after him forced the Hebrews to become slaves and work long and hard at building cities and storehouses."

"The Hebrews cried out to God to help them. And one day, God appointed Moses to lead them out of Egypt to a new country that would be their own."

"The Promised Land," the boy chimed in.

"Right," continued his father, "but it was not an easy job that God had given Moses to do. He took his brother, Aaron, and together they went before Pharaoh and stated: 'The Lord God says, let my people go.'"

"Not only did Pharaoh say no, but God hardened his heart and he made the Hebrews work even harder. He wouldn't even give them a day off to go and worship God in the desert."

"Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart if he wanted the Hebrews to leave Egypt?" the boy asked.

"The Egyptians did not believe in the one true God. Instead, they worshipped many false gods. They were going to be shown the power and might of God," the father replied.

"So God inflicted many plagues upon Egypt. First, he turned the Nile River into blood. Then there were plagues of frogs, gnats and hail. Even though Pharaoh prayed to his god to remove the plague, nothing happened.



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"Each time God sent another plague, Pharaoh promised that if Moses would ask God to remove it, he would let the Hebrews leave Egypt. But as soon as Moses had done so, Pharaoh went back on his word."

"Meanwhile, in nearby Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, not one plague occurred. Not even knowing this was enough to change Pharaoh's mind. The 10th and very last plague, the one remembered at Passover, struck at Pharaoh's heart."

"Just before God sent the final plague, Moses called all of the Hebrew leaders together and instructed them: 'Every household is to take a young lamb without blemish and sacrifice it to the Lord. Take some of the animal's blood and smear it on your doorposts and over the top of your doors as a sign that God's people live in this house. Pack your belongings and make ready to leave because this will be your last meal as a slave in Egypt. You are to roast the lamb with bitter herbs. Eat the meal with unleavened bread. There is no time to wait for regular bread to rise. Eat the meal with your shoes on and walking stick in hand. Be ready for my signal.'"

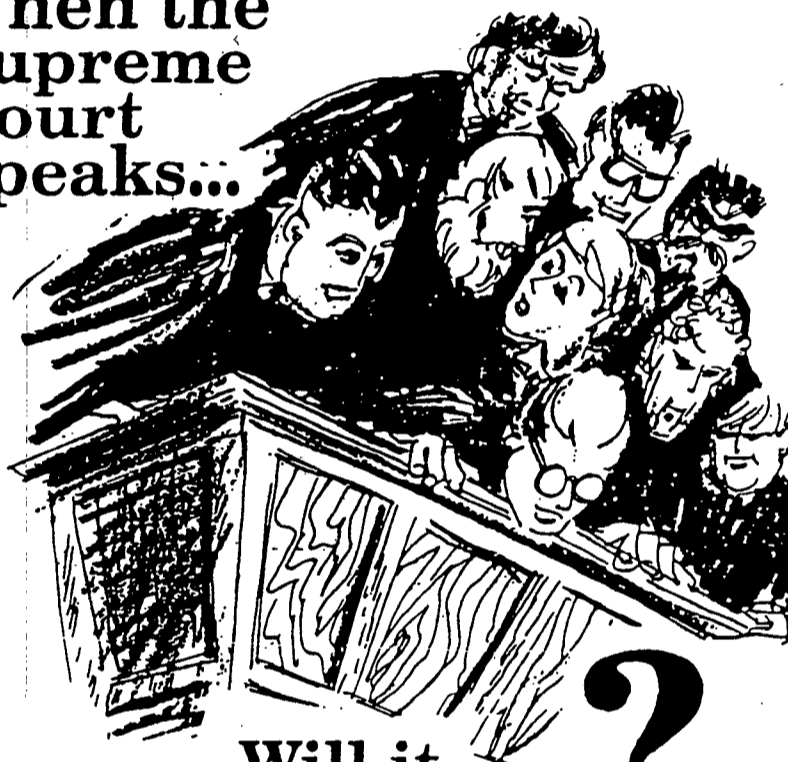
"At midnight, the Angel of Death passed through Egypt. From the lowliest Egyptian servant to Pharaoh himself, not a single household, except for those of the Hebrews, was spared. Pharaoh's own son and heir to the throne died that night."

A loud wailing was heard all over the land. At last Pharaoh relented. With Moses as their leader, the Hebrews left Egypt after 430 years of slavery," the father concluded. "Since that day, the Jewish people have celebrated Passover. It is a time dedicated to God for freeing them from their bondage and leading them to the Promised Land."

Scripture reference: the plagues, Exodus: Chapters 7-10; Passover, Exodus: Chapters 11-12.

Meditation: Jesus is the new Passover Lamb, who by his death, freed us from our slavery to sin, and gave us a new kingdom where we will live forever.

# When the Supreme Court Speaks...



## Will it Speak for the Unborn

Legal protection has been denied the unborn child for the past 16 years—4,000 die in the womb each day—170 an hour—killed by abortion.

FINALLY, the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to take up a Missouri law which, in part, states

that life begins at conception, bans abortions at public hospitals, & imposes additional restrictions on abortions & funding them in Missouri.

A ruling on this case (Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services) is possible by this summer!

Write to all of the Supreme Court Justices—today!

WRITE TODAY!

Sample Letter:

Dear Justice (last name),

In reviewing the Missouri abortion case, I strongly urge you to recognize the undisputed medical and technical evidence proving the humanity of the unborn child. Please render a decision which will restore legal protection to the pre-born stage of all human life!

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist  
Justice Harry A. Blackmun  
Justice William J. Brennan  
Justice Antho. Kennedy  
Justice Thurgood Marshall  
Justice Sandra Day O'Connor  
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