

# Social teachings must apply to church

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

People often say, "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." I'd add to those certainties "anniversary celebrations."

May 15, 1991, will mark the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of the Working Person").

It is a document generally acknowledged as the first in a long line of major Catholic teachings on the so-called social question, the most recent of which is Pope John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("The Social Concern of the Church").

One can safely predict that, throughout the year 1991, ecclesiastical and academic institutions alike will sponsor numerous special lectures, conferences, symposia and workshops, and that individual scholars, journalists and church ministers will generate a thick stack of articles and books on the evolution of official Catholic teaching concerning economic and social justice, human rights and peace.

Those of a more liberal or progressive orientation will applaud the wisdom of the teaching as expressed in papal encyclicals, council documents, synodal statements and national episcopal pronouncements, and will wonder, with some measure of impatience, when those teachings will at long last be fully implemented in the realms of government and business.

Others of a more conservative or neo-conservative orientation will offer selective praise, singling out those aspects of the teaching that conform with their own social, political and economic interests, while ignoring or explaining away elements that challenge those interests.

Still others will seek to identify areas in the teaching that require further development. This third group may have the most to contribute to the forward movement of Catholic social doctrine.

I should suggest, two years in advance of all these anniversary events, that the most pressing need for development is in the forging of a stronger link between the world and the church.

Specifically, Catholic social teaching must be applied to the government and business of the church itself, as well as to the world of government and business outside the church.

In almost 100 years of official Catholic teaching on the social question, only two documents by my count have made an explicit connection between the practice of justice outside the church and the practice of justice inside the church.

They are the Third International Synod of Bishops' *Iustitia in Mundo* ("Justice in the World"), issued in 1971, and the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," issued in 1986. The latter

document is directly dependent upon the former.

Chapter III of the synodal document "Justice in the World" is devoted entirely to the practice of justice inside the church. "While the Church is bound to give witness to justice," the synod declared, "it recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and lifestyle found within the Church itself.

"Within the Church rights must be preserved. No one should be deprived of his or her ordinary rights because he or she is associated with the Church in one way or another."

Fifteen years later the U.S. Catholic bishops made the same connection, but even more explicitly and in a more detailed fashion.

"On the parish and diocesan level, through its agencies and institutions, the church employs many people; it has investments; it has extensive properties for worship and mission. All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the church and its agencies and institutions; indeed the church should be exemplary."

At that point in the text, the bishops cite the synodal document of 1971. In the remainder of the section, they apply the prin-



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ciple to wages and benefits for church employees, the right of church workers to bargain collectively and to form labor unions, the use of church property, ecclesiastical investment policies, and the like.

But as remarkable as these two documents are in this regard, they stand alone in a long and growing body of teachings related to justice.

The deficiency is not a minor one. As Nat Hentoff points out in his otherwise sympathetic profile of New York's Cardinal John J. O'Connor, when the church's internal practices conflict with its external pronouncements, a credibility problem arises.

"Cardinal O'Connor does not seem to understand that a Church seen as hostile to nearly all independent theological thinking within will not be trusted as a source of independent thinkers able to deal with the social concerns of the Church" (*John Cardinal O'Connor*, Scribners, 1988, p. 7).

The church must practice what it preaches because it is sacramental in nature. What the church does inside must be consistent with what the Church asks others to do outside.

# Apostles witness and perform miracles through Christ's power

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"John, I think that we should leave Jerusalem soon," Peter said as the two men walked toward the temple one afternoon.

"Why now? Every day we are gaining more followers for the Church," John replied.

"I suppose I feel this way because I keep remembering Jesus' command to us about going out to all of the nations of the world and witnessing to them," Peter answered.

"Perhaps you are right, but there are opportunities to witness everywhere," John said. "Even from one tiny seed, a tree can grow in time. All that we must do is pray, and the Spirit will guide us."

The two apostles walked the rest of the way in silence. They crossed the courtyard in front of the temple and were just about to enter when they heard someone calling to them.

"Please don't pass me by," a man cried. "Even a small coin will do."

The plea had come from a beggar who was lying near the Beautiful Gate.

"If only I could work like everyone else, I wouldn't have to rely on the kindness of strangers," he told them. "But I haven't walked a single step since the day I was



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born."

"I'm so sorry," John said to him, "but we have no money to give you."

"Yes, although we cannot give you what you ask for, we do have something much greater to offer you," Peter added. "In the name of Jesus Christ, I tell you to get up and walk!"

The beggar was so overwhelmed by Peter's command that he continued to sit motionless. It wasn't until Peter grabbed his hand and pulled him up that the beggar realized that a great miracle had occurred. At first, he was a bit unsteady like a newborn colt testing his legs. Then he began to jump and leap with joy, and he bolted into the temple to find the friends who had brought him there.

Many people had been in the temple and, within a few minutes, a large crowd rushed out to where Peter and John were still standing.

"How did this happen?" they asked the two apostles.

"This miracle was not accomplished by our power," Peter began. "It was through Jesus Christ, God's own Son, that this man now walks."

"A short time ago, this same Jesus was rejected by our own people and turned over to the Romans to die on a cross," Peter continued. "But this was all part of God's plan and after three days, Jesus rose from the dead. By this great miracle, he conquered both sin and death forever."

"Now anyone who chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah can become one of his followers. There is forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who do," Peter concluded.

The crowd was stunned to silence. Then from the temple, shouting was heard.

"Arrest those two men! They are preaching lies!" the temple priests yelled as they brought the temple police to the courtyard to remove Peter and John.

But no matter what the priests told the people that day, they could not make them forget the miracle that had occurred. Many of the people who saw it and heard Peter decided to become followers of Jesus.

The Jewish Council reprimanded Peter and John, ordering them to stop preaching about Jesus. But as soon as they were released, they continued to witness to others all over the region and the new church continued to grow.

**Scripture Reference:** Acts, Chapter 3-4:22.

**Meditation:** As Christians, we are all called to be witnesses to the saving power of Jesus Christ in our own lives.

## Pioneer SSJ lawyer to discuss practice

The latest in the Come and See programs sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester will take place at the Main West Attorneys at Law, Inc., 603 Main St. W., Rochester, on Wednesday, June 14, at 5 p.m.

The law office, which was established in 1988 by Sister Jamesine Riley, Esq., is one of the newest ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Riley and her law partner, Warren E. White, Esq., operate the private, not-for-profit corporation designed to serve men and women who cannot afford to hire a private attorney, and who do not

qualify for the free assistance of existing public interest legal agencies.

During the program, Sister Riley will discuss her law practice for the working poor in the context of being a woman religious.

The program will be followed by supper and discussion at Medaille House, 48 Peck St., Rochester at 6:30 p.m.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester are a non-profit congregation of women religious working in a spirit of service for others since 1854.

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Contact Marie Wood at *Adieu* TRAVEL 335-2222

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