

Commonweal challenges 'choice' mentality

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Much to its credit, *Commonweal* magazine has been publishing since last August a series of balanced, insightful and challenging editorials on the subject of abortion.

Rarely has a liberal publication (whose editor, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, happens to be a woman) so directly and so incisively taken on the single-issue version of the pro-choice position as espoused, for example, by the National Organization for Women and its current president, Molly Yard, and by the National Abortion Rights Action League.

"In the natural course of things," *Com-*

monweal's editorial of February 23 declares, "the more we know about life in the womb, the more seriously we view the act of abortion. These groups (N.O.W. and NARAL) ask us to resist that knowledge, to trivialize abortion, to numb our consciences with rhetorical (N)ovocain.

"Having positioned themselves as the more or less official voices of the women's movement, they have brought a disciplined passion to the task of redefining what is at issue.

"The issue is not the nature of abortion, nor is it the societal compact that denies millions of women stable homes, adequate nurturance, decent education, opportunity, a sense of self, knowledge of and respect

for their bodies. The issue is 'choice.'

"And increasingly, it's a one-way choice; the 'or not,' as in 'whether or not to have an abortion,' has disappeared into a black hole ...

"Real freedom of choice with respect to abortion," *Commonweal's* editorial continues, "would entail access to objective data about the human developmental process; nondirective counselling; financial assistance and other means of making alternative decisions possible.

"N.O.W. and NARAL resist such measures in state legislatures. Depicting themselves as defenders of choice, they are in fact manipulators of choice and promoters of abortion."



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The *Commonweal* editorial becomes even stronger. It accuses N.O.W., NARAL and their allies of rejecting the principle that "rights and responsibilities mutually reinforce and sustain one another."

These groups argue that abortion is an absolute and unqualified right "because women are and always will be victims. Victims are exempt from the reciprocity that makes the interplay of rights and responsibilities possible. ...

"Victims need not be morally responsible. Victims are beyond the law. Is this what the women's movement is to become?"

The *Commonweal* editorial does not spare the other side, particularly certain segments of the Catholic hierarchy.

The Catholic Church's credibility on sex-related morality was hurt, first of all, by the "fall-into-line" response to *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI's 1968 birth-control encyclical) which the Vatican exacted from most of the world's bishops.

Secondly, the church's moral teachings affecting women are less persuasive because of the built-in gender bias in its command-and-control structure.

Thirdly, the church has lost respect through the words and actions of a few bishops, including "a simplistic readiness ... to endorse a single-issue politics as an acceptable means of resisting the abortion tide."

Commonweal sensibly concludes that "this debate should be carried on not solely or primarily by church leaders, particularly when they choose to speak 'prophetically' rather than persuasively; or by advocacy groups bent solely on results."

This is a task, the editorial concludes, that belongs to a wider segment of the citizenry — to people "willing to work toward a consensus favoring compromise, to settle for half a loaf rather than to insist on having their particular orthodoxy made into the law of the land."

It was to this particular challenge that New York's Gov. Mario Cuomo responded in a lengthy letter published in the magazine's March 23 issue.

More about the Cuomo reply next week.

High priests spread lie discounting resurrection

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Annas made no pretense to hide his annoyance as he entered the chamber of his son-in-law, the high priest.

"Caiaphas, I would have thought that you would have been anxious to put this business of Jesus behind you. After all, it was you who said, 'Better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'"

"I did say that," Caiaphas replied, "but ..."

"Then it is finished," Annas interrupted. "Why can't you let this matter die with Jesus?"

"Because it is not finished!" Caiaphas said, his face flushed with anger. "I am not a foolish man, and I would have been content to forget all about Jesus. But another problem has developed."

"A problem?"

"Before his death, Jesus claimed to his followers that he would rise on the third day," Caiaphas explained. "I asked Pilate to post his own Roman guards at the tomb of Jesus in an effort to prevent any trickery from his followers."

"So what is the problem?" Annas asked.



THE BIBLE CORNER

"The body of Jesus is missing," Caiaphas answered.

"Impossible! These Roman guards must have abandoned their post or fallen asleep."

"I have heard a far different story from them both," Caiaphas continued. "At least they came directly here after the incident. Not even their commanding officer knows of it yet. You are the first one I called."

"I would like to hear this tale for myself," Annas said. "Bring them in."

It surprised even Annas to see the two Roman guards so visibly shaken. They usually were stoic in their duties and not given to showing emotion.

"Well, what have you to say?" Annas asked, looking from one to another.

"Early this morning, some women came to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus," one of the soldiers began.

"We saw no reason to deny them," the other guard continued. "I went with them. But before we had even reached the tomb, the earth began to shake so violently that I fell to the ground."

"What happened to the women?" Annas asked.

"I could not see. There was a light so brilliant that I was blinded for a few moments," the guard continued.

"I heard someone speak from the light," his companion added. "The words were very clear: 'I know you are looking for Jesus, but he is not here. He has gone to Galilee ahead of you.' Then the light vanished."

"Did you see anyone or anything after that?" Annas asked pointedly.

"Nothing. Except for the linen wrappings in the tomb that had been discarded," the soldier answered.

His last remark brought a faint smile to Annas' face as he reiterated "Then, as you said, you saw nothing." He looked from one soldier to the other and repeated, "Nothing."

Then, as Annas turned to Caiaphas, he added, "And we are prepared to reward you for your faithfulness to this story of nothing."

The Roman soldiers accepted a large sum of money to spread a story throughout the region. They told everyone that they had fallen asleep, and that some followers of Jesus must have come during the night to steal the body. This story is still believed by some people today.

Scripture reference: Matthew 28:1-15; John 11:49.

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"BUT THE COMFORTER, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you!"
JOHN 14:26

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