

# Feature fosters spate of positive responses

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Two months ago the *Chicago Tribune* did a feature story on me that elicited a substantial amount of mail. At this writing, 95 percent of it has been positive, and strongly so.

That has surprised me as much as it may surprise some of you, because my files have been bulging for years with negative letters, many of them harsh and vituperative, a few of them obscene.

But somehow the *Tribune* piece struck a chord with many Catholics whose sentiments and concerns I had given expression to.

I was quoted in the article as saying that I try "to speak for the millions of American Catholics who don't go along with this hard-line approach ... From a priestly point of view, I speak for them so they will

not lose heart ... I say to them you don't have to obey or get out. That summarizes my ministry."

Significantly, much of the mail came from women, about whom I had said: "The alienation of women is the most serious problem the Catholic Church faces today." They are angry with the hierarchy "because these men come across as being out of touch with what is going on with the experience of women."

At the urging of some of my friends and colleagues at the University of Notre Dame, I'm going to share some of the mail with you this week and next — if for no other reason than to let some of you know that there are many others out there like you.

From an 83-year-old woman in Arlington Heights, Ill.: "I have reached that happy time of my life when my convictions

are based on conformity with what I understand are (the church's) teachings and the example of Christ — not on fear of what an excommunication-brandishing (cardinal or priest) may decree."

A 67-year-old woman with six children from Oak Park, Ill., who attended Catholic grammar school and college asked: "How much more God-like is the Church of today since beloved John XXIII and Vatican II? We should all pray for those poor, rigid people who are so afraid of change and that feared four-letter word — Love. Please keep up the good work and know that certainly among my long-time Catholic friends, your beliefs are ours."

From a young anti-abortion woman in Aurora, Ill., troubled by the activism of certain Catholic bishops on the abortion issue: "I was raised (in the late 1960s and early 1970s) to believe that I can decide what is



right and wrong for myself. I don't need anyone to put a restriction on that right in the name of religion.

"Don't misunderstand me. I am, and want to remain, a Catholic. I just would like to see the Catholic Church allow its (members) to experience the freedom of self-expression. It is our human right to be allowed to express our thoughts and feelings on all subjects regardless of whether or not the Vatican agrees with us."

From a teacher in Waukegan, Ill.: "Religion if it is to be embraced totally must be a way of life. Your attitude toward Catholicism is real and practical, accepting and loving. I agree, as in any organization there must be authority to maintain order. But we don't have to run scared of that authority. We should learn from it. But as a teacher I know you don't learn from someone of whom you are afraid."

From a woman in Chicago: "This is a letter of thanks for speaking out for the Church I always knew, a Church of peace and caring and forgiveness. I am so embarrassed by the present state of the Catholic Church — the bully pulpit, the threats (and acts) of excommunication, the treatment of gays and married priests. You give me hope that one day we'll return to the kind of Church I remember. (That's not to say I haven't found such a parish here in Chicago. I have, but it took a lot of leg work)."

From an Illinois state senator, resentful of the pressures brought upon her by certain members of the hierarchy who know little about politics and apparently less about the complexities of medical ethics: "We are writing law in uncharted areas because medical technology has created a world never before witnessed in all of civilization."

"Fortunately or unfortunately, the law on these matters will be written by people just like me rather than eminent theologians or popes or patriarchs or whatever. By design or by default, it will fall to us ordinary folks who represent ordinary folks to handle this situation and to make the calls necessary for humankind to go forward ..."

"Please, do not allow the Church to kick people like me out as we wish to serve God in the best and often only way we know how."

More next week.

## Haman's plan of revenge foiled as King Xerxes honors Mordecai

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"Haman, why are you still up?" his wife, Zeresh, called to him.

"I am too angry to sleep," Haman replied sullenly. "There can be no peace for me while that swine, Mordecai, is alive. He insulted me again today at the palace gate by refusing to kneel to me as I passed."

"And you have written a law to deal with this Mordecai," Zeresh said. "Soon all of the Jews in the entire kingdom will be killed."

"It can't be soon enough for me," Haman scoffed. "I must think of a way to disgrace Mordecai publicly to pay him back for his lack of respect for me."

"I have an idea. Why don't you have

Mordecai hanged in the city square?" Zeresh asked. "Go to King Xerxes tomorrow and ask him for permission to have a gallows built."

"A splendid idea!" Haman said as his mood brightened. "Then everyone can see what happens to those who do not honor me as they should. I shall go see the king first thing in the morning. Tomorrow evening I can really enjoy myself at Queen Esther's banquet."

Haman was not the only person suffering from insomnia that night. "Your majesty, perhaps if you read something, it will make your eyes heavy with sleep," the king's servant suggested.

"All right, bring me the official records of my kingdom," King Xerxes told him.

When Haman arrived the next morning, the king was still reading over the events of his reign.

"Ah, Haman, I've discovered an unsung hero," King Xerxes said as he greeted him. "Tell me, what should I do to honor a man who has served me so well in my kingdom?"

Haman smiled broadly, thinking that the king was talking about him. In addition to



getting rid of Mordecai, Haman thought, he would also receive accolades from the king.

King Xerxes interrupted his daydream. "Well, Haman, any ideas?" the king asked.

"Yes, I think you should bring your own royal robes for this man to wear. Place him on a royal horse and appoint someone to take him through all of the city streets. As he goes, have the servant proclaim: 'This is the reward for the man who has honored his king by his actions!'"

"Excellent, Haman!" the king said. "Did you know that my gatekeeper, Mordecai, foiled an attempt on my life by two of my own officials a few years ago? He has never been rewarded. Go now and do as you have suggested."

It was a day filled with bitterness for Haman. The other officials who stood daily with Mordecai at the palace gate regarded Haman as if he had lost his mind.

As soon as his ordeal was over, Haman rushed home and went directly to bed. He was so humiliated that he fell into a deep sleep.

It took his wife's vigorous shaking for several minutes to wake him. "Get up Haman. Have you forgotten about Queen Esther's banquet? King Xerxes has sent his officials to bring you to the palace!"

Haman's ordeal had just begun.

Scripture reference: Book of Esther, Chapter 5:9-6.

Meditation: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth." (Psalm 34:15-16).



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