

# Moral law applies to everyone

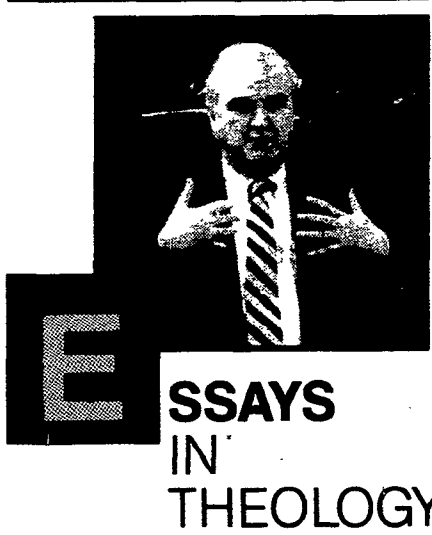
By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Through most of September and October, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was embroiled in a turbulent controversy about abortion and the separation of church and state. The conflict arose from Gov. William Weld's proposal to make his state's abortion laws the most liberal in the nation.

*Boston Globe* columnist David Nyhan saw the governor's move as a politically inspired diversionary tactic. Because of Gov. Weld's opposition to government spending on welfare and education, Nyhan pointed out Oct. 8, the governor was beginning to lose the support of many women who had helped elect him.

According to Nyhan's theory, Gov. Weld concluded that the only way to soften their anger against him over budget cuts was to divert their attention. How? By escalating the abortion debate. Why now? "Because the specter of Clarence Thomas helping slam shut the door on legal abortion has millions of American women upset."

Although Gov. Weld's legislative package was "mainly symbolic," Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law nevertheless "swallowed the bait." By denouncing the governor and threatening Catholic politicians — who constitute two-thirds of the



state's legislators — the cardinal played into Weld's hands, Nyhan observed.

Suddenly the issue isn't how Gov. Weld is hammering the poor or shortchanging education. "Here's the politician," Nyhan observed, "who's for death via injection for teen-age convicts standing up for women's rights. And winning political points."

"Thanks to the cardinal's eagerness to engage Weld," Nyhan continued, "the issue now is: Can any Catholic get re-elected unless he or she is dutifully anti-abortion?"

The controversy is unfortunate, but it does offer three lessons.

The first has to do with Cardinal Law's assertion that "to be pro-choice is to be pro-abortion" (*Boston Globe*, Oct. 4). When polled, at least 54 percent of the Catholic legislators disagreed with him.

While many in the pro-choice movement seem to have no moral problem with abortion — viewing it simply as a medical procedure — many others do oppose abortion on moral grounds. Their difference with the hierarchy, they insist, is political rather than doctrinal.

Furthermore, they detect an element of political inconsistency in the argument that pro-choice equals pro-abortion.

It is well-known, for example, that Cardinal Law is friendly with President George Bush, who supported several pro-choice Republican candidates in the 1990 elections.

I know of no statements indicating that Cardinal Law ever has criticized Bush for this grave moral lapse. If it is truly the case that pro-choice equals pro-abortion, then no politician can be exempt from the church's sternest criticisms. So how can we explain the special treatment given to the president?

A second item: When a state senator from Methuen protested that "we can't legislate morality," morality was once again being confused with religion.

The fact is that we legislate mora-

lity all the time — on civil rights, care of the elderly, assistance for the disabled, spending for armaments, and so forth.

Morality distinguishes between right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust, independently of any religious creed. Morality is rooted in the natural law, which binds everyone.

What the Constitution prohibits is legislation that imposes religious doctrines whose truth or validity cannot be grasped except within a particular faith. The correct formula, therefore, is, "we can't legislate religious doctrine."

Finally, many legislators who properly defended the cardinal's clear right to speak out on abortion also told the *Globe* that "they resented the pressure they felt he was putting on them as Catholics."

That criticism could have been avoided if the Massachusetts bishops' Sept. 19 statement had called on *all men and women of good will* in public life — not just Catholics — "to create a society which guarantees respect for human life."

Which brings us back to the free ride given President Bush. The fact that he is an Episcopalian makes him no less bound by the moral law than are Catholic politicians. And no less exempt from criticism by the hierarchy.

# God shows Hebrews how to rely on Him

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

Early one morning, Aaron came into his brother's tent and told him, "Moses, we've run out of water. In a few more days, the people will die in the desert."

"I don't understand," Moses replied. "We are camped near an oasis. There should be plenty for everybody, including our animals, to drink freely at the spring."

"Not if our enemies have their way," Joshua said.

"What enemies?" "The Amalekites have claimed this oasis as their own," Aaron began. "Not only have they set up guards by it, but we've heard that they are planning to raid our camp soon."

"God did not bring us this far only to let us die. We must fight back against these Amalekites. Go and tell Joshua that I'd like to see him."

Aaron returned a short time later with a young man. Joshua listened to everything that Moses proposed before saying, "Our people have no training to do battle against the Amalekites. On the other hand, these nomads have a long history of brutally contending with their enemies. I fear certain defeat at their hands if we go to war."

Moses waited patiently until Jo-

shua had given all of his arguments against challenging the Amalekites. Then he simply told him, "Joshua, the Lord has chosen you to lead his people in this battle. And so he will give you the means to win, too. Now go and gather together the best men to help you."

When Joshua turned to leave, Moses added one last puzzling thought, "And, Joshua, don't forget to look up."

That same day, Moses accompanied his brother Aaron and Hur up the mountain near the Hebrew camp. From this vantage point, they would have a clear view of the battlefield.

Just before the fighting started, Joshua looked up and saw Moses with both of his arms raised high over his head. In one of his hands, Moses held his staff.

"What are you doing?" Aaron questioned.

"Showing our people who is really fighting this war," Moses explained. "If they put their faith in God, they will win. But if they try to overcome these Amalekites with just their own strength, they will lose."

Moses continued holding his staff overhead until late afternoon. Then his arms became so tired and heavy that he was forced to lower them to his sides.

"I'm worn out," he told his two

companions.

"Moses, try and muster your strength," Hur said. "Look, now the Hebrews are faltering in the war, too."

Moses raised his arms slowly again. But, in a few minutes, no matter how firm his resolve, he felt too weak to continue.

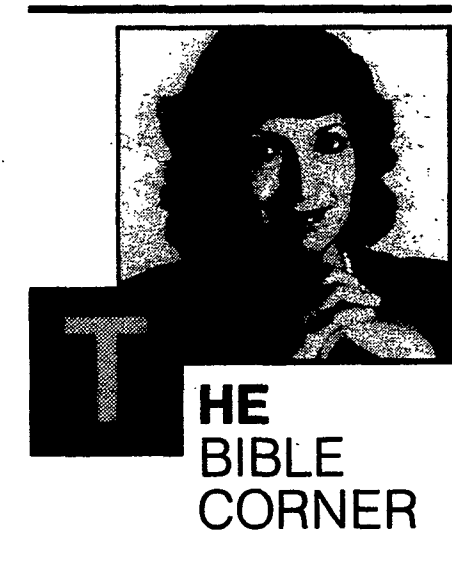
When his brother saw his dilemma, Aaron said, "Wait here, Moses, I have an idea."

Together with Hur, Aaron brought a large rock over to where Moses was standing. "Sit down," he said. Then, turning his attention to Hur, Aaron suggested, "You take one arm and I'll take the other."

Now when the Hebrews looked up from the battlefield, they saw Aaron and Hur supporting Moses' arms high over his head. With their help to steady him, Moses never once changed his stance. By day's end, the Hebrews had defeated the Amalekites.

Before they came down from the mountain, Moses built an altar in thanksgiving to the Lord for their victory. "We will call this place 'The Lord is my Banner' so people will remember that my arms were lifted in faith to God," he told Aaron and Hur. "And with the help of friends," Moses smiled, "the job was made easier."

Afterwards, the Lord told Moses to write everything down on a scroll



so that it would be a permanent record for all generations after they reached the Promised Land.

Scripture Reference: Exodus, Chapter 17:8-15.

Meditation: "Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed. I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 40:10)

"Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one, for the results can be better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

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