

Vicar of Christ or Vicar of Peter?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Which papal title is the more traditional: Vicar of Christ or Vicar of Peter? Many Catholics would unhesitatingly choose the former. They would be wrong.

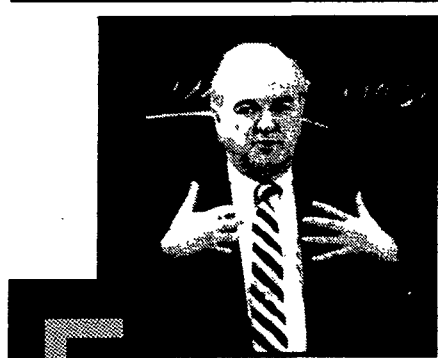
According to French theologian Jean M.R. Tillard, OP, and other Catholic scholars, the title Vicar of Peter first came to be used at the end of the fourth century by Pope Siricius (d.399), and at the Council of Ephesus (431) it was applied to Pope Celestine I.

Thereafter, it was commonly accepted by popes themselves. Thus, Leo the Great (d.461) called himself "the vicar of Peter," but was careful to add, "the blessed apostle Peter does not cease from presiding over his see (of Rome)."

The popes of the fifth and sixth centuries regarded themselves simply as "holding the place" of Peter. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the title remained in use as an ordinary designation of the Bishop of Rome, alongside "vicar of Peter and Paul" and "vicar of the apostolic see."

The title Vicar of Christ also has a long history, but not as a papal title. Cyprian (d.258), for example, used it of those who preside at the Eucharist, and during the Middle Ages the title described the specific mission of all bishops.

Even the Second Vatican Council referred to bishops as "the vicars



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

and ambassadors of Christ," insisting that "they personally exercise (their sacred power) in Christ's name" and not as "vicars of the Roman Pontiff" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.27).

It was not until the pontificate of Eugene III (d.1153) that the title Vicar of Christ was specifically applied to the Bishop of Rome.

This medieval innovation received its strongest push from the highly authoritarian Innocent III (d.1216), who found in the title the basis of his universal power, even over temporal authorities. He wrote: "We, although successors of the prince of the Apostles, are not however, his vicars nor the vicars of any other apostle or other man, but

of Jesus Christ himself."

Robert Bellarmine, SJ, (d. 1621) deeply embedded this notion in the neo-Scholastic theology that dominated Catholic teaching from the period following the Council of Trent until the start of Vatican II.

He incorporated the title into his widely quoted definition of the church: "An assembly of men ... under the authority of lawful pastors and above all of the only vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff."

In spite of the powerful forces against it, the title Vicar of Peter never completely disappeared. In the new missal, for example, the title still introduces the prayer for a departed pope, and both John XXIII and Paul VI used it as well.

It also retained its place in the rite of ordination of a bishop.

This was the question put to every new bishop in the old Roman Pontifical: "Will you show submission and obedience towards the blessed Apostle Peter, to whom through God has been given the power to bind and loose, and to his vicar our Lord Pope (name) and his successors?"

The title, however, was changed in the new Pontifical from Vicar of Peter to "Successor of Peter."

Theologians like Father Tillard have pointed out the risk of confusion in such a change. Peter, after all, fulfilled certain unique functions in the early church which can-

not be handed on to any "successors."

First, because of his and Paul's martyrdoms, Peter is regarded as co-founder of the Church of Rome. No successor can co-found, much less re-found, the Church of Rome.

Secondly, Peter was one of the original Twelve Apostles. To be admitted to the company of apostles, one had to be a "witness to (Jesus') resurrection" (Acts of the Apostles 1:22). No successor can meet that requirement.

Thirdly, Peter and the other apostles will surround the risen and glorified Christ in the heavenly kingdom, where they will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30) and where "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" will serve as the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). Neither could any pope "succeed" to these functions.

If the concept of Petrine succession needs to be carefully qualified, so, too, does the title Vicar of Christ, as applied to the pope.

Otherwise, the use of such a title can lead to the kind of dangerous exaggerations of papal authority to which Innocent III laid claim in the early 13th century.

Vicar of Christ must always be understood in the light of the more traditional title Vicar of Peter. The pope is Vicar of Christ because he is a bishop among bishops. He is Vicar of Peter, he is the Bishop of Rome.

Stealing often rationalized at the office

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Much theft that goes on in the workplace involves more than pinching pens or making unauthorized copies on the copying machine.

Serious stealing is often rationalized by such innocuous business bromides as "gaining a competitive advantage" or "letting the buyer beware," or some other explanation for taking something from someone and giving less in return.

Such activity in the marketplace is not necessarily illegal, but it certainly violates the spirit of the Seventh Commandment: "You shall not steal." Here are a few examples:

- When people or companies or even whole countries engage in unfair competitive practices, they are stealing — first from their competitors, who lose business, profits, and customers; and then from their customers, who will ultimately pay higher prices because of the absence of legitimate competition.

Obviously, defining "unfair" competition is difficult and must be done on a case-by-case basis, but as

one Supreme Court justice remarked about obscenity: "You know it when you see it."

The point of the Seventh Commandment, however, is that each person who tries to follow the Judeo-Christian faith must use a moral — not a legal — yardstick in deciding whether he or she is competing fairly.

- When someone takes the job of a striking worker, the "replacement worker" may be breaking the Seventh Commandment. Two strikes recently — one at Caterpillar in Illinois, and one at the Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation in West Virginia — have showed that the question of taking another person's job no longer appears to pose a moral dilemma for many workers.

Both firms were overwhelmed with applicants when they sought to permanently replace striking workers. It is possible that after much investigation into and agonizing over a specific situation, a person might come to the conclusion that to replace a striking worker would be a moral thing to do. But to do so quickly and easily, without

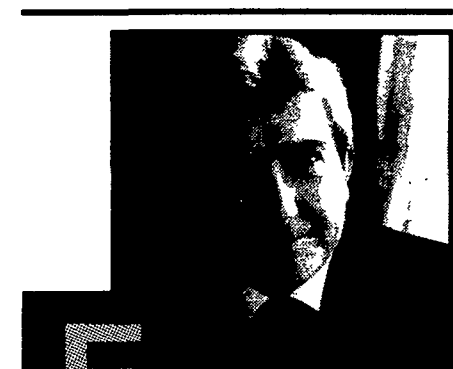
any knowledge of the issues involved or consideration of the moral consequences of one's own actions, is simply stealing — even though it is presently legal.

- When investors buy a company and then proceed to sell off its assets, they too may be guilty of stealing. It might be legal, for example, to deplete the employee pension fund of a purchased firm, but to do so could be wrong.

Eliminating jobs, departments or even whole divisions may be necessary for a company to remain competitive and viable, but weighing the return on investment against the harm done to employees and communities is a moral requisite of the Seventh Commandment.

- When a company pays its top management 100 or 1,000 times the compensation it gives to its lowest-level employees, it may be legal, it may be good business, it may be what the market will bear, but it may not be just. Laws cannot resolve this question, but the Seventh Commandment can help.

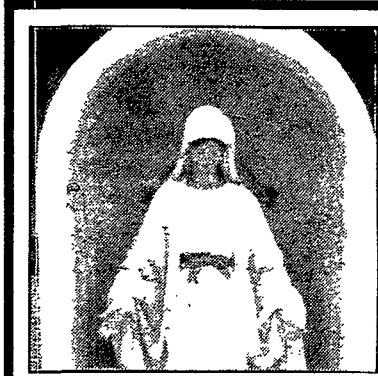
- You can't copyright an idea, but you can steal one. Some in the



FAITH AND WORK

marketplace would call it simply "an idea whose time has come." Yet if somebody comes up with a truly innovative concept in product or marketing, is it right to simply take that idea and run with it — even if no laws are broken in so doing?

Shouldn't Christians be known in the workplace for being honest and bending over backwards to be fair? Or is that merely being naive?



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