

Catholic voters taken for granted

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

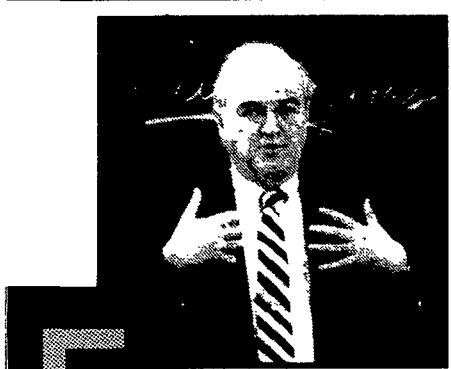
Judging by the summer's national political conventions alone, it would seem that both the Democrats and the Republicans are taking Catholic voters for granted this year.

The Democratic convention in New York City adopted such an extreme pro-choice line that Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey was denied access to the podium to speak against the party's platform plan on abortion.

Although the majority of Americans — including Catholics — are pro-choice on legal grounds but anti-abortion on moral grounds, this distinction was swallowed up in the convention's year-of-the-woman euphoria, reflected in the pro-choice chants, signs, and speeches. ("My name is Anne Richards, and I am pro-choice," was how the Texas governor introduced herself as convention chairwoman.)

But the Democrats are assuming that the economy, not abortion, will be the decisive issue when Catholics enter the voting booth this November. And the Democrats are probably right.

Their strategy may come back to haunt them, however, even if they should win. Somewhere down the road the party leadership and its two Southern Baptist candidates are going to have to improve their lines of communication with a constituency that comprises almost one-quarter of the nation's population.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The Republicans are also taking the Catholic vote for granted this year. By lumping most Catholics with the pro-life religious right, the Republicans, too, assume that their hard-line, no-exceptions platform plank favoring a legal ban on all abortions — even in the cases of rape and incest — will keep their Catholic supporters in tow.

But Catholics aren't stupid. They can see that the Republicans are trying to have it both ways this year: a tough pro-life platform has been softened by some not-so-subtle messages from the White House itself.

First, President Bush told an interviewer for NBC Television that if one of his granddaughters came to him as an adult and said she wanted an abortion, he would argue against it but would ultimately support her.

The president noted that, in the end, the decision would be hers. "Well, who else's — who else's — could it be?"

A few days later, Barbara Bush broke her long public silence on the issue by sending a clearly calculated signal to pro-choice Republicans that there is more sympathy for their position at the White House than they might think.

"I'm not being outspoken or pro or con abortion," she told an interviewer for a national news magazine. "I'm saying abortion should not be in there, either pro or con."

Mrs. Bush added that abortion is a "personal thing," and that "personal things" should be left out of, in my opinion, platforms and conventions.

One notes the silence of some of our most militant pro-life bishops in the face of such remarks. These bishops will not waver in their support for the Republican ticket, granting as many photo-opportunities as it requests, and they will continue to cherish the direct access they have to the White House.

But just consider for a moment what their candidate and his wife are really saying about abortion.

President Bush pointed out that if one of his granddaughters came to him and told him that she was going to kill her unborn child (that's what every abortion is, according to the pro-life movement), he would "put his arm around her" and try to "talk her out of it ... encourage her not to do it."

But if she went ahead with the abortion, he'd "stand by" her. "I'd

love her and help her, lift her up, wipe the tears away, and we'd get back in the game."

An odd way to describe a family discussion about killing an unborn child.

Mrs. Bush's words are even starker. For her, the killing of an unborn child is a "personal thing," and as such it should be left out of platforms and conventions.

For both the Bushes it comes down to a woman's choice. "Well, who else's — who else's could it be?" the president said.

It's a "personal thing," his wife insisted.

Killing an unborn child, that is. Both parties are indeed taking Catholics for granted this year.

The Democrats are convinced that Catholics have nowhere else to go, given the economy's terrible state.

But the Republicans are even more contemptuous of us. They take us for fools, and they are counting on their Republican allies in the hierarchy to run cover for them with the flock.

The president and his wife are pro-choice. They regard the killing of unborn children as a "personal thing." The platform says something else, but everyone knows how meaningless platforms are.

Will Catholic pro-life militants inside and outside the hierarchy vote Republican again this year? Of course, they will. But fewer in the flock are likely to follow their bishops' lead this time around.

And if current trends hold, the White House won't be taking any of their calls after next January.

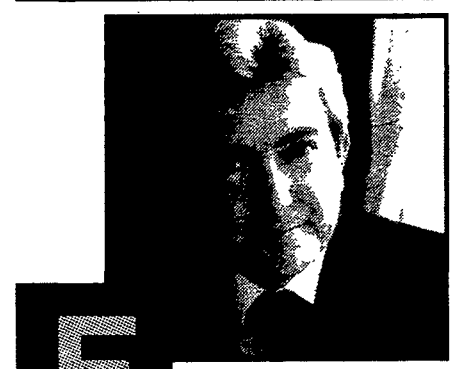
Emotions do belong in the workplace

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Businessman poet: an oxymoron? Many would say yes, but James Autry proves that it is not.

Autry, former chief executive officer of the Meredith Company Magazine Group, is the author of *Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership* (William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1991), a book of essays and poems on the spirituality of business.

"Management is difficult," he said in a recent talk to a group of Christian business executives in Chicago. "It's gut wrenching, hands-on, demanding and frustrating in many



FAITH AND WORK

ways."

To illustrate the difficulty of a manager's task, Autry read from his poem, "What Personnel Handbooks Never Tell You:"

They leave a lot out of personnel handbooks./Dying, for instance./You can find funeral leave/but you can't find dying./You can't find what to do/when a guy you've worked with since you both were pups/looks you in the eye/and says something about hope and chemotherapy./No phrases/no triplicate forms./no rating systems./Seminars won't do it/and it's too late for a new policy on sabbaticals.

"The question I like to ask," Autry continued, "is where did we get all

that tough guy stuff — that somehow we are to keep our emotions out of the workplace, that somehow we are to be drill sergeants with our employees and save all the soft stuff for home and family and friends?"

Business, for Autry, is "a sacred trust" and "an awesome responsibility" that provides grist for his poetry. Here are some lines from "Threads:"

Listen./In every office/you hear the threads/of love and joy and fear and guilt,/the cries for celebration and reassurance,/and somehow you know that connecting those threads/is what you are supposed to do/and business takes care of itself.

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