

New form of scandal given today

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

The word "scandal" is often bandied about without much care for its precise meaning or moral implications.

The word is derived from a Greek word meaning "snare," "trap," or "stumbling block." In its strictest sense, to give scandal is to set a moral trap for someone in order to lead that person into sin. Such scandal is malicious.

In most instances, however, scandal is not deliberately given. Oftentimes, in fact, people are scandalized by words or actions that are good in themselves.

When such scandal is taken by people who lack judgment and humility, the scandal is called pharisaical.

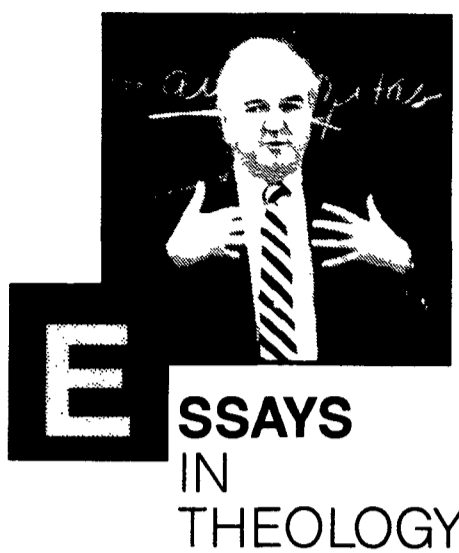
When such scandal is taken by people who lack spiritual maturity or strength of character, it is called the scandal of the weak.

Many of the complaints about scandal one hears in today's church have to do with pharisaical scandal.

Things are spoken, written, and done that are perfectly legitimate in themselves, but they happen to be offensive ("scandalous") to a small group of self-appointed, closed-minded "defenders of the faith," or to the morally narrow-minded and self-righteous.

No one is obliged in conscience to avoid pharisaical scandal. Scandal of the weak is another matter. It is to be avoided whenever and wherever possible.

We should remember, however,



that even the Lord himself gave scandal. When Jesus was presented in the temple, Simeon predicted that he would be a sign of contradiction (Lk. 2:34). And he was.

He crushed the expectations of the Jews for a political messiah, and he infuriated the self-righteous by his conduct and his teaching.

He ate with tax collectors, broke the law by healing on the Sabbath, conversed with prostitutes, and denounced religious authorities in vivid and vehement language.

Jesus knew that he was scandalizing some people by what he was saying and doing, but that did not deter him.

Today, however, there is a new form of scandal given — a type not covered by the traditional categories of the moral theology textbooks and certainly not the type given by Jesus himself.

It is neither pharisaical scandal nor the scandal of the weak, because those who are scandalized are neither self-righteous nor immature.

On the contrary, they are often well-educated and deeply committed church members. Many are, or have been, active in ministry at the parish and diocesan levels.

They know what the Gospel is all about. They are well-versed in the church's teachings on social justice and human rights. They are responsive to the call of the Second Vatican Council to greater lay involvement in the church's life.

These Catholics are scandalized by the actions of bishops, pastors, and other church officials who openly violate the Gospel's spirit and the church's social teachings.

They are scandalized when the church treats its employees more brutally than a profit-making business would, firing them at will, without warning and without recourse.

They are scandalized when a bishop refuses to recognize the natural rights of his Catholic school teachers not only to form a union but also to select whichever bargaining agent they prefer. (The U.S. Catholic bishops explicitly defended the latter right in their 1986 pastoral letter on the economy.)

They are scandalized when a bishop does business with a law firm that advertises itself as "for management only," that takes no employee cases, and that has a reputation among other lawyers as a "tough, labor-busting" law firm.

They are scandalized when

powerless people — almost always women — are driven unwillingly and with much pain from their ministries because their theological and pastoral views are closer to those of the council than to those of a new pastor or bishop, or because their professional and ministerial competencies overshadow those of their clerical employer.

I received a letter from one of these women soon after the publication of my Labor Day column a few weeks ago. She noted that the column had given her "the first hope (she) had felt in a long time."

"I am one of the 85 percent you speak of — I have given my love, energy, skills to the Catholic Church for many years. They now get my energy and skills, but very little love," she wrote.

"The unnamed bishop has driven it from my heart. I will not bore you with my pain and hurt, but knowing that a priest really understands the truth and reality gives me a glimmer of hope."

"Perhaps I am filled with cynicism. I know I am filled with pain and fear. I believed the message of Jesus and I see so precious little of it in the hierarchy. Please keep writing and speaking out for all of us ... continue to take a stand for justice."

Such pastoral leaders usually pride themselves on their orthodoxy and their fidelity to the Holy Father.

All the while, however, they cause "pain," "hurt," and "fear" in those who have faithfully served the church. They extinguish hope and drive out love.

In a word, they are a scandal.

Full-time homemaker is no easy task

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

I have a confession to make: I couldn't do it.

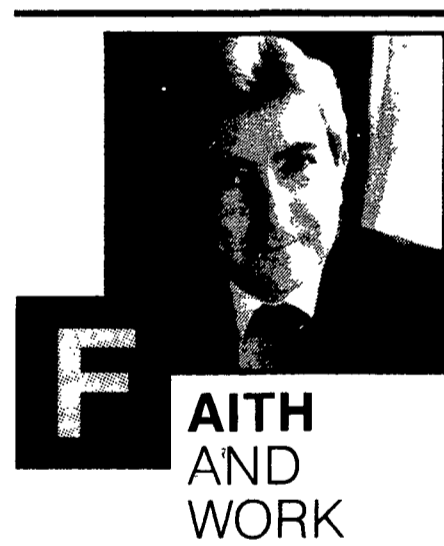
Even though I love my kids more than anything else in the world, and I consider myself to be a father who shares the responsibility of raising children equally with my wife, I couldn't do it.

I could not be a full-time homemaker.

I don't have the patience, for one thing. After several hours (or days) of responding to the seemingly never-ending and often unreasonable demands of three preschoolers, I can't wait for the chance to get out of the house and go to "work."

I also enjoy the intellectual and esthetic stimulation I receive from my job and my volunteer activities — and I'd be truly loathe to give it up. Finally, my ego is too weak to take the lack of respect and recognition given to stay-at-home mothers — much less stay-at-home fathers — in our society.

I confess all this as an introduct-



ion to Mothers At Home, a Virginia-based organization founded in 1984 with a threefold purpose: "to help mothers at home realize they have made a great choice — one made by many smart women today; to help mothers excel at a job for which no one feels fully prepared; and to correct society's misconceptions about mothering today."

The not-for-profit organization publishes a monthly journal, *Welcome Home*, and has just published a wonderful new book, *Discovering Motherhood*, both of which are filled with articles, poetry and art by mothers about their work.

It is obvious that the authors are intelligent, talented and motivated women who have chosen to leave the paid work force to devote the majority of their time to caring for their children. But rather than feel sorry for themselves or doubt their career choice, these women have done what those in other occupations have always done. They have organized a professional support group and begun producing the resource material they need.

Robin Morris, one of the authors of *Discovering Motherhood*, gives this reflection on full-time motherhood in "His Turn:"

"It is three o'clock on a rainy Monday afternoon and I want my old job so bad I could scream. I want some place to go, some place out of this house. I want a reason to wear my nice clothes. I want to go

out to lunch and not worry about the cost. I want to be respected for my abilities and paid for my accomplishments. I want the praise of other adults and a quarterly review to tell me how I'm doing.

"It's my turn," the song says, and today, in sweats and matted hair with a whining child, I'm ready to take it."

"But this is just it, isn't it? It is not my turn. It must be the small child's turn. This is the time when they develop as persons; when the world becomes known as hostile or friendly, crazy or calm. It's the small child's turn, whether I've had enough of a turn or not.

"Yes, today I want my old job so bad I could scream. But that's not bad enough to take Richard's turn (which is wholly in my power). My turn will come again, when Richard is older, and maybe then I will be able to appreciate my turn even more..."

Perhaps if I could develop these women's spirituality I could do the work of full-time fathering.

Then again, maybe not.

ANSWER KEY

"I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION AND I WILL BLESS YOU;
I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING."

Genesis 12:2

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