

Gays, lesbians need law's protection

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Jesus often proclaimed the Gospel in parables that challenged his listeners' assumptions and prejudices. One of the most familiar is that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

The point was not that we should always lend a helping hand to a neighbor in need. Too obvious, and, therefore, not challenging.

No, the story's main point was that the hated Samaritan was "good." He alone came to the aid of the man who had been beaten and robbed.

First, came a priest, "and when he saw him he passed by on the other side." Then a Levite, and he, too, "passed by on the other side."

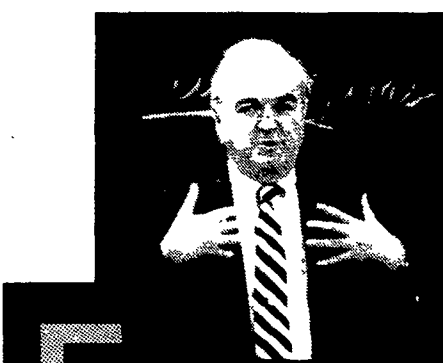
Both were highly respected members of the Jewish establishment.

And then came the Samaritan.

It is utterly crucial to remember that, to the Jews, Samaritans were a heretical and schismatic group. They were detested even more than the pagans. Indeed, Jesus' own disciples were shocked when he conversed with a Samaritan woman (John 4:27).

But Jesus would have none of that bigotry. The purpose of his preaching's was to tell us that if we hope to inherit God's reign and enter into eternal life, we must love one another as brother and sister — even those whom we regard as enemies, traitors, heretics, and worse.

That message, folded into the parable of the Good Samaritan, caught Jesus' audience by surprise. He



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wasn't telling them a safely predictable story about helping one's neighbor in need.

The story had an unexpected and jarring twist to it. The Samaritan, a detested enemy of "upright Jews," acted like a good neighbor to another in need, in contrast to the indifferent and irresponsible behavior of two respected and "upright members of their own community."

Had Jesus been addressing a U.S. audience some 19-1/2 centuries later, he might very well have substituted a gay or a lesbian for the Samaritan. Homosexuals fall roughly into the same category of the despised, reviled and resented.

As we approach the upcoming election, voters in Oregon, Colorado and Maine face decisions on three

highly publicized referenda.

Political advertising in Oregon has equated homosexuals with pedophiles, and voters have been urged to support an amendment to the state constitution classifying homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural or perverse."

According to *The New York Times*, the amendment would require Oregon to take an active role in discouraging homosexuality at all levels of state authority, from zoning commissions to fish and game licensing.

A proposed amendment to Colorado's constitution would prohibit any community in the state from passing laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination.

And in Portland, Me., voters will consider an initiative to repeal the city's five-month-old ordinance prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals.

All three referenda originated with right-wing Protestant groups who read the Bible in a fundamentalistic way, which is to say uncritically. They have soul-mates in the Catholic Church as well.

Their campaign strategy has been clever, if perverse. They falsely portray anti-discrimination laws as affirmative-action gambits, and they prey upon parents' fears for their children's physical safety and moral well-being.

But how can one explain the zeal that fuels this campaign?

Many who resist anti-discrimination legislation sense that they have

lost the abortion battle. It is by now obvious that their often strident pro-life rhetoric frightened moderates and energized women, even those who are opposed to abortion on moral grounds. Consequently, there is much greater political risk today in being pro-life than in being pro-choice.

And so homosexuals have become the new target of opportunity. Significantly, polls show that even some liberals and moderates are prepared to vote against gay rights. The concerns of gays and lesbians, unlike those of women, have not yet galvanized the center of the electorate.

Moreover, the debate's language is biased. It speaks of sexual "preference" rather than sexual "orientation," as if it were scientifically established that gays and lesbians "choose" to be homosexual in about the same way that one chooses to be a Democrat or a Republican.

Harsh and outrageous rhetoric abounds in such a climate. Every Christian should have been appalled and sickened by the *Newsweek* photo of a sign held aloft during the St. Patrick's Day parade in Boston last spring: "God Hates Fags."

That sign surely does not reflect the moral values and sentiments of a majority of the population nor of the church, but the vileness of its message indicates why gays and lesbians need the law's protection. Not favoritism. Just protection.

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers ...

Employers should views unions as allies

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Thomas Geoghegan is a Catholic labor lawyer with a mission: to convince Americans that our economy and society would be much better off with a strong labor union movement than it is with weak, ineffective, or non-existent unions.

Geoghegan is the author of the surprise best seller, *Who's Side Are You On? Trying to Be for Labor When Its Flat on Its Back* (Plume Books, 1992), which is both critical and supportive of the union movement in this country. At a recent meeting in Chicago of business executives, labor union officials, and community organizers, Geoghegan made some sobering observations.

He pointed out that only about 10 percent of the non-government U.S. work force is currently represented by a union. In Germany, arguably the most robust economy in Europe, union-negotiated wage agreements cover 90 percent of such workers.

"Germany is a high wage — not a



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low wage — economy," he said, "yet it is able to compete very well on the world market."

Geoghegan said the lack of union strength in the United States has led to such ills as falling wages, the increase in child labor, and the decline in the standard of living.

The 1940s and '50s — the time of

the greatest union strength in this country — was also the time of greatest economic prosperity for the largest number of people, he claimed, and it is high wage countries such as Germany and Japan — and not cheap labor countries such as Mexico — that are in the best economic shape and the ones that we should be emulating.

"Although Germany and Japan have different situations in regard to organized labor," he argued, "they are alike in that the employees in both countries have a privileged role. Employees are viewed as partners with management in co-determining the major decisions made by their companies."

Geoghegan maintained that such an arrangement is more in line with Catholic social teaching than are the policies most U.S. companies currently follow. "The Vatican-influenced socioeconomic system works pretty well in post-industrial society," he said. "Giving workers a stake in the system is crucial to its success."

Key to this kind of management-

labor relations, Geoghegan insisted, is the basic right to join unions without getting fired. "In the United States today, he said, "workers who are not protected by a contract can be fired for any reason, right up to the day of retirement.

He noted that, counting only cases which have been adjudicated in favor of the workers, roughly one out of 20 workers affected by union organizing drives in this country are routinely fired — a situation which clearly violates Catholic social teaching for the last 100 years on the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively.

Geoghegan urged employers to view unions as potential allies — rather than as the enemy — in helping this country regain its competitive edge.

"Instead of trying to compete on the basis of falling labor costs, he concluded, "business should be relying on improved quality and technological innovation. And for that they need a well-paid, well-trained, and organized work force.

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Crossword Answer Key

ACROSS	DOWN
1. medium	6. spell
2. astrology	7. potion
3. seance	8. magic
4. sorcerer	9. horoscope
5. vision	10. broom