

Catholics submissive by definition?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A spate of articles and letters appeared in the Catholic and secular press bashing the media for bashing the church in the aftermath of Pope John Paul II's visit to Denver in August.

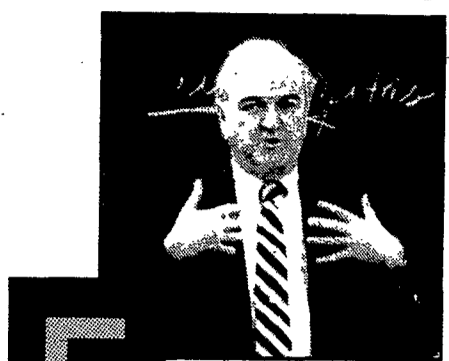
The charge was that the media gave too much play to dissenting Catholics and to opinion polls showing that dissent is fairly widespread throughout the church in the United States.

There may be some degree of validity to this charge because the media don't understand religion all that well, and undoubtedly there were excesses and distortions in the coverage related to the papal visit.

On the other hand, media bashing can be a form of avoidance behavior. It's an easy way out of facing up to real problems — whether the media bashers are politicians, fundraising organizations, the tobacco industry, the gun lobby, or the Catholic Church.

One of the most outlandish attacks on the media appeared on the op-ed page of a diocesan paper on the East Coast. After denouncing all the opinion polls and the media's fascination with "disaffected Catholics," the writer attempted to set us all straight: "To be a Catholic is, by definition, to submit to authority."

The statement begs an obvious question: whose authority are we



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

talking about? If God's, if Jesus', if the Gospel's, then to be a Catholic is to submit to authority.

Indeed, the New Testament sees Jesus' authority as something central to his ministry. Here was "something greater than the temple" (Matt 12:6), greater than Jonah and Solomon (Matt 12:41-42), and different from the power of "this world" (John 18:36).

After his death and resurrection, Jesus' authority is perceived anew. He is declared risen and enthroned at God's right hand (Acts 2:34-36). To him "all authority in heaven and on earth" is given (Matt 28:18). All creation is subject to him (Phil 2:10), and he will sit upon God's judgment seat (2 Cor 5:10) to judge the living and

the dead (Acts 10:42).

However, Jesus exercises his authority in the manner of a servant (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27). It is precisely because he did not cling to divinity that he became Lord of all (Phil 2:5-11).

And so he charges his disciples to follow his example: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; ... But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves (*diakonos*)" (Luke 22:25-26; John 13:14-15).

His kingdom, after all, is not of this world (John 18:36). Therefore, his disciples are not to be engaged in any struggles for power or preferment among themselves (Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

And it is important to remember that the absolute power which Jesus claims in Matthew 28:18 is not transferred to his disciples. Not even Peter received absolute authority.

In Acts of the Apostles 1-12, where his leadership is most clearly portrayed, decisions are made by "the Twelve" or "the apostles" or "the church," and not by Peter. His action in Acts of the Apostles 10 is reviewed by "the circumcised believers" (11:1-18). His devious behavior at Antioch elicits an open rebuke from Paul (Gal 2:11-14).

Nor are the apostles the sole participants in Jesus' authority. There are also prophets, teachers, wonder-workers, evangelists, presbyters, and

others (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11).

Paul himself is harshly and unjustly criticized by some of the Corinthians. He responds to the criticisms with warmth, and never suggests that he is above criticism because of his status.

The Spirit, we are assured, is given to the whole church and not exclusively to the church's leaders (1 Cor 12:1-28; Rom 12:3-8). There is a diversity of gifts and charisms, and all must work together as one for the good of the whole.

The power which Christian authority has is grounded in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is available to all. Indeed, no one can even profess that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, authority in the church is always of a unique kind, not simply another form of standard social or political authority.

It is a power existing within the Body of Christ, not just within another human organization. Authority as a function of the Body of Christ is a new concept of authority, just as the Body of Christ is a new concept of community.

Are Catholics, by definition, people who submit to authority? "No," if we mean the submission of a child or of a soldier, but surely "Yes," if we mean the submission of a disciple, one who follows willingly and without coercion in the footsteps of the One who came among us not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45).

Love is only game where two can play, win

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 22:34-40; (R1) Exodus 22:20-26; (R1) Exodus 22:20-26; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

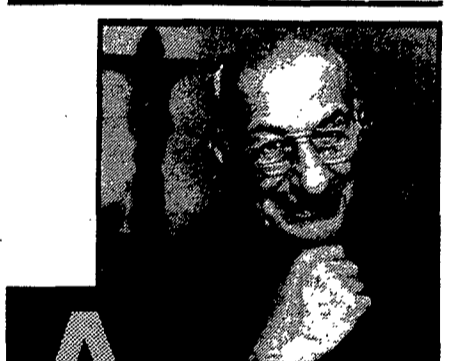
When St. John the Apostle was an old man on the Isle of Patmos, he always preached the same sermon: "Little children, love one another."

People thought he was getting senile. One day someone asked, "Why do you always preach the same thing?"

John answered, "It is the command of the Lord. If you love one another, you fulfill the law."

Today we hear so much about love. Such talk is fine and good provided it doesn't lead to license or doing as one pleases. What sexual aberrations are being allowed today in the name of love. How often love's pretext is used to justify pre-marital sex. "We love each other," some youngsters will say. "So what is wrong with our having sex?"

Love is social welfare for others. They even reduce the Gospel to social works. Their stock in trade is self-flagellation, self-criticism, and un-



WORD FOR SUNDAY

dled individualism.

So, what is love all about?

First, love is hierarchical. At the top of the list is love of God, then self, and finally our neighbor. St. Vincent de Paul, the great apostle of charity, said, "The poor did not lead me to God. God led me to the poor." Love of neighbor flows from love of God.

But even within love of neighbor, lies a hierarchy. The closer one gets to a fire, the more heat one gets, so the

closer one is to another, the more one must love that other. Thus our first love should be for our family.

We say blood is thicker than water. The very word "kind" comes from "kin" plus "d." Love is kind and should be first shown to kith and kin.

But love does not stay at home: it ought to go to church. Thus our second love should be for our Catholic faithful. And so at Mass, we pray for the pope, the souls in purgatory, the assembly and ourselves.

The third in line for our love is our neighbor. The Latin word for neighbor is *proximus*, which means the one nearest us. It can also mean the one most in need of our help, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Lastly, our fourth love should be for our enemies. The intensity of our love of God can be measured by how far it reaches out to others. We must love our enemies, because every artist loves his own work. And even our enemies are the creations of God, destined for heaven, and so loved by Him and to be loved by us.

Love is active and dynamic. St. Gregory the Great said, "Love is not idle; where it exists, it does great things." Love is not a blotter that

sops up, but a dynamo that generates action. Thus God's love erupted in creation, in redemption, and in our sanctification. For this is love's prerogative: to give and give and give.

Love must have a standard. How ought I to love my neighbor? As myself. And how do I love myself?

Well, I love myself whether I deserve it, don't I?

I always give myself the benefit of the doubt, don't I?

I always put the best interpretation on my actions, don't I?

I always try to do what is best for myself, don't I?

Then we should do the same for our neighbors.

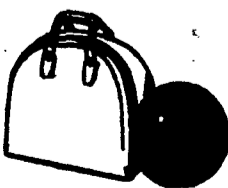
I must not rashly judge them. I must give them the benefit of the doubt. I must determine my service to them, not by their merits, but by their needs. I must be charitable, kind and loving to them, not an "Archie Bunker" type.

We cannot convert the whole world, but we each can sweep in front of our own home. If we did, we'd have clean streets. And if we so loved, we'd have a better world.

Love is the only game where two can play and win.

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