

Cardinal honored by critics he has

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Four months ago Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin entered his own personal "agony in the garden." On Nov. 11, he was named in a lawsuit by a former seminarian as having engaged in sexually abusive conduct during the 1970s, while archbishop of Cincinnati.

Throughout that terrible day in November, the CNN television network played tapes of its interviews with the plaintiff. Over the weekend it ran its much ballyhooed "special" on sex abuse in the priesthood, with the Bernardin case prominently displayed.

The cardinal was in deep trouble. Or so it seemed to many at the time.

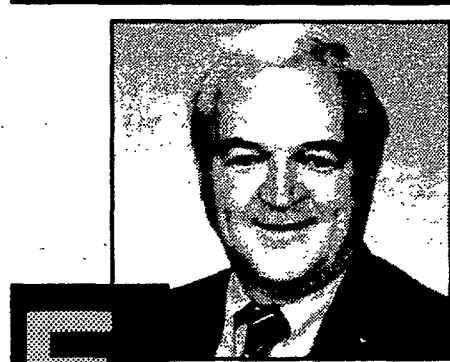
This week's column, however, is not about the lawsuit, nor is it about the cardinal's subsequent vindication in late February, when Steven Cook withdrew his suit.

It reflects instead on the initial, mean-spirited reaction to the allegations on the part of certain ultra-conservative Catholics.

To put the matter bluntly, some of them openly rejoiced upon first hearing of the charges against Cardinal Bernardin last November.

In Rome, for example, two young American Jesuits taunted a fellow American Jesuit whom they knew to be of a different theological orientation from themselves.

For them, Cardinal Bernardin represented the church's despised "liberal" wing (a point that the cardinal and many of his liberal critics would



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find amusing.) They delighted in his problems because — in their minds — his disgrace would further undermine that wing's influence and credibility.

But no public reaction from the Catholic right was more virulent than that expressed by a prominent activist in the national pro-life movement, to whom I shall return below.

One must keep in mind why the cardinal is so despised among that group, in spite of his courteous and conciliatory manner toward all and his unswerving loyalty to the Holy Father.

In a couple of major speeches given during the 1984 presidential election campaign when abortion was sharply debated (among New York's Cardinal John O'Connor, vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, New York's Governor Mario Cuomo, and others), Cardinal Bernardin called for a more

holistic approach to abortion.

If we are to be pro-life on abortion, he argued, we must be pro-life across the board.

Although the cardinal called it a consistent-ethic-of-life approach, the press and the general public found his vivid metaphor of "the seamless garment" more appealing. Subsequently, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops itself appropriated Cardinal Bernardin's language for its quadrennial statements on political responsibility issued just prior to each U.S. presidential election.

But the seamless-garment approach is still anathema to many activists in the pro-life movement. They believe that it dilutes the campaign against abortion, and gives pro-choice liberals an escape-hatch on the issue.

The cardinal and most of his fellow bishops disagree. The church's ongoing fight on the unborn's behalf is undermined by pro-life activists who favor capital punishment, give instant support to their government's every military initiative, oppose the expenditure of public funds for aid to the poor and other social services, and who, in general, regard North Carolina's Senator Jesse Helms as a kind of ideal public servant.

The cardinal's harshest public critic was Father Charles Fiore, a Dominican who has been in conflict with his Order and who, according to various news reports, had actually counseled the former seminarian prior to his filing the lawsuit against Cardinal Bernardin.

According to a story in the *National Catholic Reporter* at the time, Father

Fiore's publicly announced involvement with the plaintiff and his attorney caused some of the cardinal's supporters to ask if the suit may have had a hidden political purpose.

Father Fiore had told Religious News Service, for example, that Cardinal Bernardin "is an evil man." He has reportedly described the cardinal's episcopal "failings" as demonic.

In the Nov. 7, 1991, issue of *The Wanderer*, one of the most right-of-center Catholic newspapers, Father Fiore attacked the cardinal's consistent-ethic-of-life approach and various alleged failures of pastoral stewardship in Chicago, and called for the cardinal's resignation.

Father Fiore, to be sure, has his own problems. Although a member of a religious order, he has had almost no contact with Dominican priories or ministries for approximately 20 years.

For over a decade he has been directly engaged, in one way or another, with Fiore Enterprises in Madison, Wisc. — a business concern that constructs hotels and malls, and which is worth millions of dollars. Father Fiore, a vowed religious, lives in a home near Madison whose value has been estimated at \$600,000.

No wonder the Dominicans are throwing him out and that no diocese thus far has taken him in. Not even Peoria, to this date.

Cardinal Bernardin is surely honored by the thousands of friends and supporters who have stood by him from the beginning of his painful order. But he is also honored by the enemies he has. It's worth thinking about.

How would people remember you?

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

My new spiritual director asked me to write 10 chapter headings for my own autobiography. Not that I should write the whole book (after all, I'm only 46 years old and I figure that I'm only halfway through life). Besides, I'm sure that not many people (with the exception of my mother) would be interested in reading my life story.

"Just jot down the key points," the priest told me, "but don't do it chronologically. Instead, try to think of the 10 most important things about your life that you would want your own children to know about you."

I realized that this was another spiritual exercise that my spiritual director had devised to help me get at the truly important, the meaningful, the transcendent (if you will) things in my busy life.



FAITH AND WORK

I thought about this list on and off, while driving to work or shoveling the driveway — adding, subtracting, rephrasing the 10 points, but never

actually writing them down. Then one night I awoke with ideas racing through my mind. I guess my subconscious had been working on this task the entire time! I could not get back to sleep until I had gotten up, gone into the bathroom, and written these 10 points down.

I offer to you now, without further explanation, the 10 most important things that I want known about my life:

1. That I have loved and been loved.
2. That I have always tried to be a loyal son, a respectful grandson, a faithful husband, a good father, a supportive sibling, a loyal friend, and hope someday to be a wise father-in-law and grandpa.
3. That I have enjoyed life and gloried in creation.
4. That I have done much good work.
5. That I have sinned (and been forgiven and forgiven myself).

6. That I have always chosen to err on the side of action over inaction.

7. That I have loved my country (but not to the detriment of others), that my politics have been based on compassion for those less fortunate than I, that I have abhorred war and violence of any kind.

8. That I have loved my church (while being well aware of its human nature and faults) and have tried to contribute to its mission.

9. That I have had a firm (albeit examined) conviction that life has meaning, that there is a transcendent power at work in the world, that Jesus has shown us the way, and that there is life after death.

10. That I have tried to make the world a better place.

Perhaps this exercise would be helpful to you. What are the 10 things you would want people to know about yourself?

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