

The world's new moral scourge

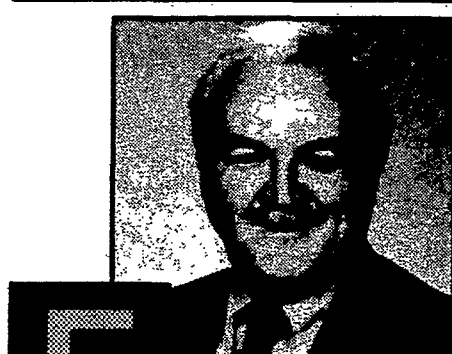
By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

When communism collapsed under its own dead weight just a few short years ago, many of us were filled with joy and amazement. Who can forget the euphoric scene at the Berlin Wall, where newly reunited West and East Germans happily smashed away at one of the world's most deadly symbols? Or of statues of Lenin crumbling to the ground in East-bloc town squares? It was all quite unbelievable.

But is the world really a better place now that communism is gone? Is there, for example, a more dangerous and dehumanizing place to live than the former Yugoslavia, where nationalism and ethnic hatreds have fueled murderous assaults on non-combatants — children, the elderly, women?

Have the national enmities in North Ireland been lessened? Is there no more tribal bloodletting in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa? Have hostilities in the Middle East been put to rest? Do Greeks and Turks, Kurds and Iraqis, Buddhists and Hindus, Jews and Christians, blacks and whites lie down together in peace like the biblical lion and the lamb?

Many are coming to realize that nationalism may pose an even greater threat to world peace than communism ever did and that communism may have unwittingly contributed to world peace — at least in the short term.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

In a multicultural, artificially stuck-together country such as Yugoslavia, where ethnic rivalries and hatreds are rooted in centuries-old grievances, it was communism that kept the lid on. Serbs, Croats, and Muslims lived together in peace. They intermarried, toiled side by side, and welcomed one another in their homes.

As soon as the communist regime was gone, the virus of nationalism convulsed the country. Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were at one another's throats, while the world looked on helplessly.

Not a single day passes in this supposedly blissful post-communist world order that we do not read in the papers or see on television accounts of

the most brutal forms of killing on every continent of the globe: in Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America — between tribes, races, and ethnic groups.

Nationalism is the world's new moral scourge. And what makes it so particularly dangerous a scourge is that it is so easily cloaked in virtue, the virtue of patriotism and of ethnic pride.

The Second Vatican Council had warned on this danger in its Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity: "The Christian faithful ... should practice true and effective patriotism. At the same time, let them altogether avoid racial prejudice and bitter nationalism, fostering instead a universal love for humankind" (n. 15).

The council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions made the point even more explicitly: "We cannot in truthfulness call upon that God who is the Father of all if we refuse to act in a brotherly and sisterly way toward certain other human beings, created though they be to God's image ... The one who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8) ...

"As a consequence, the Church rejects, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against other men and women or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion" (n. 5). The council could have added gender and ethnicity as well.

As we shake our heads and wring

our hands over the tribal slaughters in Africa, or over the bitter and violent confrontations in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, or over the barbarous outbursts of hatred in Asia or the Americas, we would do well to recognize that the very same forces — albeit on a drastically reduced level of intensity — are at work closer to home.

Like the nationalism condemned at Vatican II, these forces are usually cloaked in the virtue of patriotism and of ethnic pride.

The virus of nationalism has many unpleasant manifestations — ridicule and cutting humor, to be sure, but also a mindless determination to defend one's own national or ethnic group at any cost.

When was the last time that you saw a Serbian American on television expressing shame and revulsion over Serbian-led violence against innocent non-combatants in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Probably about the same time you saw a representative of the American Tobacco Institute acknowledge that smoking is dangerous to your health, or an official of the National Rifle Association admit that there are too many guns in the hands of too many irresponsible people and that their sale ought to be restricted.

Patriotism is a virtue. So, too, is ethnic pride. But it's all too easy to cross the line into a nationalism that contradicts the Gospel.

Faith without love is nothing at all

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 15:9-17; (R1) Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; (2) 1 John 4:7-10.

It's quite a coincidence that the Gospel of love falls on Mother's Day. What better words could we read on Mother's Day than: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love." What a model for us all: mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, as well as children and friends.

Jesus links happiness with love. "All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete."

In one of the Peanuts cartoons, Charlie Brown and Lucy are discussing the meaning of existence.

"Why do you think we're put here on earth, Charlie Brown?" Lucy asks.

"To make others happy," answers Charlie Brown.

Lucy is not pleased with this answer. She says, "I don't think I'm making anyone very happy ... Of course, nobody's making me very happy either ..." Lucy then becomes quite indignant and roars, "Somebody's not doing his job!!!"

What does it take to be happy? An-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

swers may differ but one thing is certain: no one can truly be happy who is not in a proper relationship with God and with other people. It's hard to be really happy when you live only for yourself.

C.S. Lewis believed that to love makes one vulnerable. "Love anything," he once wrote, "and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, ... wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries;

avoid all entanglements; lock it safe in the coffin of your selfishness. There, ... it will not be broken ... it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love ... is Hell." Fortunately for Lewis, late in life, he found love — and happiness — in his bride joy. The movie, *Shadowlands*, depicts their beautiful love story and Lewis' transformation.

In his own eloquent way, Lewis was saying, "No love, no happiness." So Jesus commanded us to love so that our joy might be complete.

Princess Alice, the second daughter of Queen Victoria, had a 4-year-old son whom she loved dearly. He contracted "black diphtheria." The disease was highly contagious and very deadly. Nurses warned the frail princess to stay away from her son. This was very difficult, as for any mother.

One day as Princess Alice stood in a far corner of her son's room, she heard him whisper to a nurse, "Why doesn't my mother kiss me anymore?" That was more than Alice could bear. As tears streamed down her cheeks she raced to her son's bed, held him in her arms and smothered him with kisses, reassuring him of her love.

Tragically, this turned out to be the kiss of death. She contracted the disease and in a matter of weeks both mother and son were buried.

Parents can understand what Princess Alice did, for where there is true love, no sacrifice is too great.

Throughout history, the one driving force moving humanity forward has been the willingness of parents to make almost any sacrifice to ensure that their children would have a better life. But today a dramatic change is taking place. Studies show that many parents are putting their own happiness before that of their children.

Thus we have mothers on drugs, ignoring their little ones. We have fathers leaving their families to fend for themselves as they chase rainbows. Thus many families are in crisis today.

How can we be Jesus' followers and ignore the model? He so loved He gave himself... Where there is no giving, there is no love, be it within the family, between friends or within society. When everyone is looking out for No. 1, we're in trouble.

St. Paul wrote: "If I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." That pretty well sums it all up. If we cannot love, our faith is a sham.



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