

Authority must be handled with care

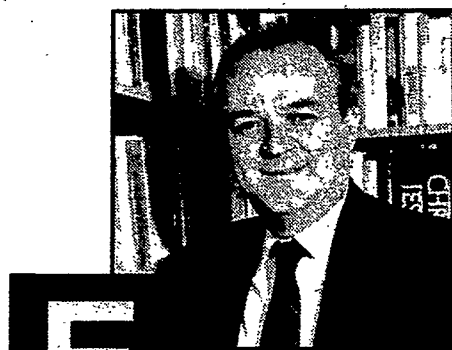
By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Scholars and various experts have written many books and articles on the subject of authority. It would be exceedingly helpful, however, if someone were to put together a volume of essays on authority written not by theologians, psychologists, sociologists, and other professional types, but by people in various walks of life who have actually faced the day-to-day challenge of exercising authority. I have in mind, for example, parents, teachers, law enforcement personnel, business executives and managers, public officials, and religious superiors.

The editor of such a volume might put the following sorts of questions to prospective contributors in order to guide them in their writing.

(1) How do you yourself understand authority's purpose: is it primarily to direct and control people's thinking and behavior, or is it primarily to help people grow and mature, to become better human beings? (Note: Do not give a textbook answer, or one that you think would be expected of someone in your position. Give the answer that flows directly from your years of experience in the daily exercise of authority).

(2) Undoubtedly, there have been individuals or groups under your authority (children, students, employees, ordinary citizens, women religious and priests, associations of various kinds) who have resisted your au-



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thority and have violated the laws and rules you were expected to enforce. How have you dealt with that resistance and with those violations? Have your approaches always worked? If not, which ones failed, and why? Have you ever changed your failed approaches? How and with what results?

(3) Have you found the threat or imposition of punishment to be an effective means of exacting conformity from those under your authority? If not, why not?

(4) If the threat or imposition of punishment have not proved to be effective in changing people's thinking and behavior, what approaches have, in fact, proved to be effective?

(5) In your experience, what role, if any, has the example of your own

behavior played in the effective exercise of authority, positively or negatively? Has your own willingness to live by the values you promote and the rules you apply to others been a crucial factor in any success you have had?

(6) Have you ever lied to those under your authority? Has your lack of truthfulness ever compromised your authority in any way? If so, how?

(7) Have you ever been accused of unfairness in your manner of exercising authority? What was the nature of the accusations, and how have you generally responded to them?

(8) Are you personally accessible to those subject to your authority. Do you welcome dialogue with them? In your experience, have instances of inaccessibility ever weakened your exercise of authority? If so, how? Has your willingness to dialogue contributed to your effectiveness as an authority-figure? If so, how?

(9) Have you ever made loyalty to yourself a kind of litmus test of your authority? Have you ever regarded criticism of, or resistance to, your authority as an affront to your own personal dignity or to the dignity of your office? If so, what effect, if any, did your attitude have on your capacity to exercise authority?

(10) Have you ever discovered — and openly admitted — that some of those who resisted or criticized your authority or who violated the rules and laws you were required to enforce had a legitimate reason for doing so?

Did that discovery move you to change your manner of exercising authority? If so, how?

(11) To whose authority have you yourself been subject? Have you ever been critical of those who have exercised authority over you? Have you ever resisted their authority, openly or covertly? Have you ever violated the rules or laws they were required to enforce in your regard? Did you ever consider any of your own violations to have been legitimate? Did you feel free to express your views to those in authority over you? With what results?

(12) Do you think there is a crisis of authority today in society's traditional institutions: the family, the school, the churches, public and civic life? If so, describe the nature of the crisis and indicate, on the basis of your experience alone, how those in authority could most effectively address the crisis? Again, on the basis of your own experience, what do you believe to be the least effective, or most counterproductive, means of dealing with challenges to authority?

(13) For Catholics only: On the basis of what you have observed and experienced as a member of the Catholic Church and in light of your own experience in the exercise of authority, how would you assess the current responses of pastoral leaders to the crisis of authority inside the church and within society at large?

Such questions as these are not only for potential contributors to a book. They are for each one of us to answer.

Good deeds can gain eternal life

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 10:17-30; (R1) Wisdom 7:7-11; (R2) Hebrews 4:12-13.

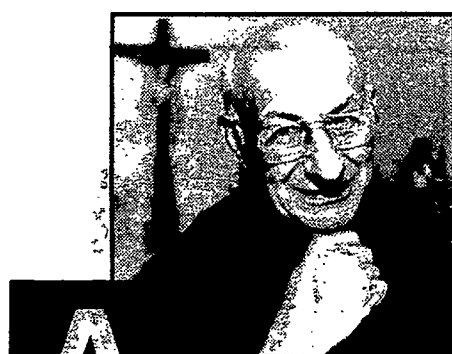
Our Holy Father, John Paul II, used this Sunday's Gospel as the basis for his powerful encyclical "*Veritatis Splendor*" ("The Splendor of Truth").

In his meditation on this gospel passage, the Holy Father points out that there is a relationship between good deeds and eternal life: good deeds can gain eternal life.

Then the Holy Father observed that the norm of morality — the standard by which one can measure whether a deed is good or bad — is outside each person. He insisted that the norm of morality is objective, not subjective; that it is none other than God himself, who alone is good.

The church, the guardian and pillar of truth, echoes this norm in her wonderful "Catechism of the Catholic Church."

One of modern man's great errors is this one of rejecting an objective norm of morality. For so many people, freedom is the right to do as they please: The standard of morality for



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

them is not what does God think? No, but what does society think? Or the majority? Or the media? Or what do I think? Or feel? Or I follow my conscience (taking no pains to make sure that one's conscience is correct). The Holy Father condemned all such substitutions for the moral law in no uncertain terms in his encyclical. (You may obtain a copy of my commentary on "*Veritatis Splendor*" from The Rhiele Foundation, P.O. Box 7, Mil-

ford, Ohio 45150).

One blatant example of this disregard for objective truth and goodness is happening today in our schools in the revision of textbooks — especially social studies texts. We celebrate Oct. 10 the discovery of the new world by Christopher Columbus.

When the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America was celebrated in 1992, I was so angered at the misinformation and vicious calumnies leveled against Columbus that I wrote a booklet to set the record straight — "Christopher Columbus: Forty Facts" (If you want this booklet, write me at 5 S. Marvine Ave., Auburn, N.Y. 13021; please include \$2).

I am bringing up this incident again because even the prestigious Smithsonian Institute has succumbed to this campaign of ideological revisionism about Columbus (*The Wall Street Journal*, 6/24/94).

What is more shocking is that the New York State Department of Education under its commissioner, Dr. Thomas Sobol, is peddling this revisionist history of Columbus to our school children in its study guide titled "Italian Americans: Looking Back

— Moving Forward."

Dr. Augustus Pallotta, an authority on Columbus with a doctorate in Italian studies from Columbia University and a master's degree in Spanish from Indiana University, said to the Syracuse Board of Education: "I have examined the material on Columbus put together by the Social Studies Curriculum Committee. Accuracy is conspicuously lacking. The authors harshly critical of Columbus are not historians, not educators nor journalists: they are lay people representing organizations ideologically opposed to Columbus and the legacy of European civilization brought to the New World. These materials have a built-in bias against Columbus and lack balance, accuracy, and objectivity."

Pallotta then asks, "Are we encouraging objectivity of critical thinking when we ask our students to read that Columbus was a 'filthy murderer, who destroyed peoples, land, and ecosystems in his search for material wealth and riches?' ... Personally, I see little educational value in these materials."

There we have it: rejecting objective norms not only in morality but also in regard to truth.



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