

## There is a meanness in the land

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Most of the U.S. Catholic Church's pastoral leaders were probably delighted by the results of last month's congressional elections.

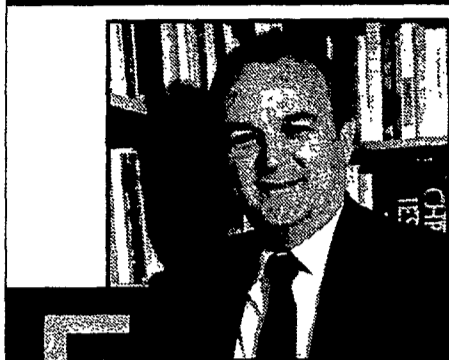
Many of them do not like President Clinton, especially because of the haste with which he signed an executive order to make it easier to procure an abortion. And they do not like the Democratic Party because of its recent and growing identification with pro-choice politics.

But it is a safe prediction that over the next two years the new Republican majority in Congress will not pass any legislation to implement the broad promise of the 1992 party platform to make all abortions illegal.

Even so combatively conservative a senator as Phil Gramm of Texas admits that abortion will not be on his ambitious legislative agenda. He acknowledges, like many other Republicans, that there simply isn't a consensus on abortion any longer in the Republican Party.

One has only to reflect on the determined efforts of the newly elected Republican Governor of New York, George Pataki, to convince voters during the recent campaign that — in spite of his voting record in the New York state legislature — he is actually pro-choice.

Mario Cuomo's defeat would normally have elated the governor's harshest conservative critics within the Catholic hierarchy and laity. But in



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Governor-elect Pataki they are faced with yet one more Catholic Republican who has drifted down the pro-choice path. Such victories are bitter-sweet.

Conservative Catholic voters, therefore, who really expect the Republicans to translate their vigorous pro-life rhetoric into concrete legislation are destined for disappointment.

Such legislation may be introduced, but it won't go anywhere. For many Republicans, abortion legislation will be about as welcome as the proverbial skunk at a picnic. They don't want anything to do with it, lest it divide the party and derail other Republican programs for economic and governmental reform.

And if abortion remains untouched, what will Catholics be left with? A Re-

publican leadership, in the House of Representatives at least, threatening to dispatch children born of unwed parents to orphanages, kicking those on welfare (most of whom are women and children) out into the street, and cutting off aid to the elderly, the disabled, and the chronically poor.

When asked what would be done about those who fall through the cracks into desperate and destitute conditions, the ascendant Republican leadership speaks blandly of private charities. One can hear the steady tinkle of the Salvation Army bells over the red-colored pots of coins and crinkled dollar bills. Surely, that will suffice for the ne'er-do-wells and the illegitimate waifs they've begotten in sin.

Already, at their recent annual meeting in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Catholic bishops have sounded an alarm against "punitive" welfare proposals. Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, president of the bishops' conference, warned that, in our efforts to reform the economy, we cannot deprive the poorest and the neediest of our citizens of the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, education, health-care.

Several years ago the U.S. Catholic bishops adopted as their own Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's consistent-ethic-of-life approach to public policy issues. The Catholic Church is foursquare against abortion, but it is also against capital punishment. And it supports governmental policies that help ensure a life of human dignity

for children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, and the poor.

In other words, we are not a one-issue church. And yet for years some Catholic bishops and laity have embraced ultraconservative Republicans because of their stand on abortion, while ignoring their voting records and values on the many other issues covered by Catholic social teaching.

The Democrats, to be sure, made it all too easy for such a mistake to be made. Their refusal to allow a pro-life Democratic governor, Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, to address the national convention in 1992 was a political blunder of spectacular proportions. A symbol of arrogance, unfairness, and one-sidedness, it has hung like an albatross around the party's neck.

Now it's the Republicans' turn. But they are picking up the reins of political power at a time of increasing racial tensions represented by all the talk about a racially linked "bell curve" of intelligence, and of growing animosity toward immigrants, as represented by the passage of Proposition 187 in California.

Our religious leaders' work is surely cut out for them because there seems to be a new meanness in a land where we are called to preach and to practice a Gospel of love, justice, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

Given the current climate, however, that kind of "platform" would be a sitting duck for a barrage of 30-second commercials, pitched mainly to white, mostly Protestant, males.

## The life of a salesman can be frustrating

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

When it is done with care and integrity, selling someone something can be a real service. How else are we to find out what new product is available or which of many possible choices is right for our needs, if it is not through the good work of honest salespeople?

Yet how many of us treat salespeople as if they were (a) not even there; (b) bothering us; or (c) out to get us?

Part of my job as a businessman is to be a salesman. I don't sell full time, thank God (my self-esteem is not strong enough to take that much rejection). But I do it often enough to know how difficult the work of sales really is.

I recently signed up to show our company's merchandise at a small convention of 250 people in Wiscon-



### FAITH AND WORK

sin. The conference was held in a small town located almost 200 miles away, and we were scheduled to exhibit a total of seven hours. Instead

of coming in the night before, I decided to drive in that morning, which entailed getting up at 6 a.m. and driving over three hours to get there. (I stopped for lunch at McDonald's on the way and ate my Big Mac and fries as I continued driving.)

When I arrived, I went into the room marked for the exhibitors, but I couldn't find my table. Finally, I discovered it in a small room off to the side, where I had been stuck with two other unfortunate exhibitors. No one greeted me, apologized for the lousy location, or offered to help me cart in my stuff.

Three times were open for visiting the booths. The first was during the half-hour break after the first speaker, but she spoke too long and took up half the time we had been allotted. The second was during the break after the second speaker, but he also went over his time and cut into ours.

The third and last opportunity for people to visit our booths was the hour-and-a-half between the last session and dinner. Unfortunately for the rest of the exhibitors and myself, the conference's organizers had also set up two hospitality rooms — far from the exhibit space — during that same time period.

Needless to say, I didn't sell much that day. The few people who found us in the side room were very polite, some even bought several items, but I doubt if I saw 50 people or sold more than \$200 worth of material all day.

At 6:30 p.m., I packed up my display, got in my car, and drove home. When I arrived at 10 p.m., my wife and kids were already asleep — although the dog seemed happy enough to see me. I ate something for dinner, brushed my teeth and fell into bed — exhausted from a hard day of trying to make a living.

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