

## Some waiting for bishops to speak out

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

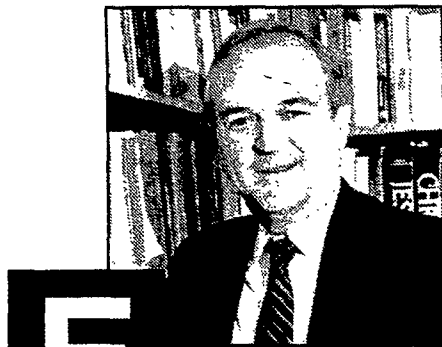
A few weeks ago Congressman Charles Rangel of New York, a Catholic, complained on the "Meet the Press" television program about the silence of the churches regarding the current political assault on the poor, on children, and on minorities, and the scapegoating of unwed welfare mothers — blacks in particular — for the economic ills of the middle class.

At the November meeting of the bishops in Washington, Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, did touch lightly upon the subject at the end of his presidential address.

"We in the church," he concluded, "stand with the unborn and the undocumented, the hungry and the homeless; we stand in the defense of human rights and human life." He cited, among other examples, the church's opposition to "punitive welfare provisions which harm poor children and break up families."

And the Connecticut bishops later that month issued a brief Thanksgiving statement in which they expressed concern about their state's newly elected Republican administration's promise of welfare reform.

While conceding the need for eliminating waste and abuses and for people on welfare to take control of their lives, the Connecticut bishops warned that the end result "must not harm the vulnerable."



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

They insisted that everyone in society has "the right to life, food, clothing, shelter, education, employment and medical care," and explicitly rejected the argument that churches and other nongovernmental groups can and will provide the safety net once supplied by government. The bishops pointed out that voluntary action is not enough. "Government too must take the steps to ensure that no one lacks the necessities of life."

But since November the Republican-controlled House of Representatives in Washington has been driving a political steamroller over the poor and the powerless in the name of decentralization of government and budget-cutting.

The most visible example thus far is the attack upon the school lunch program.

The House Republicans have voted to repeal the National School Lunch Act, which since 1946 has fed hundreds of millions of hungry children. It is a program initiated by President Harry Truman when he, too, had a Republican Congress, and expanded by President Richard Nixon, himself a Republican. "A child ill fed," Mr. Nixon said in 1969, "is dulled in curiosity, lower in stamina, distracted from learning."

Today 95 percent of all schools participate in the lunch program, which feeds 25 million children each day. More than half these children get a free lunch or pay only 40 cents; the rest paid on average (in 1991-92) about \$1.15.

Of the six million children who also eat school breakfasts, most receive them free or at reduced prices.

Because of the recent Congressional action, however, some schools may have to get out of the business of offering lunches, while others may have to raise prices. For the poorest children, it could mean an end to free breakfasts and lunches, both of which have been linked to improved academic performance.

Moreover, federal nutrition standards for the meals would be replaced by variable state standards. When state standards replaced federal standards in the food stamp program, some states — in the interest of economizing — cut back the program to the detriment of those most in need.

The legislation gives the states block grants, which allows the individual states to determine how to spend the

money. Eighty percent is supposed to be earmarked for meals, but the states could spend the other 20 percent on programs unrelated to school breakfasts and lunches.

During times of recession, when state coffers are short of cash, there would no longer be any extra money from the federal government to pick up the slack. The states would have to cut back on the program or charge more for the meals.

The record shows, however, that every time the cost of meals has been raised by 1 percent, school participation in the program has been reduced by 1 percent. When the Reagan administration slashed the school lunch program in the 1980s, 2,000 schools and 3 million children dropped out.

Among other programs on the Republicans' chopping block are the drug-free schools program, an education program for homeless youths, job training for homeless veterans, and high-school equivalency and college assistance programs for migrants.

Many ask why the poorest and weakest citizens have been targeted for the first and sharpest budget cuts by politicians who have looked the other way when billions — not millions — of dollars have been lost, at taxpayers' expense, through the criminal behavior of greedy bankers in the savings and loan scandal.

Congressman Rangel and others are wondering when church leaders will break their silence and raise their powerful voices on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society.

## What we think may be enough may not always be

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

You have never done enough. You have already done enough.

One of the reasons I think Jesus believed and taught this contradiction is that it explains so many Gospel stories I have always had a tough time understanding.

Take, for example, the one about the prodigal son. Here we have a kid who does every possible thing to hurt his father, yet when he returns repentant he is thrown a party in celebration. He had already done enough to win his father's love. The older son had stayed by his father, helping him with the family business, never asking anything in return. When he balked at forgiving his brother, however, his fa-



### FAITH AND WORK

ther told him, in effect: "Son, you have

never done enough. You must rejoice in your brother's salvation, even though he did you wrong."

Another example of this contradiction in Jesus' teaching is the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector at prayer. Despite the fact that the Pharisee did everything the law required and more, he had not done enough in Jesus' eyes. The tax collector, according to Jesus, went away "justified" just by admitting he was a sinner.

The rich young man's mistake was in telling Jesus he had kept all the commandments since he was a youth. Jesus' response was that he still hadn't done enough: "sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor," Jesus told him. With the woman caught in adultery, however, it was enough that she "go and sin no more."

How else are we to understand the parable of the workers hired at different hours who were all paid the same wage? Those who might have worried that they hadn't done enough learned they had. Those who believed they had done more than their share had not ... at least according to Jesus.

Martha's mistake? She didn't think she had done enough.

Peter's mistake? He thought forgiving his brother seven times was enough.

If you've got stories or insights from your own lives that show that we have never done enough and yet at the same time we have already done enough, please send them to me at 4848 N. Clark Street, Chicago, Ill. 60640. I'll use them as the basis for further columns this year.



### Shirley Jones

— IN CONCERT —

Saturday, April 1 at 8 p.m.  
Tickets - \$28

Join the radiant singer and actress Shirley Jones for her elegant solo concert performance of well-loved Broadway and Hollywood show tunes.

Box Office: 586-2420  
Groups: 424-2979

 Nazareth College  
Arts Center 4245 East Avenue • Rochester, NY 14618-3790

### Kids' Chronicle Answer Key

- |           |             |             |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. throne | 4. sceptre  | 7. kingdom  |
| 2. crown  | 5. princess | 8. palace   |
| 3. purple | 6. queen    | 9. anointed |

Serving Today's Needs... With Traditional Dignity.

*Alvah*  
**Halloran & Son** Inc.  
*Funeral Home*

 2125 Chili Avenue

247-7590

H. Daniel Halloran

