

Cardinal reaching out to both sides

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

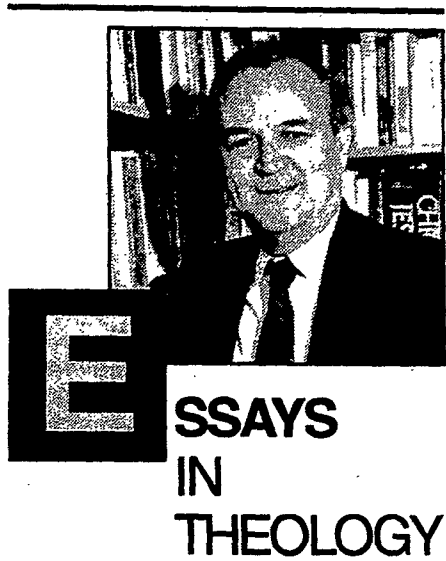
The resolution of conflicts — whether in politics, diplomacy, business, or litigation — is impossible if one of the parties should adopt a stonewall approach where there is no give, no compromise, and no willingness even to consider the possible legitimacy of the other party's grievance.

What applies to nations, organizations; and litigants also applies to communities, like families and the church. Marriage counseling, for example, can't work if one of the spouses adamantly refuses to participate. Parents can't hope to reach an understanding with their children if every item in dispute is labeled "non-negotiable."

The church is subject to the same stresses and strains that any family experiences. When parties in conflict refuse to reach out to one another, the conflict becomes more bitter and the possibilities of settlement more remote. And the church's unity is undermined.

As an influential conservative voice in the U.S. Catholic hierarchy, Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law has loyally supported Vatican teaching and policy on a wide variety of issues: women's ordination, clerical celibacy, legislation regulating abortions, and birth control.

It is significant, therefore, when a church leader of his stature speaks and acts contrary to the stereotype in which



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the media and others have cast him.

Two items will illustrate the point.

A recent Mike Barnicle column in the *Boston Globe* tells the story of a priest, on leave of absence from the active ministry, who telephoned the cardinal to inform him that he had AIDS.

"How are you doing?" the cardinal asked.

"Not too well," he replied. "I've called to ask a favor. I'd like you to say my funeral Mass."

But Cardinal Law did more than that. He offered to bring the man back into the priesthood. And when the illness worsened, he offered to care for him in the cardinal's official residence.

When asked by the *Globe's* columnist why he responded that way, the cardi-

nal replied: "When someone has AIDS, you don't say, 'How did you get it?' You say, 'What can I do to help?' This is the way we ought to lead our lives."

And that is also what good pastoring is all about. Non-judgmental. Caring.

For Barnicle, no "Pollyannish" observer of the ecclesiastical scene, the cardinal's gesture was "an example of what it means to practice a faith in a world where judgments of black and white are a thing of the distant past."

But not on the far right or the far left are they "a thing of the distant past."

The second item concerns Cardinal Law's recent address at the Knights of Columbus' annual convention in Kansas City.

Speaking at the concluding dinner before some 2,000 delegates and their families and 70 fellow bishops, the cardinal reaffirmed the church's opposition to abortion, praising Knights for their "peerless ... support for life at its most vulnerable — at the beginning and at the end."

However, he continued, "we cannot proclaim the Gospel of life selectively," adding that concern for life must extend to the poor and the weak.

"I believe that abortion is the primordial evil of our time," he declared, "but we must be consistent — our credibility depends on consistency." As in the consistent-ethic-of-life, perhaps — an approach the U.S. bishops have taken in the teeth of derisive scorn from more militant pro-life activists in

the Catholic Church.

"Think of immigration reform and welfare reform and capital punishment," he urged his largely conservative audience. "What a challenge it is to truly proclaim and truly believe the Gospel of life."

As an example of putting those beliefs into practice — as he had with respect to the priest dying of AIDS — Cardinal Law said that he and others in Massachusetts had written to President Clinton asking him not to grant waivers of federal regulations allowing the state to put a family cap and a time cap on welfare support, as conservatives in Congress have urged.

"We must address ourselves to the president, to our governors, to our Congress and our legislatures and tell them that we don't want reform to be at the expense of the poor and of children."

Apparently, the Knights of Columbus needed to hear that message before they voted on their various resolutions: against obscenity, child pornography, abortion, and sex education in schools and for school vouchers and voluntary prayer in schools — an agenda seemingly indistinguishable from that of the Christian Coalition.

The church can begin to transcend its inevitable conflicts if we develop the habit of reaching out occasionally to the other side and even gently challenging our own natural allies on issues of moment. Cardinal Law has given the example.

The world needs plowers as well as feeders

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 16:1-13; (R1) Amos 8:4-7; (R2) 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

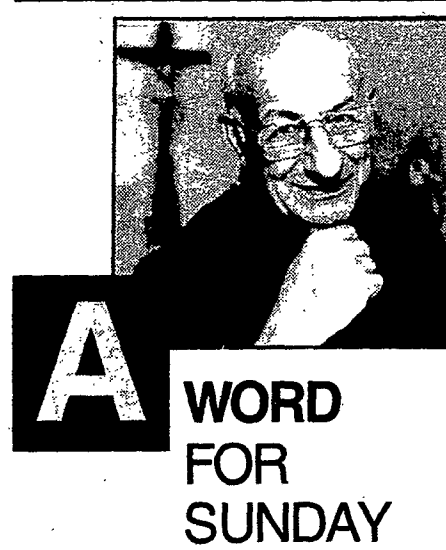
Next Sunday's readings depict a roguish gallery of crooks. The rapacious merchants in Amos were money-mad villains (R1). They could hardly wait until the Sabbath was over to open up shop.

Worse still, these same scoundrels were cheats, who tampered with scales and weights and the size of containers.

The Gospel is about a bunch of crooks. The steward was a rogue. He was a slave in complete charge of his master's estate. This slave was a business manager.

The master got a tip that his business manager was padding expenses, skimming off a little from sales, giving bargain prices to friends and relatives.

But he had not saved up anything for a rainy day, and now it had come. He was going to be fired. He was too soft to dig ditches and too ashamed to beg, so he got others involved in his wrongdoing. By cutting down the bills of his master's debtors, he believed he would have friends either out of gratitude for the dishonest favor or out of fear of blackmail. The debtors, too, were rogues for collaborating with the



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business manager.

Why, then, did Jesus make a hero out of this scoundrel?

Certainly it was not because of his ethics, which were like those of many today who believe the end justifies the means. "The firm won't miss the money. What I steal is peanuts compared to what the firm takes in every year. Besides, I'm desperate. I've got a family to feed. There's nothing else I can do." People think like that all the time in our modern, pagan society. And that is sad, because it destroys trust in people.

Daily Readings

Monday, Sept. 25

Ezra 1:1-6; Lk 8:16-18

Tuesday, Sept. 26

Ezra 6:7-8, 12, 14-20;
Lk 8:19-21

Wednesday, Sept. 27

Ezra 9:5-9; Lk 9:1-6

Thursday, Sept. 28

Hg 1:1-8; Lk 9:7-9

Friday, Sept. 29

Dn 7:9-10, 13-14 or Rv 12:7-12;

Jn 1:47-51

Saturday, Sept. 30

Zec 2:5-9, 14-15; Lk 9:43-45

When Jesus chose this man to be this parable's hero, He was not extolling the man's ethics. What Jesus was extolling was the man's ingenuity and drive. The man didn't sit around whining over his situation. He got busy and found a solution. Jesus was a man of action. He wanted His followers to be people of action.

It saddened Him that many of His followers were good people, but it was a negative kind of goodness. They did nothing to advance the kingdom. He concluded His parable with the words: "The worldly take more initiative than

the other — worldly when it comes to dealing with their own kind."

Look at all the talented people in the church. What if they were as good at spreading the Gospel as McDonald's is at what they do, or Coca-Cola or Pepsi? What if we were as committed to spreading the Gospel as American businesses are at winning new customers? That was the point Jesus was trying to make. He wants Christians not only to be nice people but to be people who make a difference in the world.

When a messenger came to Job to tell of his first disaster, he began: "The oxen were plowing and the asses grazing beside them" (1:14). Charles Spurgeon, a powerful 19th-century preacher said: "That is still the case. Some people are always plowing, breaking up the fallow ground, preparing it for good seed. And others are always feeding." Then he looked at his congregation and said, "Dear people, some of you would never miss a service. Feeding, everlasting feeding. But you never plow, prepare others for the good seed of the Gospel. The oxen plowed, the asses fed."

Jesus got frustrated by people who were nice but who never did anything to advance the kingdom. Jesus used the scoundrel — the dishonest steward — to shock us into awareness that the world needs saving, that we must be not only feeders, but plowers.

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