

COLUMNISTS

Where there's smoking, there's hellfire

Back in the seemingly blissful 1950s when most Catholics uncritically accepted just about everything they were told by their bishops, there was a tiny body of specialists to whom even the hierarchy listened. They were the moralists who, even in those pre-Vatican II days, enjoyed the freedom to speculate on thorny ethical problems and then to determine the relative gravity of offenses against the laws of God.

One of the most prominent members of that group was Francis Connell, a Redemptorist priest. Father Connell was a conservative theologian, even by precconciliar standards, but he was widely admired and respected because of his kindly demeanor and his careful and precise manner of expressing his views.

In spite of his generally rigid views on moral matters, Father Connell was well ahead of his time on one issue that continues to vex us today, namely, the morality of smoking, of tobacco advertising, and of corporate greed and the dishonesty that attempts to cloak it. Some of us young upstarts (even those of us who never smoked) thought Father Connell a bit out of touch to be raising moral questions like, "How many cigarettes does one have to smoke on a particular day before it becomes a venial sin? How many would it take to become a mortal sin?"



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

The fact that Father Connell thought smoking a moral issue at all was a source of amusement, but that he should also have tried to draw a clear line between venial and mortal sin on the basis of the number of cigarettes one smoked in a given day was more than amusing. It seemed nonsensical. Nor was it regarded as a point in Father Connell's favor that the reigning pope, Pius XII, had, at about the same time, urged the Jesuits not to smoke. The pope's injunction was seen as a European clerical thing. When American seminarians in the Roman universities chided their European counterparts for cheating on exams, for example, the Europeans would retort, "But you Americans smoke!"

How our consciousness has changed on the use of tobacco since the 1950s. Not even Father Connell could have imagined based on the information avail-

able to him at that time how close to the mark he actually was when he fingered tobacco use as a potentially serious moral problem.

I did a column on this subject several years ago. The column attracted more than the usual interest from the secular press. Smoking, after all, is not just an in-house Catholic issue, like the ordination of women. It affects all of society. The problem with that earlier column, if I recall it accurately, is that it focused almost entirely on the individual user: Is it a sin for a person to smoke?

Concerns were also expressed about the effects of secondary smoke on non-smokers, and the social impact of increased insurance and product costs. There were the usual qualifications about the impact of long-standing habits on human freedom. If tobacco use is addictive, then an older person who has been smoking for a number of years is far less culpable for that behavior than young persons who, knowing the health risks to themselves and to others, freely decide to take up the habit for the first time.

Those moral considerations affecting the individual user are still valid and important. But we now know that what is far more important and potentially far grayer a sin is the moral behavior of the corporate executives, their lawyers and

their advertising agencies. With full knowledge of the addictive and harmful nature of tobacco (if we are to take at face value the internal corporate memoranda that have since become public), these executives, lawyers and advertisers have continued to market this product aggressively, especially to children (the Joe Camel campaign is the most dramatic case in point) and to foreign countries.

They have also apparently been less than truthful about tobacco's addictive and harmful qualities before Congress, in the courtroom and in the media, in order to protect their financial investment and, indeed, to increase it exponentially.

If Father Francis Connell were alive today, one doubts that he would have wasted his considerable talents for ethical analysis on the hapless, addicted individual, smoking his second pack of cigarettes on a given day. He'd be setting his sights instead on the tobacco industry's highly paid executives, lawyers and advertisers. He might also want to take a closer look at some latter day, self-styled moralists who have risen to the defense of the tobacco industry in the name of democratic capitalism.

I doubt if Father Connell would have bought their argument.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Act now, for earthly life is short

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 6:7-13. (R1) Amos 7:12-15. (R2) Ephesians 1:3-14.

Sunday's readings talk of mission and commission. Amos is commissioned by God to go to the king's sanctuary at Bethel and prophesy.

The Twelve are summoned by the Son of God to go out two-by-two to preach repentance.

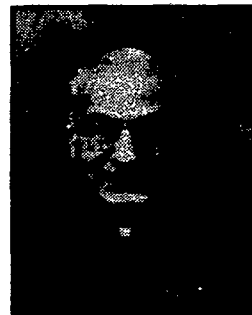
The first point in both commissions is the urgency of the mission. God told Amos to go, leave your flocks and your orchards, and go, prophesy to my people Israel. Go, do it now!

The Twelve are told to travel light. Take no food, no traveling bag, no money. Just a walking stick and sandals, like the Israelites when they were about to leave Egypt in the Exodus. Speed was imperative.

Nor were they to bother about lodgings. Stay wherever they'll take you. Take what is offered you to eat, and don't be picky or choosy. You have no time to lose.

Ulysses S. Grant, commander-in-chief of the Union Army during the Civil War, later president, was a man of great simplicity. In vital campaigns, he would take only the necessities. His secretary said, "I was with him once, when his entire baggage for six days was his toothbrush."

Victory often depended on quickness of movement, and Grant would not let himself be bogged down with paraphernalia common to most military



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

men. Romans called army baggage "impedimenta." And that was what baggage often was to an army — a hindrance.

Likewise, we must never let the things of this world get in the way of the things of God.

Secondly, we must act. Don't be a NATO person: No Action, Talk Only. The most effective Christians of our day are those who operate on the JDI principle: Just Do It.

On March 25, 1988, the Mother of God reportedly said in Medjugorje, "Dear children, forsake everything and consecrate your time to God. Don't forget your life is fleeting like a spring flower."

Flowers are never forever. Few things are so ephemeral as spring flowers. Man's life is like that: here today, gone tomorrow. Therefore, the Lord has said, "Don't loiter on the way. I have eternity, but you have only time — and time is short."

Life is short, and death is sure.

The hour of death remains obscure. A soul you have — an only one. If that be lost, all hope is gone.

Waste not your time, while time shall last;

For after death 'tis ever past. The all-seeing God your judge will be; Or heaven or hell — your destiny.

All earthly things will fleet away, Eternity shall ever stay.

Besides the urgency to travel light and to act speedily, there was the message: the need to repent.

Repentance means making a U-turn in life. So often we are going in the wrong direction. Repentance urges us to change our style of life. The change is not necessarily from glaring sins, like robbery, murder or adultery. The change generally has to be from a life that is completely selfish, inconsiderate, self-centered and egotistic, to one that is God-centered, active and apostolic.

Lastly, the Apostles were charged with bringing not only God's message of repentance, but also of healing bodies. Christianity aims at the whole man: soul and body.

The first Red Cross was started by the church, by St. Camillus. The first charities were organized by St. Vincent de Paul, founder of the Sisters of Charity. Everyone knows the story of Damien the Leper and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The monks of St. Benedict worked

the land to feed the poor. The Franciscans became poor to make the poor rich. The first poor laws in England came in 1601 after Henry VIII and Elizabeth had confiscated the monasteries of the land.

We may glory in the works of the church, but we are all called to continue the same works. We are to be leaven in society bettering it, making it wholesome. We are to be salt of the earth, flavoring life by our example. We are to be lights, scattering the darkness of sin and error.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, July 14

Exodus 1:8-14, 22;

Matthew 10:34-11:1

Tuesday, July 15

Exodus 2:1-15; Matthew 11:20-24

Wednesday, July 16

Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12;

Matthew 11:25-27

Thursday, July 17

Exodus 3:11-20;

Matthew 11:28-30

Friday, July 18

Exodus 11:10-12, 14;

Matthew 12:1-8

Saturday, July 19

Exodus 12:37-42;

Matthew 12:14-21

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