

COLUMNISTS

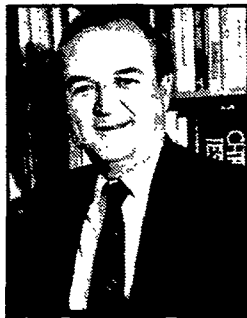
Promise Keepers has historical cousins

The Promise Keepers have come and gone from the Washington Mall, some half-a-million to a million of them. From their leadership's point of view, the rally must have been a great success: a cover story in *Time* magazine, lots of attention on the Sunday talk shows, plenty of column space in the national press and prayer-to-prayer coverage on C-SPAN. That ought to help boost slumping attendance at its recent stadium rallies in various parts of the country.

The reactions to the Promise Keepers' march on Washington ranged all the way from the sycophantic to the frantic: from those who gushed about family values, while wringing their hands over a nation that has lost its spiritual way, to those who could probably be persuaded that the Promise Keepers are the Klan without the sheets.

Leaders of women's groups in particular were skeptical of the movement's assurances that it has no political agenda. The Promise Keepers sound all too familiar to them, like Christian Coalition types who believe a woman's place is in the home, with the husband the divinely appointed head of household.

One of the wisest and calmest voices in the discussion has been that of Martin Marty, professor at the University of



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

Chicago and one of the most respected Protestant commentators on the U.S. religious scene.

In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* (10/3/97), Professor Marty places the Promise Keepers movement in some historical perspective. "They are not," he reminds us, "the first Protestants to organize in an effort to advance some version of the male cause."

Though the Promise Keepers has its own character, Marty points out, it draws from these and other earlier movements. "Where the Y.M.C.A. catered to wanderers, Promise Keepers champions men at home; where the Boy Scouts had a macho tint, Promise Keepers has hugs and crying."

But the tradition is the same, Dr. Marty insists, and that means that the

Promise Keepers "are far less threatening than the group's critics would have you believe." Indeed, as Marty suggests, some of the movement's critics may actually be working to the Promise Keepers' advantage. At a time when the movement's numbers have begun to decline, feminist critics come along to help its leadership convince current and potential followers that "there really are enemies out there."

Whoever knows the heart of an evangelical Protestant, Professor Marty observes, cannot be surprised, much less taken aback, by the Promise Keepers' devotional style. Evangelicals have always been "good at dealing with guilt and grace, shame and forgiveness, repentance and resolve." Thus, the Promise Keepers are challenged to change their ways and to keep their promises to their spouses and their children.

Without saying so explicitly, Martin Marty also puts his finger on why so many mainstream Christians, including Catholics, tend to look askance at the Promise Keepers. In addition to the crying and the arm waving, Promise Keepers seem to gravitate like devotees of tag sales to those biblical texts that portray God in a patriarchal way.

And yet if we have learned one thing

from feminist theologians and Scripture scholars over the past two decades, it is the power of theological and biblical language to define social, political and cultural roles more often for ill than for good. If God is masculine, society itself must have been made by "Him" in "His" own image and likeness, as the divine patriarch. It is divinely ordained from all eternity, therefore, that men are to be at the center of the social universe and atop the political and familial hierarchies.

Any theologically educated Christian who watched only portions of the televised proceedings from the Washington Mall earlier this month could only have winced at the Promise Keepers' relentlessly masculine references to God.

Try to imagine for a moment how the religious dynamism of the Promise Keepers' movement would have to change if, like the lawyer in the film "Liar, Liar," its leaders and literature were forced suddenly to stop speaking of God in masculine terms, but instead as a genderless reality who transcends every human concept. Not a Supreme (male) Being, not a being at all, but Being itself.

It wouldn't likely be the stuff of comedy, but of pathos.

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

Souls in purgatory need our prayerful help

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:37-40. (R1) Wisdom 3:1-9. (R2) Romans 6:3-9.

Nov. 2 is All Souls' Day. This year it falls on a Sunday. So important is this commemoration of our deceased that it preempts even the Sunday liturgy.

The church teaches two things about purgatory: First, it exists; and second, we can help the souls there.

Scripture abounds in references to purgatory: 2 Maccabees 12:43ff. Matthew 5:26; 12:32. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. 2 Timothy 1:5. 1 Peter 3:19; 4:6.

Under the city of Rome, there are more than 500 miles of catacombs, cemeteries of the early Christians. On the tombs of the deceased are inscribed the words: *Hic jacet (name) ora pro me.* "Here lies so-and-so, please pray for me." Those in heaven don't need prayer; and those in hell cannot benefit from prayer. So there must be another place.

In 1769 James Boswell said to Samuel Johnson: "Sir, what do you think of purgatory as believed by the Roman Catholics?"

Johnson answered: "Why, Boz, it is a very harmless doctrine. They are of the opinion that the generality of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of the blessed spirits; and therefore that God is graciously pleased to allow of a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering. You see, Boz, there is nothing unreasonable in this."

"But then, Sir," asked Boswell, "their masses for the dead?"

"Why, Boz," answered Johnson, "if it is once established that there are souls in Purgatory, it is as proper to pray for them as for our brethren who are yet in this life." As usual Johnson displayed great common sense.

We can help the souls in purgatory. That is what the communion of saints

means.

We can help them by having Masses celebrated for them. By giving alms. "Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins" (Sirach 3:29). By gaining indulgences for them. By praying for them.

We must never cease praying for our deceased. The church doesn't. God foresees all our Masses and prayers and applies them immediately to the soul. This is anticipatory grace, just as in the case of the Immaculate Conception. So pray always for our deceased.

Death is the end of life, but it must not be the end of love. We have loved them in life, let us not forget them in death.

In the Judgment, Jesus will judge us by our charity to the hungry, thirsty, naked and in prison. And who are these? The poor souls in purgatory.

A pious man died. He was the friend of St. Antoninus, the saintly bishop of Florence, and a great benefactor of St. Antoninus' diocese. Masses and prayers were offered for him. After a long while, the man appeared to St. Antoninus suffering the terrible pains of purgatory.

Shocked, St. Antoninus asked, "Are you still in purgatory? You who led so pi-

ous and devout a life?"

"Yes," answered his friend, "and I shall remain there for a long time. On earth I neglected to pray for the souls in purgatory. Now God in his justice has applied all the Masses and prayers being offered for me to those souls for whom I should have prayed."

How true the words of our Lord: "The measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." (Luke 6:30)

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

Daily Readings

Monday, November 3
Romans 11:29-36; Luke 14:12-14
Tuesday, November 4
Romans 12:5-16; Luke 14:15-24
Wednesday, November 5
Romans 13:8-10; Luke 14:25-33
Thursday, November 6
Romans 14:7-12; Luke 15:1-10
Friday, November 7
Romans 15:14-21; Luke 16:1-8
Saturday, November 8
Romans 16:3-9, 16, 22-27; Luke 16:9-15

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THING TO DO..."**

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