

COLUMNISTS

Church should review its internal social justice

The observance of Labor Day prompts this reflection on what should be our abiding concern for justice in the church.

Over a century of Catholic social teaching, only two pronouncements have applied this teaching to the church itself: "Justice in the World," from the Third World Synod of Bishops in 1971, and "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1986 pastoral letter.

The synodal document was remarkable because it incorporated the social apostolate of the church into the essence of the church's mission. "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world," it declared, "fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (Introduction, para. 6).

Previously, the social apostolate had been regarded as only antecedent to the real mission of the church: preaching the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments. The social apostolate was placed in the category of "pre-evangelization," that is, activities that prepare people to receive the message of salvation and to participate eventually in the church's sacramental life.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

According to the synodal document however, the church's activities "on behalf of justice and ... the transformation of the world" are an essential part of the preaching of the Gospel. They are works of evangelization itself.

But the synodal pronouncement went even further: "While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, the Church recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the Church itself" (III, para. 2).

The document continued: "Within the Church rights must be preserved. No one should be deprived of his or her ordinary rights because they are associated with the Church in one way or another. Those who

serve the Church by their labor, including priests and religious, should receive a sufficient livelihood and enjoy that social security which is customary in their region. Lay people should be given fair wages and a system for promotion..." (para. 3).

"We also urge that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church..." (para. 4).

"The Church recognizes everyone's right to suitable freedom of expression and thought. This includes the right of everyone to be heard in a spirit of dialogue which preserves a legitimate diversity within the Church" (para. 6).

"The form of judicial procedure should give the accused the right to know his or her accusers and also the right to a proper defense. To be complete, justice should include speed in its procedure. This is especially necessary in marriage cases" (para. 7).

The document called upon the church "to live and administer its goods in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed to the poor. If instead the church appears to be among the rich and powerful of this world its credibility is diminished" (para. 9).

The 1986 pastoral letter of the U.S. Catholic bishops drew heavily upon the synodal document. "All of the moral prin-

ciples that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the Church and its agencies and institutions; indeed the Church should be exemplary" (n. 347).

The bishops committed themselves to "the principle that those who serve the church — laity, clergy and religious — should receive a sufficient livelihood and the social benefits provided by responsible employers in our nation" (n. 351).

They affirmed "the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively with the institution through whatever association or organization they freely choose."

Finally, the bishops underscored "the continuing discrimination against women throughout Church and society, especially reflected in both the inequities of salaries between women and men and in the concentration of women in jobs at the lower end of the wage scale" (n. 353).

To be sure, these pointed words of both the Synod of Bishops and the U.S. Catholic bishops are utterly meaningless if they are not honored in practice in every diocese, parish, school and hospital operating under Catholic auspices.

Labor Day 1999 offers the church a challenge to practice what it preaches.

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

Work things out with others before it's too late

23rd Sunday of the Year (Sept. 5): (R3) Matthew 18:15-20. (R1) Ezekiel 33:7-9. (R2) Romans 13:8-10.

There was a church where the pastor and the minister of music were not getting along. As time went by, this began to spill over into the worship service.

The first week the pastor preached on how we all should dedicate ourselves to the service of God. The music director played "I Shall Not Be Moved."

The next week the pastor preached on tithing and giving gladly to the Lord. The director led the song, "Jesus Paid It All."

The third week the pastor preached on gossiping. The music director led the song, "I Love to Tell the Story."

Disgusted, the pastor told the congregation the following Sunday that he was considering resigning. The musician led the song, "Oh, Why Not Tonight?"

The pastor did resign and told the congregation that it was Jesus who had led him to this parish and it was Jesus who was taking him away. The music leader led the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Isn't it true that there often is somebody who gets under one's skin?

In September 1996 Mark E. Mire was convicted in Baton Rouge, La., for shooting to death a man in a bar in 1994 be-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

cause the man had said Mire's dog was ugly. Drunken stupidity.

In Paraguay dueling is still legal provided both parties are registered blood donors. Social stupidity.

Wouldn't it be great if we could live in peace and harmony with all people? Jesus tried to help us with this. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother."

How many deaths, how many conflicts, could be avoided if we followed Jesus' advice? Why can't we sit down with people and work things out before they get out of hand? In Jesus' teaching, the person who is sinned against takes the first step. Who is right is sometimes not as important as maintaining communication.

There are times when who's right isn't as important as maintaining communication. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in a concentration camp. One day a German officer walked by and Bonhoeffer saluted him and said, "Heil, Hitler." Bonhoeffer noticed that another prisoner next to him was refusing to salute. So Bonhoeffer whispered to him, "Salute, you fool. This isn't worth dying for." Some things simply aren't worth dying for.

Sometimes there is an urgency to mend fences. In *Chicken Soup*, Dennis E. Mannerling tells about an assignment he gave to a class of adults to "go to someone you love, and tell them that you love them."

At the next class, one of the students said to the teacher, "I was angry that you gave this assignment. I didn't feel I had anyone to say those words to. But as I drove home, my conscience started talking. It told me exactly who I had to say those words to. Five years ago, my father and I had a vicious disagreement and never really dissolved it. We hardly spoke. By the time I got home, I convinced myself I was going to tell my father I loved him."

"The decision seemed to lift a heavy load off my chest. I went to my parents' house. Dad answered the doorbell. I didn't waste any time. I took one step in the

door and said, 'Dad, I just came over' to tell you that I love you.'

"It was as if a transformation came over my dad. His face softened, he began to cry. He reached out and hugged me and said, 'I love you too, son, but I've never been able to say it.'

"Two days later Dad had a heart attack. I hope he'll make it. But my message is, 'Don't wait to do the things you know need to be done. Act now!'"

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

Daily Readings

Monday, September 6

Colossians 1:24-2:3; Luke 6:6-11

Tuesday, September 7

Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 6:12-19

Wednesday, September 8

Micah 5:1-4 or Romans 8:28-30;

Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23, or 1:18-23

Thursday, September 9

Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 6:27-38

Friday, September 10

1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14; Luke 6:39-42

Saturday, September 11

1 Timothy 1:15-17; Luke 6:43-49

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