

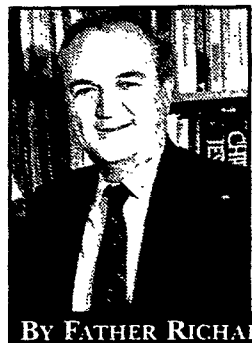
COLUMNISTS

Lieberman raises issue of religion in public life

There has been a glut of commentary, in print and on television and radio, about Senator Joseph Lieberman's references to his religious faith and his more pointed statements about the role of religion in public life.

In *The New York Times* alone, within the space of only a week, there were opened pieces by Eleanor Brown, a fellow at the New America Foundation, who applauded Lieberman's reuniting of religion and political liberalism in the spirit of the late Martin Luther King Jr.; by former Sen. Eugene McCarthy and Keith Burris, Connecticut newspaper editor, who expressed a concern about the religifying of politics and the politicizing of religion; by Stephen Carter, law professor at Yale University and author of a new book on religion and politics, who indicated that the separation of church and state makes it possible for religious bodies to be intercultural; and by Michael Novak, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, who delights in the senator's openness about his religious faith, but not in his politics.

The Times itself weighed in with a lead editorial which read: "The idea that spiritual guidance can help in combating immorality is irrefutable. The danger lies in political appeals that are so zealous



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

that they unsettle Americans with different religious views, making them feel like second-class citizens, or lead to policies coercive toward non-believers." The paper also published a higher-than-average number of letters on the subject.

The veritable avalanche of comment had been stimulated in large measure by the unexpected criticism against Senator Lieberman by Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish organization based in New York City. Mr. Foxman faulted Lieberman for pushing the religious envelope too far into the political arena. He took particular exception to assertions that religious faith is an essential foundation of morality and that the Constitution only guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.

Senator Lieberman backed off from one of the two positions. "I know religious people whom I consider not to be moral and I also know people who are not religious whom I consider to be extremely moral. So, you know, I'm talking about probabilities." He did not qualify his view that the Constitution does not guarantee freedom from religion.

What is to be made of all this? First, those who defend Senator Lieberman saying that religion and the expression of religious faith have a legitimate place in the public forum are right. As commentators have pointed out, many of the leaders and activists in the successful struggles against slavery and for civil rights were largely motivated and inspired by their religious faith.

Second, the so-called wall of separation between church and state ("the wall" not appearing in the Constitution) does not preclude people of faith from running for political office, nor publicly acknowledging their faith, nor appealing openly to their traditional sacred texts, nor calling upon God to bless theirs and the nation's efforts (all of which Senator Lieberman did in Nashville in August).

Third, while it is true that religious faith and the values associated with a particular religious tradition can, and often

do, inspire noble, even heroic, behavior, morality itself is not grounded exclusively in religion. Indeed, Catholicism's natural law tradition insists that a sense of morality is written in the heart of every human, whether the person be religious or not. Religion should contribute substantially to the development of a moral sensibility, but it is not essential.

Fourth, the Constitution, fashioned against the background of religious persecution in the colonists' native lands, does indeed guarantee freedom from religion as well as freedom of religion.

There are two religion clauses in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The latter guarantees freedom of religion; the former guarantees to religious dissenter and non-believer protection from laws that would make their citizenship less equal than anyone else's.

Finally, while few Americans like to see religious groups pushing their own political agenda (a tendency of Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals, not of Jews), there is a remedy to such behavior — in the voting booth.

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

Stones and little foxes can impede life's journey

26th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 1): (R3) Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48; (R1) Numbers 11:25-29. (R2) James 5:1-6.

In the Gospel, Jesus uses some strong words. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out!" He is using hyperbole to drive home some very important advice.

The first thing he is saying is, "Evaluate your path in life." What is your ultimate goal? Whenever we plan a trip, the first thing we think of is our goal, where we are going. We begin with the end in mind and keep our eyes fixed on that.

In 1965 Allen Schwartz became the law partner of Ed Koch when Koch was 40 years old. When Schwartz's wife gave birth to a boy, David, Koch said, "David will have his bar mitzvah in Gracie Mansion." Schwartz thought Koch had lost his mind. David did have his bar mitzvah 13 years later — at Gracie Mansion.

Koch had a plan, a vision. Since many have no fixed direction in life — no challenging goals, no lofty purpose — they do not achieve all that they might achieve. Evaluate your life's path!

Secondly, Jesus emphasizes that it is the little things that count — hand, foot, eye. Men trip not on mountains; they stumble on stones.



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

At Orlando, Florida, a suspected Colombian drug kingpin who had eluded authorities for two years was caught shoplifting souvenirs. Amazing! A few years ago a presidential debate with more than 100 million viewers was held up for 27 minutes because of a malfunction caused by a capacitor costing \$1. Imagine! The space probe Mariner I, bound for Venus, had to be destroyed at a cost of \$18.5 million due to a missing comma in Mariner's computer program. Look to the little things! The little foxes eat the vines.

Are there little foxes that are gnawing at the vine of your life? Look after the little things: diversions that distract you from your goals, time wasters that drain the hours out of your day. One of the

best antidotes to sin is the realization that sin always keeps you from your goals, your path, your heart's real desire. That is what sin is — an impediment to your being all God created you to be.

Finally, Jesus says, act decisively. Cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye is about as decisive an act as one can take. If you see that your life can be better — your home life or your work life or your life as a disciple of Jesus — and if you see that there are things that are keeping you from achieving what God means for you to achieve, don't "pussyfoot around," get into action.

Someone invented a new word, "catmatic." It is the opposite of dogmatic. Dogmatic people are those who have opinions about everything and are always expressing those opinions. Catmatic persons are those who pussyfoot around! They never make firm decisions. They never get into action.

A farmer needed a farmhand. So he posted a notice in the village. Three youths responded. The farmer met with each in turn, asking about his background and concluded with a peculiar question. "Tell me, how long can you work with a stone in your shoe?" "Half a day," answered the first youth. The sec-

ond young man boasted, "All day long!" Third youth responded, "Not a minute! When I get a stone in my shoe, I take it out right away." The farmer hired the third young man on the spot.

If there is some stone in your shoe as you walk life's path, impeding your progress, get rid of it and do it now. Jesus wants us to think long term, to rid ourselves of those little things that drag us down, and he wants us to act decisively.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, October 2
Job 1:6-22; Matthew 18:1-5, 10
Tuesday, October 3
Job 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23; Luke 9:51-56
Wednesday, October 4
Job 9:1-12, 14-16; Luke 9:57-62
Thursday, October 5
Job 19:21-27; Luke 10:1-12
Friday, October 6
Job 38:1, 12-21, 40:3-5; Luke 10:13-16
Saturday, October 7
Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17; Luke 10:17-24

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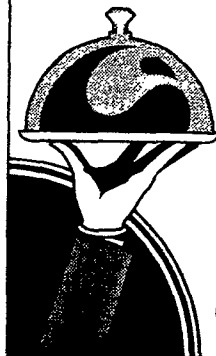
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