

COLUMNISTS

Media 'spin' misrepresents pope's teaching

The ability to "spin" has become an essential qualification for a successful political operative. To spin is to skew the evidence so that it supports your candidate's interests and puts the best face on an unpleasant development.

Whenever Pope John Paul II issues a major encyclical or delivers an important address on economic and social questions, certain Catholic writers can be depended upon to drag out their own spinning wheels in an effort to re-weave the statement into an economically and politically conservative pattern.

The latest instance occurs, not surprisingly, on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. In a lengthy column entitled, "A Gospel of Freedom" (12/22/00), the *Journal's* chief editorial writer, William McGurn, reconfigures John Paul II into a free-market globalist with no time for socialism or the welfare state (financial allocations for those in need or federal regulation of business).

The occasion for the column was a recent Vatican conference on "Globalization, Economy & the Family," cosponsored by the conservative Acton Institute of Grand Rapids, Mich., and the Pontifical Institute for the Family.

What papal profile emerges from the column? First, that he believes "the so-



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

cial question is the question of the market." Second, that the "free and open world market" is not responsible for the existence of "poor and marginalized" people; "their exclusion from it" causes their poverty and powerlessness, because they are deprived of jobs and "the opportunity to ratchet themselves upward as they learn what skills are necessary to success and how to acquire them."

Third, that "a truly open and global economy" is "a necessary if insufficient condition" for "a freely chosen civilization of solidarity." Fourth, that "the test of a legitimate capitalism is one that respects profits and private property and allows for 'free human creativity in the economic sphere.'"

Fifth, that "the most valuable" elements of human labor are "intelligence,

creativity, enterprise." Sixth, that one does not truly help the poor with aid or assistance, but by encouraging them to become "agents of their own development." Otherwise, they are nothing more than "rutting animals breeding to their own destruction while they wait beneath the tables of the West for the crumbs to drop; another billion or so in aid, or another billion in condoms."

"However short this falls of loving thy neighbor as thyself," McGurn concludes, "surely it provides a more fertile soil for the Gospel imperative than what John Paul II calls the 'Culture of Death.'"

He concedes that "belief in the laws of the market does not ... require a belief in the Almighty, much less in Jesus Christ or the Roman Catholic church. If John Paul is right, however, what they do share is a truth that man was meant for freedom and the determination that in this third millennium we no longer speak of economics as the Dismal Science."

Perhaps not economics, but surely this version of papal teaching.

Where is the pope's affirmation of the "preferential option for the poor," or his insistence on the economic rights of workers and the demands of social justice and human rights (beyond property and profits), or his support for the rights

of workers to form labor unions, or his strictures against an unregulated capitalism, or his criticism of a consumerism that is artificially stimulated and manipulated by the free market's advertising engines, or his emphasis on the need to preserve the environment from exploitation and pollution, or his warnings about the "idolatry of the market," or his reminder that the right to private property is not absolute but socially conditioned, or his assertion that "the more that individuals are defenseless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular the intervention of governmental authority"?

John Paul II has written positively about the global free market, but his approval is qualified by the knowledge that there are "many human needs which find no place on the market." The market, he pointed out in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), must be "appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied."

Spinners need to weave these threads in as well.

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

St. Paul offers his classic explanation of love

4th Sunday of the Year (Jan. 28): (R3) Luke 4:21-30; (R1) Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13.

Sunday's second reading is from St. Paul's classic explanation of love. In his letter, Paul lists 14 facets of love: two tell what love is; eight tell what love is not; four describe the four attitudes of love.

First, Paul tells what love is. It is patient and it is kind. Patience means putting up, not with things, problems, afflictions, disasters, like those that afflicted holy Job, but putting up with people, like Job's friends, who were judgmental and uncharitable. Motive is important: salesmen put up with people to make a sale. But Christian love puts up with people for the love of God.

Secondly, love is kind. The word "kind" comes from the word "kin." Kindness means to love another as one is supposed to love one's kin. It reaches out to others by being considerate (listening to them); by being compassionate (feeling with them); and by being gracious — a good neighbor or friend. A little girl prayed: "Dear God, please make bad people good and good people kind."

Next, Paul lists eight qualities about what love is not. First, it's not jealous nor sad about another's good fortune as



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

though it were a personal attack. True love is content.

Secondly, love does not put on airs. It does not have an unreasonable desire for the esteem of others. Be modest. All we have is from God. Refer all to him.

Thirdly, love is not snobbish. It is not puffed up like a hot-air balloon. Nor is it so proud that it feels no need for God, prayer, or the sacraments.

Fourthly, love is never rude. One virtue our youth seem to have lost is respect and courtesy for others, especially for elders. A bumper sticker read: "Be odd, be polite."

Fifthly, love is not self-seeking. Paul is talking about the "me first, others be damned" attitude.

Sixthly, love is not prone to anger. As

a poet put it: "Anger in its time and place/ May assume a kind of grace/ But it must have reason in it/ And not last beyond a minute." As the Book of Proverbs (15:1) reads: "A mild answer calms wrath."

Seventhly, love does not brood over injuries. Some quipster joked: The Irish Alzheimer's disease is "to forget everything but the grudge." When a parishioner who had been badgering his pastor finally asked forgiveness, the priest wrote: "Forgiven, forgotten, forever!"

Lastly, love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth: this could happen to me; there go I but for the grace of God.

Then, Paul lists the four permanent attitudes of true love. True love bears all things, covers up for others. Of St. Teresa of Avila, it was said, "When Teresa was present, the absent were safe."

True love trusts, both God and fellow men. Love ennobles even the ignoble by believing the best of persons. Fr. Flanagan of Boys Town said: "There are no bad boys; only bad environment, bad training, bad example, bad thinking."

True love has no limit to its hope and never gives up on a person, just as a mother never gives up on her wayward

child. True love has great expectations.

Finally, love has the power to endure, never allows disappointment or difficulty to cause one to give up on a person. As Burt Bacharach wrote: "What the world needs now/ Is love — sweet love/ No, not just for some/ But for everyone."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, January 29
Hebrews 11:32-40; Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday, January 30
Hebrews 12:1-4; Mark 5:21-43

Wednesday, January 31
Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15;
Mark 6:1-6

Thursday, February 1
Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24;
Mark 6:7-13

Friday, February 2
Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18;
Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

Saturday, February 3
Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21;
Mark 6:30-34

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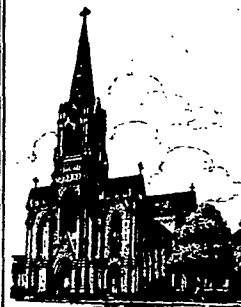
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FEB. 28 - ASH WEDNESDAY NOON MASS
LENTEN/EASTER SERVICES TBA



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