

COLUMNISTS

Archives closed to 'Jewish-Catholic' scholars

Stonewalling often works. Many with legitimate grievances against major organizations and public figures are forced to retreat from the legal battlefield for lack of financial resources and/or psychological staying-power. Plaintiffs are drained, worn down and bullied away by powerful and unyielding defendants.

Stonewalling can also backfire, as it has in some highly publicized lawsuits against the Catholic Church over sexual misconduct by its clergy. The stonewalling only magnifies and intensifies the original offense, with church officials as well as the predator being seen at fault.

Only a commitment to the truth and a readiness to rectify wrongdoing can insure the realization of justice and, in the end, a containment of the damage.

The controversies over Pope Pius XII's role during the Holocaust and Pope Pius IX's alleged anti-Semitism, freshly stimulated by Professor David Kertzer's new book, *The Popes Against Jews: the Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (Knopf), are not going to go away simply because scholars have been denied access to the relevant Vatican archives.

On the contrary, that action has only made matters worse. It has reinforced the suspicion that the Catholic Church has something to hide in the matter of



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Pius XII, whose cause for canonization was initiated some 35 years ago, and Pius IX, who last year was raised to the ranks of the "blessed." The upshot was that the Vatican panel of scholars, Catholic and Jewish alike, disbanded in protest.

While the record of the Catholic Church and of the papacy has not been a particularly glorious one in the matter of the Jews, that record is not without its positive aspects. And those positive aspects have been increasing almost exponentially in recent years. Never before in its history has the church been more aware of its sins against the Jews and more readily disposed to acknowledging and asking forgiveness for those sins.

The turn began under John XXIII (1958-63) when he removed the reference to the "perfidious Jews" from one

of the prayers of the Good Friday liturgy.

It was a relatively small step, but one filled with symbolism. It paved the way for the subsequent forward leaps taken by the Second Vatican Council in its historic Declaration on the Relationship Between the Church and Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), by various European bishops' conferences (especially in Germany and France), and by Pope John Paul II himself.

That dramatic progress was acknowledged last year in *Dabru Emet* ("speak the truth to one another"), a highly publicized statement on Christians and Christianity prepared by a small group of Jewish rabbis and endorsed by some 170 rabbis and scholars from all four branches of Judaism in North America.

In 1965 Vatican II explicitly condemned anti-Semitism "at any time and from any source." In 1995, the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the infamous concentration camp at Auschwitz, the German bishops condemned the silence of Christians during the Holocaust and confessed the guilt of the church itself. The French bishops followed suit in 1997, acknowledging the "anti-Jewish" dimension of some of the church's doctrines, theology, preaching and rituals.

The French bishops did not ascribe

the sin to individual Catholics alone. They called it a "failing of the Church of France" and begged God's and the Jewish people's pardon for it.

John Paul II himself has established an extraordinary record in Jewish-Catholic relations, beginning with his visit in 1986 to Rome's chief synagogue (the first pope in history to do so), where he acknowledged that some of his predecessors were also guilty of sins against the Jewish people (a reference not included in the official text of his remarks). In 1994 he accorded formal diplomatic recognition to the State of Israel.

However, the high point of his pontificate in this regard was reached in 2000 during his visit to Jerusalem, and specifically his extraordinary appearances at the Wall and at Yad Vashem, the memorial for victims of the Holocaust.

When Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) opened the Vatican archives to scholars of all backgrounds in 1883, he confidently declared that "the Church has nothing to fear from the truth."

These controversies will not begin to subside until those words are taken fully to heart.

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

Many have a Lazarus at their gates

26th Sunday of the Year (Sept. 30): (R3) Luke 16:19-31; (R1) Amos 6:1, 4-7; (R2) 1 Timothy 6:11-16.

"Once there was a rich man," said Jesus, "who dressed in linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate lay a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his wounds."

Jesus was a great storyteller. Note the contrast he draws between the two characters in his parable. "Rich man ... purple ... fine linen ... luxury." And "beggar ... covered with sores ... longing to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table ... dogs came and licked his wounds." Jesus wanted us to see, in a way we could not forget, the rich man living in splendor and Lazarus living in squalor.

One of the lessons of this parable was to teach us that what is important in life is not how much we have, but the way we treat other people. The rich man was not a bad person. He kept the letter of the Law. His only sin was that he failed to notice Lazarus lying at his doorway. Do we treat the people we come in contact with in ways that Jesus would want us to? Or, like the rich man, do we pretend that



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

they do not exist?

The only thing we can take with us beyond the grave is what we have done for others for the sake of Jesus. Instead of trying to accumulate possessions, we should seek to do all we can for others — our family, our friends, the homeless, the needy, our church. The rich man could have helped Lazarus, but chose to ignore him. Are we too preoccupied with our selves so as not to notice the poor, the needy, the homeless living next to us?

Another point is that we have more in common with the rich man than with Lazarus. We have VCRs, television sets, telephones, air conditioning and cars. Moreover, most of us have our health. Lazarus couldn't even work. How blessed people are just to have good health!

Then, too, we have people who love us — family and friends. Most of us have a good education. For the most part, we are attractive people. Certainly, the dogs do not lick our sores.

Yet Jesus was not talking about wealth and poverty, but about sensitivity to those around us. The world is filled with needy people. Their needs are not always financial. Many times they are people who need love, recognition, encouragement, friends. They are all around us — neighbors, people we work with, those we live with, people we love.

Young people need the benefit of our experience. They need for us to listen to them without judging them. Then real communication can take place and we can help them.

There is a story about a botanist who was studying the heather bell found in the highlands of Scotland. While looking through his microscope at this beautiful flower, he was approached by a shepherd who asked what he was doing. Rather than trying to explain, the botanist invited the shepherd to peer through his microscope and observe for himself. When the shepherd saw the wonder of the flower, he exclaimed, "My God, and I have been trampling on them

all my life!"

Is that the word of warning we need? Do we need to wake up? Or to pay attention? Are you or have you been trampling on the heart of someone nearby? Who is the Lazarus at your gate?

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, October 1**
Zechariah 8:1-8; Psalms 102:16-23, 29; Luke 9:46-50
- Tuesday, October 2**
Zechariah 8:20-23; Psalms 87:1-7; Matthew 18:1-5, 10
- Wednesday, October 3**
Nehemiah 2:1-8; Psalms 137:1-6; Luke 9:57-62
- Thursday, October 4**
Nehemiah 8:1-4A, 5-6, 7B-12; Psalms 19:8-11; Luke 10:1-12
- Friday, October 5**
Baruch 1:15-22; Psalms 79:1-5, 8-9; Luke 10:13-16
- Saturday, October 6**
Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29; Psalms 69:33-37; Luke 10:17-24

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SAT/SUN MATINEES: 12:45, 3:15
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