

COLUMNISTS

Falwell and Robertson spread the blame

It is easy to dump on poor Jerry Falwell and his fundamentalist soul-mate, Pat Robertson, for their intemperate remarks on Robertson's television program, "The 700 Club," just two days after the horrific attacks upon New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington.

Falwell blamed secularists, feminists, gays and lesbians, the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way — all, according to him, with crucial help from the federal court system — for spiritually weakening the country through their support of legalized abortion, gay rights and their opposition to prayer in public schools.

"What we saw on Tuesday, as terrible as it is," Mr. Falwell said, "could be minuscule if, in fact, God continues to lift the curtain [of protection] and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve."

Pat Robertson endorsed Falwell's remarks. "Jerry, that's my feeling. I think we've just seen the antechamber to terror. We haven't even begun to see what they can do to the major population."

A few moments later, Falwell expanded upon his earlier comment. "I really believe," he continued, "that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are ac-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

tively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America, I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'

Alas, the next day the back-peddling began, and three days after that came the public apology.

In a brief statement issued in the teeth of a storm of bitter protest, including a rebuke from the White House itself, Falwell said: "Despite the impression some may have from news reports today, I hold no one other than the terrorists and the people and nations who have enabled and harbored them responsible for Tuesday's attacks on this nation."

Three days later, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Falwell went a step

further and issued an explicit apology.

"I apologize that, during a week when everyone appropriately dropped all labels and no one was seen as liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, religious or secular," he said, "I singled out for blame certain groups of Americans." He characterized his original remarks on Pat Robertson's television program as "insensitive, uncalled for at the time and unnecessary."

Mr. Robertson, however, felt no need for contrition. He released a statement on Friday of that terrible week saying that no one on his program had suggested that anyone but the terrorists was responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people.

Some have noted that the Reverend Messrs. Falwell and Robertson were only reflecting a theological viewpoint that is common among some, if not many, of their fundamentalist, evangelical and Pentecostalist coreligionists, namely, that God deliberately withdraws divine protection from nations in retribution for their violations of divine law.

In this instance, God's lifting "the curtain of protection," as Mr. Falwell put it, meant that God foresaw and allowed the deaths of thousands of innocent persons, including children and infants, in order

to teach the feminists, the gays and lesbians, those who support legalized abortion and those who oppose prayer in public schools that God will not be mocked.

While no one should ever suggest, by hint or sly innuendo, that the Falwells and the Robertsons are somehow on the same moral level as the Islamic fundamentalists who were involved in this series of horrific events or who supported and approved them from afar, there is something that they do have in common and it is in the realm of theology.

They share, to some extent, a profile of God as a punisher of sins, whose punishments may even include the killing of thousands of innocent persons, perpetrated by agents acting on God's behalf.

While our own fundamentalist leaders would never countenance the use of violence in the defense of God's will, one cannot forget that at least a few kindred spirits have murdered doctors, nurses and staff personnel associated with abortion clinics in this country.

Religious fanatics, under whatever name, distort the face of God. Would that there were a divine "curtain of protection" from them as well.

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

Include thanks in all prayers

28th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 14): (R3) Luke 17:11-19; (R1) 2 Kings 5:14-17; (R2) 2 Timothy 2:8-13.

Jesus was traveling near the border of Samaria and Galilee on his way to Jerusalem. Near the border was a group of lepers. It was common for such groups to band together on the outskirts of cities, often deserted by family and friends.

When they saw Jesus their hopes were raised. They cried out, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" Jesus said, "Go and show yourselves to the priest." It was customary for people with leprosy or other skin disorders to show themselves to the priest. If the priest declared the leper cured, he was free to rejoin family and friends.

As the 10 lepers went to show themselves to the priest, Luke writes, "they were cured." They received the gift of healing, but only one returned, fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.

In saying thanks we often receive more than we expect. The man who returned to thank Jesus received, besides physical healing, the gift of salvation. "Stand up," Jesus said to him, "your faith has been your salvation."

In saying thank you we also bless others. A Sunday school class made cards to



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

distribute to residents at a nursing home. One lad handed a card to a woman sitting in a wheelchair and smiled at her. The woman's eyes filled with tears of joy. She exclaimed, "Oh, thank you!" The young lad later said, "I felt how good it was to give a person something."

No prayer is complete without a word of thanksgiving. St. Paul said, "Give thanks in all circumstance..." By giving thanks we unlock the storehouse of God. Our trials are often transformed into triumphs. The burden may someday be a blessing. There is a saying that "God writes straight in crooked lines." Trust him. Be grateful no matter the problems.

Finally, we need to remember that we are all debtors. So many Christians for-

get the blessings that God has given them. Instead, they seem to focus on problems. In class I used to make a dot in the center of a blank sheet of paper. I would ask the class what they saw. Invariably the answer would be that they saw the dot in the middle of the sheet. Then I would say, "You missed all the white paper and saw only a dot."

Christopher Columbus discovered America. Whether or not he was the first is irrelevant. There is no denying that Columbus did indeed make a contribution to our world that influenced the lives of many generations to come.

As one historian wrote: "It was Columbus' genius to marshal all his knowledge and past experience, and use them to forge the trip to the Indies. Columbus' breakthrough lay in his ability to make theory a useful tool. This was a thoroughly modern idea. The notion that ideas could be transformed into action — even on such a grand scale as the scheme of getting east by going west — was what set him apart. Columbus was born at precisely the right place, and grew into manhood learning precisely the right things, at a time when the West discovered it must risk or wither, grow or die."

Whether all of Columbus' actions would meet our approval, we acknowledge his contribution. But like that one Samaritan who came back, we are thankful most of all, to Jesus. His contribution is greatest of all, for he has given us all life, hope and victory.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, October 15

Romans 1:1-7; Psalms 98:1-4; Luke 11:29-32

Tuesday, October 16

Romans 1:16-25; Psalms 19:2-5; Luke 11:37-41

Wednesday, October 17

Romans 2:1-11; Psalms 62:2-3, 6-7, 9; Luke 11:42-46

Thursday, October 18

2 Timothy 4:10-17B; Psalms 145:10-13AB, 17-18; Luke 10:1-9

Friday, October 19

Romans 4:1-8; Psalms 32:1-2, 5, 11; Luke 12:1-7

Saturday, October 20

Romans 4:13, 16-18; Psalms 105:6-9, 42-43; Luke 12:8-12

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