

## COLUMNISTS

## Conservatives on both sides regarding hierarchy

One of the remarkable aspects of the tragic crisis confronting the Catholic Church today is the widespread collapse of support for the hierarchy on the part of a traditionally loyal and dutiful laity. Indeed, the expressions of anger and the demands for the resignations of bishops accused of covering up criminal behavior have come at least as frequently from the Catholic right as from their counterparts in the moderate middle and on the left.

And the exceptions prove the rule. The three most prominent voices on the right who have not joined the chorus of criticism are Father Richard John Neuhaus, a former Lutheran minister who edits the conservative magazine, *First Things*; Raymond Flynn, former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See and former mayor of Boston; and Mary Ann Glendon, a professor of law at Harvard who is frequently called upon to represent the voice of the Vatican and the U.S. Catholic bishops.

Father Neuhaus and professor Glendon blame the counter-culturalism of the 1960s for the mess we're in, with professor Glendon going so far as to say that it's all a matter of "clerical self-discipline." A variation perhaps on the slogan, "Just say 'No.'" Ambassador Flynn, on the other hand, has focused his efforts on defending his "good friend," Cardinal Bernard



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

## essays in theology

Law of Boston, who had a large hand in securing the Vatican post for him.

Father Neuhaus, Ambassador Flynn and professor Glendon are in a distinct minority, even on the right. Their attempts at shifting the blame from the bishops to nameless counter-culturalists or, in Flynn's case, to *The Boston Globe*, stand in stark contrast to the blunt analyses and severe solutions proposed by some of their better-known associates on the Catholic right.

Among the first to call for Cardinal Law's resignation was the recognized father of modern-day conservatism in the United States, William F. Buckley Jr. In a nationally syndicated column on Feb. 12, he referred sharply to the state of "lawlessness in Boston" and urged its archbishop to step aside.

On March 14, Bill O'Reilly, the popular

host of Fox-TV's "The Factor," posted "Sins of the Fathers" on the WorldNet-Daily Web site. He characterized the Catholic Church as a dictatorship and pined for the days "when a compassionate man like John XXIII was calling the shots."

"What is not a secret any longer," O'Reilly wrote, "is the failure of the church leadership in America." Cardinal Law's refusal to resign, he argued, "is precisely the indicator that explains how the church's sexual molestation problem could get so far out of control."

O'Reilly was followed in quick order by William Bennett, *Book of Virtues* author, secretary of education in two previous Republican administrations and a prominent moral critic of President Clinton.

Bennett has called for the resignation of any bishop who covered up the criminal activities of priests under their direct supervision. In his op-ed piece of March 18 in *The Wall Street Journal*, Bennett mentioned only Cardinal Law by name, but clearly included other bishops. They "must be removed from positions of authority, no less than the priests whose acts were covered up. Both groups harmed children, and harmed the Church."

Bennett's broadside was followed, in turn, by one from Patrick Buchanan, a virulent critic of liberals in both politics and

the Catholic Church and a two-time candidate for the presidency of the United States. In his own WorldNetDaily column posted on March 19, Buchanan compared Cardinal Law to "a Mafia don providing safe houses for one of his button men. ... Catholic bishops who failed in their managerial and moral duty to protect innocent children should be sent to monasteries to do penance the rest of their lives."

"His Holiness," Buchanan declared, "needs to clean house. Pope John Paul II should send a representative to the United States to order the immediate retirement of any bishop who failed in his duty to expel pedophiles from the priesthood."

Not even William Donahue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, has rallied to the support of the bishops. "I am not here to defend the indefensible," he told *The New York Times* March 24. Conservative Catholics, he acknowledged, are just as angry with the hierarchy "for dereliction of duty."

Al Gore would be president today if he hadn't lost his home state of Tennessee. The moral is that you cannot afford to alienate your natural base of support. It's a lesson for bishops and politicians alike.

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

## Christ appears but is not always recognized

3rd Sunday of Easter (April 14): (R3) Luke 24:13-35; (R1) Acts 2:14, 22-33; (R2) 1 Peter 1:17-21.

"I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you. Which would you like to hear first?" the farmer asked.

"Why don't you tell me the bad news first?" the banker replied.

"Okay," said the farmer, "With the bad drought and inflation and all, I won't be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year, either on the principal or the interest."

"Well, that is pretty bad," said the banker.

"It gets worse," said the farmer. "I also won't be able to pay anything on the loan for all that machinery I bought, not on the principal or interest."

"Wow, is that ever bad!" the banker admitted.

"It's worse than that," the farmer continued. "You remember I also borrowed to buy seed and fertilizer and other supplies. Well, I can't pay anything on that either — principal or interest."

"That's awful," said the banker, "and that's enough! What's the good news?"

"The good news," replied the farmer with a smile, "is that I intend to keep on doing business with you." I don't know if



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

## a word for sunday

that was good news for the banker or not.

Two of the disciples of Jesus were on the road that leads to Emmaus. They were as low as that farmer — if not lower. Puzzling things were going on that they did not understand. Their Master had been crucified like a common thief. They, in turn, had scattered like frightened sheep. But now there were reports that their Master was not dead at all. Reliable sources told them that he had appeared to some of their most trusted friends. Was it real? Was he really alive? The disciples were troubled and afraid. Should they believe the good news or the bad?

And that's our dilemma too! Do we believe the good news or the bad? The good news is that Christ is alive. The bad news is that this event is having little impact on

the world today. It is easy to be fearful and troubled of heart as were those two disciples of Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

Those two disciples were trying to make sense of their situation, their world, their future. Then Jesus comes to them. This is significant: Jesus doesn't wait for them to find him. Jesus comes to them.

God pursues us that he might show us the way. Christ comes to the two disciples. They do not recognize him, but it is he who takes the initiative. He walks with them and interprets Scripture for them.

We need to hear that Christ comes to us. Often we think we must pound on heaven's door to get God's attention. Actually it is Christ who gently knocks on the door of our hearts. We are the ones with an attention problem. Christ continually comes to us but, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we do not recognize him.

When the two disciples arrived at Emmaus, they were so enraptured with their companion that they begged him to stay with them. And he did. Then something very beautiful and mysterious occurred. While he was at table with them, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he

vanished from their sight.

Even today Christ reveals himself to us through his word and the breaking of the bread. Each Sunday we listen and eat to discover Jesus.

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, April 15

Acts 6:8-15; Psalms 119:23-24, 26-27, 29-30; John 6:22-29

Tuesday, April 16

Acts 7:51-8:1A; Psalms 31:3CD-4, 6AB, 7B, 8A, 17, 21AB; John 6:30-35

Wednesday, April 17

Acts 8:1B-8; Psalms 66:1-3A, 4-7A; John 6:35-40

Thursday, April 18

Acts 8:26-40; Psalms 66:8-9, 16-17, 20; John 6:44-51

Friday, April 19

Acts 9:1-20; Psalms 117:1-2; John 6:52-59

Saturday, April 20

Acts 9:31-42; Psalms 116:12-17; John 6:60-69

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