

COLUMNISTS

Church's leaders at times violate its teaching

Labor Day provides an appropriate occasion each year to reflect on the social teachings of the Catholic Church and especially on the church's own record of applying those teachings to itself.

In past years this column has concentrated its attention on the manner in which the church treats its own employees — in its schools, hospitals, parishes and diocesan offices. The current year, however, has been dominated by the sexual-abuse crisis in the priesthood and the cover-up by some of the bishops.

One cannot fathom more egregious cases of the church's failure to practice what it preaches and teaches about justice and human rights: priests betraying their sacred trust through predatory behavior toward innocent and vulnerable minors, and bishops placing the reputation of the institutional church ahead of the safety and well-being of children and young people, as well as their families.

Such cases have by now been thoroughly documented, reported and commented upon in the media and then confronted by the bishops themselves in their semi-annual meeting in Dallas this past June.

In his powerful presidential address, Bishop Wilton Gregory acknowledged that the bishops' "God-given duty as shepherds of the Lord's people holds us responsible and accountable to God and to the Church for the spiritual and moral health of all of God's children, especially



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

those who are weak and most vulnerable.

"It is we who need to confess; and so we do. We are the ones, whether through ignorance or lack of vigilance, or — God forbid — with knowledge, who allowed priest abusers to remain in ministry and reassigned them to communities where they continued to abuse.

"We are the ones who chose not to report the criminal actions of priests to the authorities, because the law did not require this.

"We are the ones who worried more about the possibility of scandal than in bringing about the kind of openness that helps prevent abuse.

"And we are the ones who, at times, responded to victims and their families as adversaries and not as suffering members of the Church."

Our bishops' sincerity and determination will be tested in the enforcement of the national policy they adopted for the protection of children and young people. Will they, in fact, remove every priest from ministry and even from the priest-

hood itself against whom credible allegations of sexual abuse have been raised?

Will the bishops put an end to the intimidation of the victims of sexual abuse and their families when complaints are brought to their attention?

Will the bishops cooperate fully with the criminal justice system, while resisting any unwarranted intrusion on the part of the civil authorities into the internal life of the church?

Will the bishops eschew secret, out-of-court settlements with plaintiffs when their primary purpose is the protection of the church's reputation rather than the well-being of the victims and their families?

And, finally, will some of the bishops who have violated their pastoral trust in the manner explicitly described by Bishop Gregory himself voluntarily step aside in order to show that zero tolerance applies to themselves as well as to their priests?

However serious these cases of injustice have been, other more traditional, in-house violations of Catholic social teaching also continued during the past year.

In an Eastern diocese, for example, a group of Catholic school teachers had unionized two years ago and affiliated with a national bargaining agent. No collective bargaining agreement has as yet been reached with the diocese and the parish.

Then, last year, the diocese rejected a

grievance procedure that would have involved a neutral third party. The teachers have since charged the parish and the diocese with unfair labor practices and a failure to bargain in good faith. They are currently awaiting a hearing before their state supreme court.

Although the school in question is small, the case is regarded as groundbreaking since it would be the first elementary school in the diocese to unionize and only the second in the entire state to do so.

Meanwhile, the bishop and the pastor seem determined to halt the spread of the union movement within Catholic schools by adopting a hard line with regard to grievance procedures and wages.

As for the matter of wages, the discovery process has recently disclosed that in the 2001-02 school year the salaries of teachers seeking to unionize were frozen, while the nonunion teachers in the same school were given their regular salary increases.

The attorney for the teachers expects to amend the complaint because such action constitutes, in his opinion, unlawful discrimination based on union affiliation.

One hopes that justice will prevail, and with it the credibility of Catholic social teachings.

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

To carry one's cross is to have faith and trust in Christ

Near the end of his life, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem to suffer, die and then rise from the dead. Peter rebuked him for talking like that. Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

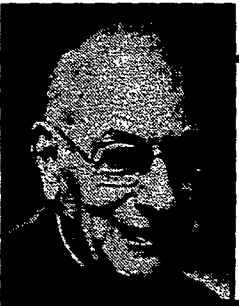
Jesus meant three things by this remark.

First, he meant we must deny ourselves. Who is going to control our lives: us or Jesus? Will we trust Jesus? Will we accept his guidance for our lives?

Lt. Col. Jeff Patton flew an F-15 fighter plan in Desert Storm. His squadron flew on a very dark night to escape detection by the enemy. The pilots became completely dependent on their instruments.

Lt. Col. Patton's jet got locked on by Iraqi surface-to-air missile radar. To break the radar's lock, Patton violently maneuvered his aircraft. He broke the lock but created a new problem. He became dizzy. His mind was telling him his plane was climbing but his instruments indicated he was diving toward the ground.

Because he was flying in total darkness, he had to decide quickly whether to trust his mind or his instruments. His life depended on making the right choice.



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

He decided to trust the instruments. That saved his life. Had he delayed just a few seconds more he would have crashed into the mountains of Iraq.

When we decide to follow Christ, we can not vacillate between his instructions and our own logic. Like Lt. Col. Patton, there comes a time in our lives when we must decide whom we are going to trust, whom we are going to follow: Christ or ourselves.

Secondly, Jesus told us to take up a cross. The cross is not a burden Jesus lays on our shoulders. Rather, it means choosing freely to do something in order to be faithful to him.

Many years ago, the USS Pueblo, a ship from the United States Navy, was hijacked by the North Koreans. The 82 crew members were thrown into a period of brutal captivity. Each day a North Korean guard would enter their cell and

beat one sailor almost into unconsciousness. To prevent the one sailor from being beaten to death, each day another sailor volunteered to be beaten in his place. Eventually, the guards gave up in exasperation. They could not beat this kind of sacrificial love.

These sailors were taking up a cross. To take up a cross means to do something that will bring honor and give help to others. Good intentions are not enough. We must be willing to do those things we know are pleasing to God.

Finally, we must walk in the steps of Christ, we must seek to live like him.

What do we know about Jesus? We know he was loving. He was kind. He was forgiving. He was responsible — he lived a life without sin.

Katherine's husband left her, and she had to raise their 11-year-old son, John, by herself. A few years later, John asked to move in with his father. But Katherine's ex-husband abandoned John. John began living on the streets. One day, Katherine received a call that her son was in a vegetative state due to an LSD overdose. She brought him home. He recovered and began to rebuild his life. As time passed, John became a fine young man. Still, some people rejected him because of his father's reputation.

John cried to his mother, "Must I always be compared with my father?"

Katherine put her arms around her son and replied, "Johnny, you have two fathers. You choose the one to follow."

And that's it. We all have two fathers — one earthly, the other divine. The key question is — which father shall we follow?

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

Daily Readings

Monday, September 2

1 Corinthians 2:1-5;
Psalms 119:97-102; Luke 4:16-30

Tuesday, September 3

1 Corinthians 2:10B-16; Psalms
145:8-14; Luke 4:31-37

Wednesday, September 4

1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Psalms 33:12-15,
20-21; Luke 4:38-44

Thursday, September 5

1 Corinthians 3:18-23; Psalms 24:1-6;
Luke 5:1-11

Friday, September 6

1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Psalms 37:3-6,
27-28, 37-40; Luke 5:33-39

Saturday, September 7

1 Corinthians 4:6B-15;
Psalms 145:17-21; Luke 6:1-5



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