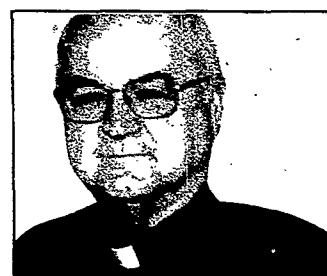


Labor Day applies to church employees too



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

that our lay employees earn a decent wage for themselves and their families and work in conditions that are secure and humane....

"Work is more than a way to make a living. ... Catholic teaching on the dignity of work calls us to engage in productive work and supports the right to decent and fair wages, health care and time off. Workers, including our own lay employees, have a right to organize to protect these rights and to have a voice in the workplace....

"This Labor Day, as we reflect on work and workers in our church, let us renew our commitment to stand in solidarity with our lay employees in defending their dignity and helping them to secure decent wages, secure working conditions and better labor protections....

"The plight of the church's lay employees may not be on the evening news or in the headlines, but it should be at the heart of our thoughts, reflections and priorities as we celebrate Labor Day this year."

Perhaps one of these years, the bishops will issue a Labor Day statement that reaffirms a key point in their pastoral letter of 1986, namely, their declaration that Catholic social teachings apply to the church itself ("Economic Justice For All," Origins, 11/27/86, p.446).

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

For the past dozen years or so this column has marked the annual Labor Day observance in the United States and Canada by reflecting on Catholic social teaching, particularly as it applies to those employed by the church itself.

This year is no exception. The demands of justice in the church are just as great now as they were in past years. If anything, the church's lay employees are more vulnerable than ever before. The announced closings of some 65 parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston is a case in point.

Archdiocesan officials insist that the parish closings are demanded by demographic shifts in the Catholic population, a decline in Mass attendance and in the number of priests, and the worsening of the church's financial condition, driven in large part by settlements in various sexual-abuse cases.

The heaviest burden of the closings will fall immediately upon the hundreds of salaried and wage-earning lay employees who will lose their jobs because of these parish closings.

To their credit, several pastors have expressed serious concern about their lay employees and a determination to protect their status within the archdiocese. At this point, no one really knows how many lay employees will find comparable jobs in neighboring parishes and how many will be forced out of church

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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cepted as part of the human condition. The ultimate goal of a Catholic is to experience everlasting life with God."

Speak clearly on stem cells

To the editor:

In recent weeks the media references to "stem cell research" have increased, stimulated in part by the death of President Reagan and the suggestion by Mrs. Reagan that stem cell therapy may be effective in the prevention and/or treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

Unfortunately the brain lesions of Alzheimer's patients suggest to the contrary, but research does indicate some potential in the treatment of diabetes, leukemia and other diseases.

My concern as a Roman Catholic is the repeated statements by some of our laity, our priests and even some of our prelates to the effect that our Roman Catholic Church condemns stem cell research which, of course, is simply not true. What we as Roman Catholics are against is the production of laboratory nurtured human fertilized ova and embryos for the production of stem cells, and the added abuses the practice is likely to engender.

There are legitimate sources of stem cells, namely: (1) the lower portion of the umbilicus and the blood therein, which would normally be discarded after a normal birth, and (2) the placental membranes and the blood therein following a normal delivery. In time we will establish other legitimate sources of stem cells. Certainly the donation of tissue from a dead fetus is a holy and wholesome act no different from organ donation following the death of a mature individual.

Our church has become increasingly receptive to scientific research and the knowledge obtained therefrom, so a repetition of an "affair Galileo" seems most unlikely. In our discussions of stem cell research we must be specific in our terminology.

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olics there is a definitive right and a definitive wrong.

And as for Haney's list of credentials, he negates them all, not only by his attitude toward human life, but also by his statement that he refuses to absent himself from the Holy Eucharist until others who commit wrongs do the same. We are all obligated to be in the state of grace when we receive Jesus, but we should not let others' sins justify ours.

Leanne Stefano
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Eternity got short shrift

To the editor:

Long ago, as a first grader in a Catholic school, I learned that one of the reasons God made me was to be happy with him in the next life. I still believe it. Firmly. But does anyone else, besides Msgr. Shannon ("Some reflections on growing older") or Sister Hollis ("Being with the dying...")?

As reported by the *Catholic Courier* (July 2004), in discussing the "end of life issues," neither the pope, nor the U.S. bishops, nor the statement of the Diocese of Rochester, nor Sister Schoelles, nor Jann Armantrout made any reference to that eternal life for which God made us. And yet, Sunday after Sunday, liturgical prayer constantly calls us to pray "bring us to our promised inheritance" (19C), "may we see heaven as our final goal" (Assumption), "bring us to the inheritance you promised" (23C), "may this gift of your Son lead us to share in his life forever" (23C).

The *Catholic Courier* indeed provided a valuable service to its readers in its July edition on health care and the "end of life issues." I only wish it had viewed the latter as "the Beginning of Life issue."

Father John J. Philipps
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EDITOR'S NOTE: The July health-care issue did not address eternal life except in essays by Msgr. Shannon and Sister Hollis. The question-and-answer article prepared by the diocese (page A5) did note the following, however: "... Death is ac-

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