

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. Recently I attended a course on contemporary theology given by a Protestant minister. He discussed such authors as Bultmann, Teilhard de Chardin, and others. It was, even though interesting, an exercise in futility. None of these contemporary theologians could hold a candle to the giant theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas. And yet Aquinas was not discussed.

It is my opinion based on my Catholic and traditional upbringing as well as a study of all the developments since Vatican II that Christ, in dying on the cross, wanted to make a point that would mean the same to every being from that moment to eternity, that is, his message was to be understood in the same way and mean the same thing. Therefore, only a theology that is communicative with the Eternal has any value. Anything else is strictly eyewash.

A. Too few Catholics who have strong opinions on the changes in the Church have gone to the trouble of taking a formal course in contemporary theology. That is why I have given more space than usual to this correspondent's observation.

If the course was on contemporary theology, then is understandable why St. Thomas Aquinas would not have been discussed at any length. It would be surprising, indeed, if he weren't mentioned at all.

St. Thomas is one of the most important theologians in the entire history of the Church. Modernization has not changed that fact. That is not to say, however, that St. Thomas is the only theologian in the Church, i.e., the only one "communicative with the Eternal." Such a judgment is manifestly exaggerated.

Finally, I should not want to agree that the message of Christ is so clear and so readily accessible to all men that it can be understood by everyone in the same way. Indeed, this presupposes that the message of Christ is a collection of static, objective truths not affected by history, culture, psychology, or anything else.

From this point of view, it is only a very short step to a spirit of religious intolerance rejected by both the Decree on Ecumenism and the Declaration on Religious Freedom. After all, if everything is so obvious, there must be something wrong with each person who does not believe in Christ as he is understood by the Catholic Church.

The Response To a Challenge

By FR. WALTER M.
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Many letters have come to me from readers of this weekly column about the Bible. Right now, before beginning our study of the Acts of the Apostles, I want to deal with something about which a number of readers have written to me. It is not a question. It is rather their response to a challenge I made earlier.

When I wrote about the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, described in Chapter 19 of Luke's Gospel, I made the point, in discussing Luke's build-up to that event, that he had put 10 of his chapters into a "journey to Jerusalem" narrative (9:51-19:28) and sometimes he had not put all that early Christian material together with perfect artistry.

I went so far as to say that some verses seemed to be just "thrown in" and I challenged my readers to explain, for example, how the 16th verse of Chapter 18, the saying on divorce and adultery, fitted into that chapter.

It was from the sayings of Jesus, I said, and Luke wanted to put it somewhere, but he didn't connect it with the rest of the material in that chapter the way he usually managed to do. Such a lack of artistry, I suggested, was so unlike Luke that perhaps it was some later editor who tacked the saying into that chapter.

I was delighted to learn from my mail that within a week, half a dozen people, so widely separated that they obviously had no connection with each other, sat down, studied the chapter carefully, and wrote me a clear explanation of how that saying did indeed fit into the chapter, with artistry worthy of Luke as well as of some later editor.

My correspondents argue that in chapter 16 Luke deals not only with the question of how Christians should handle money but also with the broader and more basic idea of fidelity to

God and to God's law. They rightly point to verse 10, following Jesus' parable about the steward, or manager, and his handling of money, where Jesus is quoted as saying: "Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in larger ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones." (TEV).

True, they say, Jesus is presented in that chapter as returning to the topic of handling wealth (verses 11-15), when he returns to the broader, more basic idea in verses 16 and 17. In those verses Jesus summarizes God's intervention in human history through Revelation. Jesus makes references to the old and new covenants, and he stresses God's seriousness about these acts by saying: "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the smallest detail of the law to be done away with."

Then, the argument continues, Luke presents Jesus as giving an example that will touch people, at least many people even more effectively than a reference to the handling of money. It is a reference to man's sexual life. It is what we read in verse 18: "Any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery; and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

In this understanding, verse 18, rather than being just "thrown in," is in fact climactic. Looking back at verse 10, my correspondents argue that marriage is one of the "larger" matters of life and Jesus refers to it in verse 18 as a major test of man's (and women's) fidelity to God.

There is a long tradition of finding spiritual meanings beyond the obvious first meaning of biblical verses, and it is still with us. The basic argument, however, that Luke 16:18 does fit into its chapter, in terms of the first meaning of the words, is something that does commend itself, and I am pleased to bring it to the attention of all of you.



This youngster recognizes pleasure in the simple act of meeting a new person and shares his real enjoyment with someone else.

My Turn to Paint the Fence!

By DOLORES CURRAN

All the other children were frolicking in the plastic backyard pool on that hot afternoon. But not Jimmy. He was down on his knees, dirty and sweating, pulling tiny weeds from his very own garden plot.

It bothered some of the mothers there. "Can you imagine preferring weeds to water today?" laughed one.

Jimmy's mother didn't bat a wrinkle. "No, I can't, but I hesitate telling him what he enjoys."

A wise mother. I wish I could be more like her. We do have a disagreeable tendency to set enjoyment standards for our families. Our biggest fault, I think, is insisting that all children enjoy the same things. We forget they are individuals just as adults are. Their pleasures might seem strange to us but they have a right to them.

Because I enjoy reading more than dishwashing, I forget that my five-year-old much prefers dishwashing. He gets enormous pleasure out of squeezing suds, breaking bubbles, and pouring water from dish to dish. But when he asks if he can wash dishes, I usually think about the slippery floor, sippy sneakers and soapy dishes and reply, "Oh, why not read instead?"

He gets the message: dishwashing isn't supposed to be fun, and, his pleasure in accomplishing something is diminished a little.

A second problem comes from our Puritan ancestry which told us that idle hands were the devil's playground,

that leisure time meant doing something profitable ("How I hated that embroidery during convent recreation," groaned a nun recently), and that if something was fun, it had to be immoral. Add to that the old distinctions between servile and non-servile work on Sundays and we have a lot of inhibitions regarding pleasure to overcome.

Pleasure is not as immoral as it is overlooked. It doesn't have to be directed toward learning a skill or filling idle hours.

Real pleasure comes in little, often unexpected ways—watching children's pleasure, seeing an old friend, hearing nice words—and we must be open to those snatches when they come along. Once we learn to recognize pleasure when we see it, we will relax in our search for it.

Many of us feel that we have to go some place or do something unusual or buy tickets in order to have a good time. A friend of mine who had to neglect her four-year-old daughter during her mother's terminal illness decided to make up for it by allowing her daughter to have a whole day of fun on her own terms.

"What do you want to do?" the mother asked. "We can go to the zoo or to a movie or out for lunch or anything you decide."

Her daughter didn't hesitate. "Best of anything in the world, I'd like for you and me to eat chocolates together on the couch while you read to me." So they made two trips, one to the library and one to the candy store. They cuddled together

eating and reading all day. And the child still talks about it.

The irony is that while her mother suggested enjoyments outside of the home, getting away from it all, Lori recognized the pleasures at hand. She recognized pleasure while her mother searched for it.

When a family begins to experience real enjoyment, it tends to share it. Parents who take their children on casual walks soon find themselves the Pied Piper of the neighborhood. Families which enjoy a game of softball together begin to draw other families into the game. Families who decide on a spur-of-the-moment picnic frequently call other children to go along.

Parents can capitalize upon this natural feeling of sharing pleasure as the first step in showing and teaching youngsters their responsibility in furnishing pleasures for those who have none in their lives.

Many families have nothing to enjoy. Their parents or single parent is too busy simply furnishing the necessities to be able to furnish fun. The working divorced mother is too tired at the end of the day to walk or read with the children. The single adult and the widow need to know that their company is of value to someone.

If, occasionally, while planning our family fun, we stop to consider how we can include others who have little enjoyment in their lives, our children will follow suit. If they see us giving of ourselves, they will realize that there's more to pleasure than self-gratification. But it takes encouragement and example.

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