

Father Richard P. McBrien

Essays in Theology



A memorable 25th anniversary

Ordination day, February 2, 1962, remains etched in my memory, but not for any loftily pious reasons. I had a 103-degree temperature all through the ceremony.

Relatively few 25-year periods in the history of the Church have been so momentous — but not because of anything I've done! Consider the following chronology.

The convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, with subsequent sessions in 1963, 1964, and 1965. (I had the good fortune of doing my doctoral studies in Rome during at least half of the council.)

The death of Pope John XXIII in 1963 and the election of Pope Paul VI.

The birth control encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, in 1968 — and its aftermath.

The renewal and reform of the liturgy.

The ecumenical movement.

The development of national episcopal conferences.

The convening of five international synods of bishops, and, in 1985, an extraordinary synod.

The proliferation of lay ministries at parish and diocesan levels.

Three popes in one year, 1978.

The election of the first non-Italian pope in centuries, John Paul II.

Liberation theology.

The women's liberation movement.

The list could go on.

I count it a special gift of Providence that my own life should have spanned all three phases of this process — pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II — and that I should have had the opportunity of being in Rome during the council itself.

There are many millions of younger Catholics today who have no first-hand recollections at all of the pre-Vatican II Church, although some of them talk and act as if they were there.

Even those now in their early 40s hadn't reached adulthood when the Second Vatican Council opened in October 1962.

I had. I was already a priest, serving at Our Lady of Victory Parish in West Haven, Connecticut.

I remember the day the announcer on WQXR, the New York Times station, wept as he reported the death of Pope John XXIII.

I remember the morning that Cardinal Montini's face flashed across the television screen: our new pope.

I remember the news bulletin in July 1968 that this same pope had just reiterated the Church's condemnation of birth control by contraceptive means.

But there were more to these 25 years than the events that made the headlines and the evening news. Anyone can find all that in an almanac.

I'm thinking today of many of those who have passed away in those 25 years — people who've affected my life as a priest.

I'm thinking specifically of other priests, priests who have no wives or sons or daughters to remember them now, but whose names should not vanish from the memories of those of us whose lives they have touched.

No one was more humanly responsible for planting the idea of the priesthood in my mind than my uncle, Msgr. William Botticelli (we knew him only as "Father Bill" and then "Monsignor Bill").

He served his people in Torrington, Connecticut, well until his death in 1981. I hope they remember him always, as I do.

My pastor, Msgr. George Grady, was always known as a people's priest. But he was regarded as a tough pastor to be assigned to.

I knew him as a parishioner, not as a curate. He was a giant of a priest. St. Justin's in Hartford should never forget him. He died on Christmas morning, 1967, a few months before an enforced retirement he vigorously resisted.

The priest who ordained me that snowy day in February was a good bishop even before we had Vatican II standards to judge him by. Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien was fair, compassionate, unfailingly kind, and always witty.

Those who knew him well miss him still.

I've paid tribute already in an earlier column to the three priests I lived and worked with in my only parish assignment, but I remember them again today, with special affection: the pastor, Father Tom McMahon (who died in 1982), Father Jim Lambert (1978), and Father Ernie Coppa (1985).

There were other priests, of course. Father Tim Byrne (1966), pastor at nearby St. Paul's Church in West Haven, who provided a newly ordained priest with a kind of cracker-barrel wisdom.

Father Bill Riley, pastor of St. Mark's in West Hartford (1974), played a role through his extraordinary parents, especially his father, who gave us rides to school every morning when we were "day-hops" at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Donnelly (1977) encouraged me in my interests in Catholic social teaching.

Father Ted Mierzewski (1978), the librarian at St. Thomas', was as kind as he was intellectually stimulating.

Finally, I owe as much to another great priest, Angelo Roncalli (1963), as I owe to any other.

Fortunately, many other priests whose lives have touched us all are still at work in the service of the Church and the Kingdom of God.

Appreciate them while they're here. And don't forget them when they're gone.

A community without a memory is no community at all.

Memorial service planned for St. Joseph's in Elmira

A memorial service will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, February 11, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira. Father Keith R. Haverkamp, pastor of the Westside United Methodist Church, will be guest homilist for the service, to be held in the Little Flower Chapel on the

second floor of the hospital's Dunn Memorial Building.

All of the families of deceased patients are invited to attend. A reception will take place on the lower level of the Dunn Memorial Building after the service.

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Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



Evangelization puzzle

It has long puzzled me that so many exhortations, instructions and collections are cast to the faithful about evangelization, while the most obvious, simplest, most effective and most available opportunities are passed by. This meditation swirls constantly in my soul as I ponder lost opportunities of evangelization. Why? Ineptness? Indifference? Parochialism?

A point of illustration is the nationwide presentation of a 90-minute documentary on Mother Teresa of Calcutta, which was aired over PBS (Public Broadcasting System) by Channel 21 on Wednesday, January 14. The documentary presented activities of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. It was the work of two women who followed Mother Teresa around the world for five years, accompanied by a TV crew. Then came the editing of yards and yards of film, to give the public a view of a wise and shrewd and determined holy religious sister, who finds Jesus in the poorest of the poor — and in everyone else, too.

Mother Teresa is devoted to the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament, without which she says she could not do her work. She is devoted to Our Lady and her rosary and sacraments. She is devoted to the pope, docile in the Church's directions regarding religious life, in complete accord with the teachings of the Church. She has no quarrel with Rome or with the Church's teachings and practice. She is feminine without the anger and resentments of rabid feminists.

Strangely enough, Mother Teresa has been consistently praised by the secular media: the TV and the press. She has been awarded degrees and honors, which she accepts with a simple appreciation, but with a remarkable indifference.

Last year while en route to Harvard to receive an honorary degree, she remarked, "I often wonder why I do these things. They mean nothing to me. But it does give me an opportunity to tell them about Jesus." Many will remember that when she received the Nobel Prize a few years ago, this dauntless evangelist, to the astonishment of all, spoke bluntly of God's love and the horror of abortion.

As admirable as most people find Mother Teresa, she is greatly resented by some Catholics. About six weeks ago, the National Catholic Reporter, which

has a splendid track record for mean carping at the papacy, Rome, the institutional Church and Catholic traditionalism, printed a full page of vicious satire against Mother Teresa and her sisters. Among dozens of biting criticisms was one which, to me, evinced great humor.

The Missionaries of Charity live a terribly austere life: in food, clothing (the Reporter derided the habit and the idea of a religious habit), in living quarters, in prayer life and in sleeping accoutrements.

Instead of a bed, the sisters sleep on a board. Instead of a Simmons mattress, they have a thin mat. No wonder they won't accept solemn vows until members have lived this life for nine years. The Reporter described the coming of the sisters, invited by a zealous priest in San Francisco, who set up for them a comfortable house with nice furniture, wall-to-wall carpeting, good beds and mattresses. I was amused when the documentary showed the sisters and Mother Teresa entering the convent, and promptly having the beds and mattresses carted away and the wall-to-wall carpeting pulled up and thrown out the windows to the ground below.

The convent, in essence, was reduced to the poverty that the sisters pledge and live. The kind priest, with all his good intentions, found they had backfired. The Reporter made sport of this impoverishment. The viewing public, I think, may have been puzzled, but certainly were edified by a group that willingly chose to live like the poor whom they serve.

The afternoon before the documentary's evening broadcast, I picked up a list of 87 families that had registered in our parish in 1986. "Why not phone these families and remind them of the Mother Teresa documentary tonight?" I resolved. It was Wednesday afternoon. Of the 72 names I dialed, I was able to reach 42 at home. Of the 42, only three knew the film would be broadcast that night. The following Sunday after Mass, several expressed their thanks for the call. "I cried through the whole program," said one parishioner.

I wonder how many pulpits that Sunday brought the evangelization message of the Gospel as well as the documentary. I wonder why we so often miss the boat in not providing this service for our people.

Enneagram I workshop slated for Rochester's Cenacle Center

An Enneagram I workshop will be conducted by Sister Lois Dideon, r.c., from February 27 to March 1, at the Cenacle Renewal Center, 693 East Ave., Rochester.

The workshop is an introduction to the overall Enneagram personality theory. The workshop will define nine approaches to experiencing, thinking, feeling and responding to the world.

Sister Lois, who has worked with the Enneagram system for 14 years, is currently Director of Novices in the Cenacle Novitiate.

The offering for the weekend is \$65. For information and reservations, contact

the Cenacle Ministry Office by calling (716) 271-8755.

Child abuse prevention program seeks to train volunteers

The Adam Walsh Child Resource Center, a not-for-profit agency dealing with missing children and child molestation, will begin a program to train volunteers to speak to children and parents about child sexual abuse prevention.

Training sessions will begin Wednesday, February 11, and continue for eight weeks.

For information, call Debra Hoffman at (716) 461-1000.

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