

Father Richard P. McBrien

Essays in Theology



The Church and change

There are some Catholics in the middle-to-senior generations who wonder why their Church didn't leave well enough alone.

Back in the late 1940s, with a successful World War behind us, Catholics seemed to be doing everything right. Our churches were full, our families were large, our parochial schools were teeming with young people, our seminaries and convents had no lack of applicants, our priests and sisters, bedecked in their Roman collars and black veils, had no difficulty exacting respect and discipline. Meanwhile, theology was something taught only in seminaries, or in watered-down versions in college and university religion courses. Theologians were about as visible as Greta Garbo.

Why did it all have to change? The way the question is posed suggests that the Church itself had complete control over the forces that brought about changes. But it did not.

The skeptical Catholic should take another look at one of Vatican II's most important documents, the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*). Its "Introductory Statement" acknowledges (as many critics of change do not) that "Today's spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution" (n. 5).

The council document points to changes in technology, biology, psychology and other social sciences. It reminds us of the changes that have occurred in the traditional father-centered family, of the spread of the industrial society, of the increase in migration, of economic progress.

"The institutions, laws, and modes of thinking and feeling as handed down from previous generations do not always seem to be well adapted to the contemporary state of affairs" (n. 7). All these new conditions, the council concedes, "have their impact on religion."

"On the one hand," the council states, "a more critical ability to distinguish religion from a magical view of the world and from the superstitions which still circulate purifies religion and exacts day by day a more personal and explicit adherence to faith. As a result many persons are achieving a more vivid sense of God."

"On the other hand," the council continues, "growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice." The reality of God is no longer taken for granted, nor is atheism an "unusual and individual" occurrence.

"As a consequence," the council concludes, "many people are shaken."

What the Pastoral Constitution says in general, and perhaps somewhat abstract, terms could be said in a very down-to-earth way as well.

Let's take the birth-control issue by way of example. The Catholic Church of

the 1940s, 1950s and even into the early 1960s was still perceived by many as the Church of don'ts: don't miss Mass on Sunday, don't eat meat on Friday and don't practice birth control.

The pope himself eliminated the second don't. A large majority of young married Catholics eliminated the third on their own authority, but not without some support from theologians who were critical of Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*.

Back in 1945, however, few people knew what a theologian was, much less cared about what he wrote. Theology seemed to have little to do with ordinary life.

How is it that the average Catholic suddenly became interested in the opinions of theologians?

Keep in mind that there was no birth control pill in 1945. When introduced in 1969 by a Catholic physician, Dr. John Rock, it generated an enormous amount of discussion and had a profound effect on sexual conduct inside and outside of marriage.

Married couples were immediately attracted to it because it offered liberation from the inevitability and unpredictability of pregnancy and child-rearing. Both could become matters of choice, to be coordinated with other goals in life.

But how did the average Catholic even discover there was theological controversy over the pill?

Television had a lot to do with it. In 1945, there were only 8,000 television sets in the United States. By 1960, nearly 90 percent of American homes had one.

But discovering a controversy and knowing what it's all about are two different things. How did the so-called average Catholic find out what theologians were saying?

Because of the jet airliner, theologians could criss-cross the country, giving lectures and workshops. In 1945, there were only seven million airline passengers; by 1960, there were 54 million; and in 1985, there were 380 million. Meanwhile, air fares have dropped two-thirds since 1945 (adjusted for inflation).

And because of the telephone, the press could reach theologians for comment in an instant. In 1945, 54 percent of homes didn't even have a phone, and long-distance direct dialing didn't begin until 1951.

Conveniences that we take for granted today had a beginning not very long ago. Ordinary things like television, jet travel, long-distance telephones, and, yes, the pill have done a lot more to change the way we live and think than Hans Kueng has.

Only a Church that was completely insulated from the world could have escaped the changes we're all still adjusting to.

Volunteers needed to survey accessibility to handicapped

The Rochester Center for Independent Living urgently needs volunteers to assist in an accessibility survey of local buildings. Volunteers will collect information on curb cuts and ramps, measure doorways and note bathrooms accessible to the disabled. People are also needed to assist with phone calls, as well as paper and computer work.

A training session is planned for Thursday, March 26, from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at

Rochester Folk Art Guild sets annual spring festival of crafts

The Rochester Folk Art Guild will present its annual Spring Festival of Crafts at Allendale Columbia School, 519 Allen's Creek Road in Rochester, on March 27, 28 and 29.

The festival will feature pottery, weaving, blown glass, wooden toys and furniture, and more. Easter-season crafts and baked specialties from foreign lands will also be featured. Fresh sourdough breads will be available, and light meals will be served.

The hours of the festival will be 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Friday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday; and 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Plenty of free parking will be available.

the center, 464 S. Clinton Ave., Rochester.

This project is being funded in part by Easter Seals. Refreshments will be provided.

Those interested in helping may call (716)546-6990 for information.

Free tickets to Red Wings games offered by Central Trust Bank

Central Trust is inviting members of organizations for the handicapped and disadvantaged to attend Rochester Red Wings home games with its compliments. On a limited basis, the bank is offering free general-admission tickets to Rochester-area groups.

"This is the third year we have offered ball game tickets to people who normally would not have the chance to attend. The excitement of the new stadium combined with the opportunity to see the Red Wings play should be a winner," said Ginni Starks, community relations officer.

To request tickets, organizations can call the Central Trust baseball ticket line at (716)546-4500 or write to the Central Trust Community Relations Office, 44 Exchange St., Rochester, 14614.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



To an author and an actor

Mr. Graham Greene
c/o Bradley Hall
9 Bow St., London WC 2

Dear Mr. Greene,

In 1985, I read your book, *Monsignor Quixote*, and enjoyed it. When the notice came that your book had been made into a TV film that would be broadcast by the Public Broadcasting System, I re-read the book in anticipation of the film, and appreciated it even more.

Through some mix-up over the date of the broadcast, I missed the PBS film, but fortunately a friend made a video tape of it, and gave me a copy.

Since Alec Guinness played Monsignor Quixote, I was confident that the movie would be excellent. It certainly was. I have watched it carefully three times and was moved each time by the subtle affirmation of the greatness of the Mass. With Monsignor Quixote's faculties suspended by his wretched bishop, Guinness expressed such utter anguish in word and in deed: "Now I am dead! A priest who cannot say Mass is dead!" And that final scene, the dry Mass, was more touching and more edifying than the discourses of a dozen bishops or two dozen liturgists.

Let me express my thanks to you for the humor, the pathos and the charity of your book, for the edification provided by your presentation of the greatness of the Mass. An added thanks to God and Alec Guinness — and to Frank McKern and the producers — for the exquisite TV presentation from your book. A friend of mine recently declared, "Greene's *Monsignor Quixote* has been greatly underrated." Let me add "Amen!"

Prospera!

Sir Alec Guinness
Kettle Brook Meadows
Petersfield, Hampshire, England

Dear Mr. Guinness:

When I read that our local PBS station was presenting a film version of Graham Greene's novel, *Monsignor Quixote*, in January, I re-read the book, which I had

read in 1985. During the reading, I wondered how the bawdy house chapter, the X-rated movie chapter and the dotty bishop's secretary would be presented. But I said to myself, "With Alec Guinness, it will come out delicately." And it did.

To me, the whole book was a subtle paean to the holiness of the priesthood and the majesty of the Mass, thanks to your wonderful portrayal of the simple and humane Father Quixote. (While quite different in personalities, the priest's housekeeper reminded me of Neil Boyd's "Bless Me, Father." That TV series was very popular in the States.)

A year ago, I read your quasi-autobiography, *Blessings in Disguise*, and liked it. The chapter on religion was of course, of special interest to me, and I roared with laughter at your retreat at the Carthusian monastery, when you were suspicious that the priest who was instructing you was concealing something, because everything seemed to fall so logically into place.

I have recommended the book to many people, saying: "If you don't read anything else, though the whole book is interesting, do read the chapter on religion. It is gloriously funny, and at the same time edifying. There is an evident devotion toward the Blessed Sacrament." (I think of the time you ran to the church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and were so emotional that you were wondering if you were losing your buttons, and were reassured when you discovered that the great Ronald Knox had done the same before you.)

Of all actors, you are number one in my mind and heart. I have seen your *Bridge Over the River Kwai* six times. And while this is a very different picture, *Monsignor Quixote*, to me, is a masterpiece.

Have you ever thought of portraying Cardinal Newman? The life of this wonderful man is loaded with possibilities.

Well, the Lord give you grace and health and happiness, and fruitful years to teach the world.

Corning parish schedules organ dedication day

St. Vincent de Paul Church in Corning will dedicate the parish's recently rebuilt organ on Sunday, March 29, with a performance featuring David Jenkins, concert organist, and the St. Vincent de Paul choir. In a program slated to begin at 3 p.m. in the church, the group will perform selections from Mendelssohn, Telemann and Samuel Barber, among other composers. The choir will be directed by Theresa Pierotti. Edna Ward is church organist.

The church's original organ, donated by Earle T. Keenan, was rebuilt through a gift from Holy Rosary Church in Rochester. The instrument now has more than 900 pipes and 15 ranks. Reconstruction was done by the Hickey Organ Company of Rochester; John Bartell of Hornell served as technical advisor for the project.

David Jenkins is currently director of music and liturgy for the Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads. He studied at

Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Iowa, and holds a doctorate in organ performance from the Eastman School of Music.

During the 1981-82 academic year, Dr. Jenkins was awarded a Marshall Foundation grant to study organ with Grethe Krogh at the Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen. He has performed extensively in Norway and Denmark. Recently, he presented a workshop at the regional convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, and served as coordinator for professional concerns in the American Guild of Organists.

Father Robert C. MacNamara, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church, will perform the dedication rite. After the concert, a reception will be held in the parish hall, where a key from the old organ will be given to donors as a memorial token. Donations for the organ's restoration were made in memory of deceased relatives and parishioners.

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