

Father Richard P. McBrien

# Essays in Theology



## An irate letter to Jesus

I receive a fair number of letters in response to my weekly column. Occasional articles in journals like Notre Dame Magazine (especially my recent piece that the editors, not I, entitled, "The Hard-line Pontiff") also elicit some reaction. And so do irregular appearances on national television.

But in a class by themselves are letters I receive from people reacting to newspaper reports of a speech I've given somewhere or other. On the basis of one or two sentences quoted out of context, these letter-writers draw all sorts of negative conclusions; for example, that I don't pray, that I don't believe in the Petrine ministry (they never use such precise terminology) or that I favor abortion.

I sometimes wonder what sorts of letters Jesus might have received from the religious right of his day, had a few of his talks been reported in the press.

Let's try the discourse on the hypocrisy of religious leaders in Matthew 23.

**Headline:** "Galilean preacher denounces hierarchy, calls Scribes and Pharisees 'blind guides' and 'hypocrites'"

**Lead paragraphs:** "Jesus of Nazareth, a well-known preacher from the Galilean town of Nazareth, carried his campaign against hypocrisy and legalism to the heart of the religious establishment today.

"Accusing the Pharisees and Scribes of laying burdens on others that they would not carry themselves, he called them 'hypocrites,' 'blind guides,' 'fools,' 'whitewashed tombs,' 'serpents' and a 'brood of vipers.'"

**Irate letter to Jesus:** "So, you're at it again! Don't you and all your dissenter friends ever get tired of banging the same old drum?"

"Who set you up to judge God's law? Let me tell you: God won't take your arrogance lying down. You and your kind are going to have to face Him some day, and I'd hate to be in your sandals.

"How dare you accuse our beloved religious leaders of hyposcristy! God set them up as our authoritative teachers. They are the one — the *only* ones — who can officially interpret God's word and God's law.

"It bothers you, doesn't it, that they get the first places in the synagogue and that they have the privilege of wearing special insignia of office?"

"You'd love to be right up there with them, I'll bet. Well, it'll never happen. They've got your number now, Jesus. You couldn't be elected a money-changer in the temple after this latest tirade of yours.

"Don't you realize the scandal you are causing? If you had any self-respect, you'd quit teaching. Get out before they throw you out!"

"Think of the little ones that you are leading astray. No wonder young people don't pay attention any more to their elders. Even women are getting uppity these days. You've been giving some of them the idea they're equal to men. What nonsense!"

"The trouble with you is that you don't pray. You'd better get down on your knees and ask God's forgiveness.

"It's pride that's doing you in. What makes you think you know more about God's law than the very men whom God Himself placed over us? It's their teaching, not yours, that we are bound to follow.

"Of course, you don't think the law applies to you. None of your kind does. I heard that you've broken the sabbath rules on more than one occasion. And you always have some damn-fool excuse about the sabbath being made for man rather than man for the sabbath. A cute turn of phrase, but it's still disobedience!"

"You're something, all right! You claim to be a religious person, but then all you do is attack religion — our God-given religious laws, our God-ordained religious leaders, our God-sanctified religious traditions.

"Thank God for the Pharisees and Scribes! Thank God for people who know what loyalty and obedience mean! Thank God for people who don't compromise their principles the first time they require sacrifice!"

"I'll tell you one thing, Jesus. When the history of this time is written, all those God-fearing Pharisees and Scribes you've so viciously attacked will be honored figures. You and your shabby crowd will be forgotten!"

**Meditation text:** "They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me" (John 16:2-3).

Father Paul J. Cuddy

# On the Right Side



## Medjugorje: A brief exposition

Q. What is this "Medjugorje?"

A. Strange name, pronounced "me-dugory" — a village of 400 families in communist Yugoslavia where Our Lady is said to appear periodically to six visionaries. My own serious interest in it came from watching a TV program a few months ago, an interview of a man and wife and a third person not related to the couple. They had been to Medjugorje, and were being interviewed about what they saw and experienced. The couple have a mixed marriage, and the third person, Wayne Weible, a newspaperman, is a Lutheran who first heard of the apparitions in a Lutheran Sunday school class that was discussing miracles. The two non-Catholics were as ardent about their experiences as the Catholic wife.

Q. Well, what's it all about?

A. First, let's make clear that the phenomenon does not have the official blessing of the Church, as do Fatima and Lourdes and Guadalupe. Secondly, there is friction between the local bishop and the Franciscans who have charge of the parish. This goes back many years to Church political tensions. Thirdly, several Franciscans from Steubenville University in Ohio have investigated the claims, and have produced some good audio and video cassettes on the affair, giving it strong credence. Finally, a few priests and lay people of our diocese have gone and returned convinced that these apparitions are from God through Our Lady.

Q. Who went from the diocese?

A. Father Tony Mugavero was the first I knew to go, and then Mrs. Ada Ferrari of St. Theodore's. Don Fiorentino of Canandaigua went later. Father Alexander Bradshaw of St. John of Rochester, Father William Frankhauser, SJ, and Bill and Connie Wahl of Pittsford recently went as a quartet. Father Al Shamon was the latest. Father Trott is scheduled for July and Father William Graff for August. So interest grows.

Q. Well, that's interesting. But what about Medjugorje?

A. Wayne Weible has printed an eight-page tabloid with a series of articles he wrote about the Seers, as the visionaries are called. Over two millions copies have been distributed, so interest in the apparitions is gaining impetus. There are numer-

ous articles, tapes — both audio and video cassettes — books and booklets. Now a lecture circuit is developing. Father Bradshaw gave a fine illustrated talk after his recent visit. His enthusiasm is so great he has trouble finding an ending, and his presentation would be more effective if he cut it down by half an hour. Father Shamon will also be on the lecture circuit, and his enthusiasm may have the same result.

Our Lady began appearing to four girls and two boys in Medjugorje in June, 1981. The children ranged in age from 10 to 17. They received messages from Our Lady which greatly coincide with Fatima: a warning because of the wickedness in the world. The remedy: conversion, prayer, fasting, the rosary and the Eucharist.

The Seers are being given 10 secrets. The eight and ninth secrets deal with chastisement for the sins of the world. The punishment is inevitable because we cannot expect the conversion of the whole world. The chastisement can be mitigated by prayers, penance and conversion.

After the first warning from Our Lady, other warnings will follow within a brief period of time, so that people will have time for conversion. The Seers pray three hours daily, beginning with the rosary and culminating with the Eucharist. They fast on bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays. The whole village of 400 families has turned to God in prayer and conversion, and practically the whole village goes to daily Mass, even in a strong communist country. The fruits of the apparitions are impressive.

Q. Isn't that a pretty brief account?

A. Yes. It is only intended to provide an initial familiarity with something great that is happening in Yugoslavia. When Father Gobbi, the founder of the Marian movement of priests, was at Holy Trinity on June 8, I asked him, through his interpreter, Father Sylvester, OFM Cap., "What do you think of the apparitions in Yugoslavia?"

Father Gobbi mentioned that he has been there six times, has talked with the Seers and finds them and their messages credible. The Church, however, always cautious, has not officially accepted the story.

Catholics are bound in faith to accept only divine revelation from the Scriptures and tradition. If God wants to give us some supernatural signs, that's up to Him.

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