

Father Richard P. McBrien

# Essays in Theology



## "Pick-and-choose" Catholicism

As Pope John Paul II prepared for his second formal visit to the United States last month, there was much general discussion of a phenomenon known as "pick-and-choose" Catholicism, sometimes known as Catholicism *à la carte*.

Archbishop Jan P. Schotte, a high-ranking Vatican official, deplored "an increasing but gratuitous assumption that one can tailor one's Church to one's own desires and turn it into a 'pick-and-choose' church where it is accepted that being a Catholic has little to do with adhering to all the Church's teachings."

Public opinion surveys have consistently disclosed that U.S. Catholics have a highly favorable view of the current Bishop of Rome, but by an even larger margin these Catholics also believe that they can disagree with the pope on certain issues of faith and morals and still be good Catholics.

The media — and perhaps Vatican officials like Archbishop Schotte — seemed generally to assume that such Catholics were all grouped somewhere on the left of the ecclesiastical spectrum.

According to that school of thought, the "pick-and-choose" Catholic, in other words, is one who disagrees with the pope on matters of sexual morality — contraception, divorce-and-remarriage, *in vitro* fertilization — or on matters of Church discipline related to sex — ordination of women, clerical celibacy.

At a point farther to the left is the Catholic who might also approve of homosexual behavior and of a woman's right to have an abortion.

True enough. Such Catholics do not accept every official Church teaching and policy pertaining to matters of this sort. On the other hand, they continue to regard themselves as Catholics in good standing. In that sense, they are picking and choosing.

But these liberal or progressive Catholics are not alone. Many conservative Catholics do the same thing. They choose not to accept their Church's official teachings regarding social justice, human rights, and peace.

To be sure, they do not openly dissent from Pope John Paul II's encyclical on human work, *Laborem Exercens* (1981). They simply ignore it.

And when they recite their litany of papal teachings they support, the following papal pronouncements are always missing: Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), and Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octagesima Adveniens* (1971), and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975).

Needless to say, Vatican II's Pastoral

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965) and the Third International Synod's "Justice in the World" (*Justitia in Mundo*, 1971) are never mentioned.

The one exception to their rule of calculated silence is their response to the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letters on peace (1983) and the economy (1986). Here these conservative Catholics are open, direct, and not just a little sarcastic in their dissent.

They claim that they are not bound by the bishops' teachings because the matters under discussion are subject to prudential judgments and varied practical interpretations — as if matters of reproductive technology, for example, were not similarly complicated.

And they suggest, indeed they charge, that the bishops are not competent to speak on questions of peace and the economy — as if the bishops were competent to address matters of sexual morality.

But more to the point: these conservative Catholics are doing the very same thing that many liberal, or progressive, Catholics have been doing. They are picking and choosing.

They are deciding for themselves what's important in the body of official teachings and what is not, which official teachings they have to accept and which ones they don't have to accept, and whether the official teachers are even competent to pass moral judgment on the issues under discussion.

The pope and the U.S. bishops have never said that their teachings on sexual morality are more important than their teachings on social justice, human rights, and peace.

Nor have the pope and the U.S. bishops ever said that the latter teachings are more matters of personal opinion, to be taken or left according to the political whim of the individual Catholic.

On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council declared in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age."

"Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation" (n. 43).

If anyone wishes to condemn "pick-and-choose" Catholicism, let him or her at least distribute the condemnation evenly across the entire spectrum of Catholics, conservative as well as liberal.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

# On the Right Side



## Pilgrimage to Piffard

In a recent homily at my daily 8 a.m. Mass, I mentioned the Trappist Abbey at Piffard, near Geneseo, and was surprised that only two of the 15 at Mass had ever been there. "The abbey is a tremendous powerhouse of grace," said I. "Let's make a pilgrimage there." Mrs. Margaret Mason, a part-time secretary at Holy Trinity parish said: "I think I have a cousin who is a monk there. I've never met him; I'm not even sure he is alive."

To my friend, Brother Anthony, I wrote: "A few of our people want to visit the abbey. One, Margaret Mason, had a cousin there, a Father Fournier, but doesn't know if he is still there. We want to come during vespers or Mass. Will you send us your schedule?" Brother Anthony sent the schedule and wrote: "The cousin indeed is here. He is Father Raymond, and until recently was our prior."

My original intention was to trundle four into my five-seater Phoenix for the pilgrimage. Margaret Mason said: "We have a van, and could take eight." The apostolic Gerry Driscolls drove their car, so we numbered 13, the number at the Last Supper.

Brother Anthony and Brother Pascal, the porter, welcomed us into a reception room. Then Father Raymond appeared. He was a teaching brother in the Philippines for 20 years. He returned to the States and 10 years ago joined the Trappists, and was ordained a priest six years ago.

By holy providence, Brother Dan O'Shea was passing through to the chapel. He is a kind of freewheeling priest of our diocese who came from Providence. For years he worked at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, a Catholic Worker offspring. He is now an adjunct to the Piffard Trappists — receptionist, scheduler of retreatants, a kind of middle man. Brother Anthony remarked: "He is invaluable. He does so many things well." Presently he is a house brother, which gives him access to monastic life and also to the world. As part of the world, he is weekend chaplain at Groveland prison, near Dansville, celebrating Mass for the men there.

Brother Anthony was Donald Webber of St. James Parish, Rochester, a graduate of Aquinas, a protege of Father Francis Feeney. He entered the Trappists 31 years ago, and is now celebrating 25 years of his profession. Another friend

loomed forth, Brother Kristen Welch, of St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield.

Several years ago, I made a retreat at Piffard with my schoolmates: the late Fathers Lane, Hester and Kleehamer and the present Fathers Heisel and William Gaynor. The cheerful Brother Kristen was the cook. I recall thinking that if his spiritual life were no better than his cooking, he would enter heaven with difficulty. Later he became cook for the monks, and a man of admirable virtue.

The abbey's chapel is dark and eerie, but devotional. There were some 60 visitors for the 4 p.m. liturgy. We each had a huge psalm book from which to chant vespers with the community. Mass followed, with Father Raymond as the main celebrant. There were 42 monks, many of them quite young. The musical accompaniment was done by three monks, with violin, cello and harpsichord. The abbey is prospering with vocations. The abbot, John Eudes, runs quite a tight ship and the community thrives under his shepherding.

The liturgy ended about 5 p.m. We left, loaded with God's grace and sacks of the monks' famous bread, which is made at the monastery. We had made reservations at a dandy restaurant, Station 42, run by a Jim Jerris. It is about two miles from the abbey, in the middle of nowhere, outside Fowlerville. The food and service were superb, so when we left at 7:30 p.m., everyone was in high gear. The van group sang songs of the '40s and '50s. And lest they lose their piety, as we neared Webster, I suggested: "We've just got time for the rosary." All prayed piously, and we entered the parking lot of the Lourdes Hymn in honor of Our Blessed Mother.

Who might profit by a trip to the abbey, especially when a liturgy is being done? High schoolers, parish groups, CCD groups, non-Catholics, pagans and people who might want the peace of a retreat. The Redemptorist Brother Benjamin Beh of Notre Dame Retreat House reached his 80th birthday in September on the feast of St. Michael. He makes his yearly retreat at Piffard, which he describes as "heavenly."

If you as an individual or a member of a group plan to go to the abbey, phone ahead of time for the time of the liturgy. It varies with the bread-baking schedule and also with the time of year. Your parish rectory can get the information for you.

## Beginning Experience slated for Finger Lakes residents

A weekend gathering of people who are experiencing loss of a loved one through separation, divorce or death will take place the weekend of October 16, 17 and 18, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at Camp Stella Maris on Conesus Lake.

The weekend is called "The Beginning Experience" and is conducted by a team of volunteers who are specially trained to understand

what the people in attendance are going through.

For information about the Beginning Experience or other Finger Lakes-area support groups for the separated, divorced or widowed, contact Carl at the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, 110 Exchange St., Geneva, or call (315)789-2686.

## Social ministry office sets sessions for pre-Cana teams

The Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry will sponsor training sessions for new or existing pre-Cana teams on October 8 and 13. Teams will consist of couples interested in

helping engaged men and women prepare for marriage.

Contact the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry at (315)789-2686 for information.

## Vinyl available to parishes through upholstery company

Bogdan's Upholstery & Drapery Service, which is located on 116 Main St., in Depew, is offering heavy, deep-green vinyl to any parish that needs it. Although the vinyl would be too stiff for furniture, it would be appropriate for kneeler upholstery or

school-bus seating. The residential and commercial upholstery company would donate the vinyl at absolutely no obligation to any interested parish.

Call (716)683-4770 for information.

### FOSTER HOMES NEEDED

Catholic Family Center needs nurturing foster homes for:

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