

Columnists

Leaving tiresome debates behind

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Some of the greatest figures in the history of the Church have been theologians: St. Irenaeus, St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman, Karl Rahner and so many others. Their work has expanded and deepened the Church's understanding of the great mysteries of Christian faith.

By contrast, modern theologians are perceived by many as polemicists — combatants in an ever-raging battle between the hierarchy and the Church's scholarly community. Theologians seem to spend most of their time defending their turf against what they see as uninformed interference from Church bureaucrats and other non-theologians.

An outstanding American Catholic theologian, Jesuit Father Avery Dulles, addresses this problem in a short piece he wrote for the September 19 issue of America magazine, "If I Had Five Minutes with the Pope..."

Father Dulles would tell the pope that he converted to Catholicism as a young man because he was attracted to its strong intellectual and cultural heritage. He had admired its religiously inspired art, poetry, music and philosophy.

But the present scene, he would complain to the pope, leaves much to be desired. The Church is no longer seen as an inspirer of wisdom and creativity. Not only do contemporary art and literature owe little to Christian faith, but Catholic philosophy — if the term be permitted at all — is in disarray.

"Theologians," he continues, "find themselves caught up in legalistic battles about the binding force of this or that doctrine. Few are boldly addressing the new problems presented by modern civilization, or lack of civilization. The kind of critical mediation once accomplished by Clement and Origen, Augustine and Aquinas is scarcely being attempted any longer."

Recalling that the Church was for many centuries the primary meeting place of art, scholarship and philosophy, he would ask: Could not Rome and the papacy once again sponsor a renewal of Christian humanism?

In the high Middle Ages, it was Rome that sponsored the universities and mendicant orders that produced the great *summas*. Rome

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patronized the arts and letters during the Renaissance, energized the baroque culture of the Counter-Reformation, and in the 19th and 20th centuries fostered both the Thomistic revival and the liturgical movement.

"Cannot Rome today help to identify the key issues and foster appropriate styles of thought and expression, while allowing for suitable adaptations?" Dulles asks the pope in his imaginary five-minute conversation.

He suggests that the greatest service the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith could perform for the Church would be to take the positive role of stimulating the intellectual search for a comprehensive vision of reality, one that would attract and delight the human spirit.

If I had five minutes with the pope, I would give him Father Dulles' article and urge him to ponder it. The Church needs *theology*, not legalistic jousting, I would say. And I would encourage the pope to take the late Jesuit Father Karl Rahner's advice about preserving the purity of faith.

Rahner insisted that the most effective way to defend against error is by proclaiming the truth more compellingly, not by threats and censures. If the pastors of the Church were to follow that method of defending the faith rather than current methods, theologians would respond in kind. They would feel secure enough to effectively isolate colleagues whose work is inferior or whose manner is irresponsible.

In a less adversarial atmosphere, theologians could begin to do theology once again the way Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa and Aquinas did it. And no one would be happier to leave behind those tiresome debates about dissent, infallible or non-infallible teachings, magisterium and academic freedom than the theologians themselves.

Regretting failure to "Do it NOW"

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Most of us have occasions of great regret, and I am suffering one now. The newspapers carried the obituary notice of Basilian Father Anthony Lococo, who died at the Basilian Fathers' residence in Toronto August 29. He was a priest I have kept in memory for 40 years, and I always intended to get to see him. But I never did! Had I followed the adage: "Do it NOW," this awful regret would not hang over me like a brooding spirit.

I like most priests, admire several, reverence some and endure a few. But Father Lococo was special.

In 1946, when I was discharged from the Army, Bishop Kearney sent me to Sampson, 15 miles south of Geneva. The old Navy base, which is now Sampson Air Base, was then to become a two-year state college. The diocesan chancellor, Monsignor James McAniff told me: "We don't know much about it, so do what you can."

Sampson College was one of four two-year colleges established during Governor Dewey's administration in an effort to accommodate the deluge of GIs who had returned home with the ending of World War II.

By the second year, our Catholic students and faculty had so increased that we needed three Masses. Saturday-night vigil was not dreamed of in 1947, and celebrating more than two Masses was verboten. So I wrote Father John O'Loane, the austere superior of the Basilians at Aquinas Institute, asking for a priest to help us on Sundays. He sent Father Lococo, a special prize.

He was in his mid-30s, handsome in an olive-skinned, Latin manner. He had black curly hair and beautiful teeth that sparkled from his frequent smile. He was admired by our students. He preached well. He adapted to the unpredictability of our setup. When Sampson closed in 1949, Father Lococo left us with great memories.

Occasionally the Aquinas Basilians would tell me of him. He spent 1938-58 at Aquinas, where his students reported he was strict, expecting much of them and getting results. Later, he was superior of St. Charles College in Ontario, Canada, then master of novices for the Basilians in Canada. Finally, he went to Michael Power High School, where he taught Latin and did guidance work, even after his

On the Right Side

retirement in 1971.

He had several years of debilitating health in Toronto, and even though it is only three hours away, I never did get to visit him despite great intentions. Now I am saddened by this. Some years ago I wrote a column entitled, "Do it NOW." I present it to you again for your meditation:

Make your will or update the one you have.

Visit the sick or a house-bound person.

Pay debts or bills. It is strange the number of people who do not repay loans.

Make a needed appointment with the doctor or dentist.

Return borrowed books, whether on loan from individuals or the public library. I knew a family who kept library books so long they accumulated fines of more than \$80.

Invite some friends for luncheon or an evening you have intended for ages.

Get the plumbing or windows or electricity or whatever in the house fixed.

Write a letter you've neglected.

Make that telephone call that can lighten a heart or mend a fence.

Go to confession.

Make a retreat, which is important to the spiritual life.

Acknowledge with thanks a gift or hospitality.

Go to Sunday Mass regularly, or daily Mass if possible.

Quiz the children or grandchildren on their religious knowledge. An excellent book for first confession or first Communion is *Jesus and I* by Father Heeg, SJ (\$1). Our CCD teachers find it the best of all.

Write to your bishop about things you appreciate or do not, saying why you commend or why you regret. He welcomes the input of the people.

If you DO IT NOW, you will have fewer regrets and many satisfactions.

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