

et cetera

Cardinal

Continued from Page 4 and "carefully sculptured."

Sulpician Father Raymond E. Brown, New Testament professor at the Union Theological Seminary in New York and participant in the conference following the lecture, said that the elements of modern biblical scholarship criticized by Cardinal Ratzinger were deserving of criticism. But he questioned whether they were found among many American scholars.

The Rev. Neuhaus, however, was enthusiastic in his praise of the cardinal's performance, both during the lecture and in the following two days of dialogue with Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox scholars. The Rev. Neuhaus termed the visit "a smashing personal triumph for Cardinal Ratzinger."

"There was nobody who, after 18 hours with him, including a dinner on Thursday evening, didn't say he was an extraordinarily impressive human being and an extraordinary thinker," the Rev. Neuhaus said in a January 31 telephone interview with National Catholic News Service.

"He never once pulled rank," said the

Rev. Neuhaus, who served as discussion moderator, "or said, 'I can't address that question because I'm in a delicate position.' No question was ruled out of order."

Others who participated in the dialogue also said the cardinal made a strongly favorable impression both as a theologian and personally.

"The one adjective that I think everyone would agree on in describing the experience is 'positive,'" said Sulpician Father Raymond E. Brown, New Testament professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

The Rev. Elizabeth Achtemeier, a Presbyterian minister who teaches Old Testament and homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va., and the only woman participating in the conference, described Cardinal Ratzinger as "extremely gracious and open." She said she was impressed that a man of his position would sit with the other participants for "two full days of interchange and dialogue."

She came to the conference, she acknowledged, intending to pose questions about his "rigid" orientation as portrayed in a 1985 book-length interview titled "The Ratzinger Report."

"But he's not rigid or harsh at all," she said. "The discussion was so open that my

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Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

questions were dealt with, and I didn't need to pose them as such."

Father Brown said Cardinal Ratzinger showed that his concern was how to "bring Scripture into the service of all the churches and let it express its authority in the life of the Church."

The relation of Cardinal Ratzinger's juridical authority to the work of biblical scholars was not discussed directly, Father Brown said, but the cardinal indicated he saw use of ecclesiastical power as an "absolute last resort" and wanted the authority of the biblical message to prevail.

"He is no threat to honest and responsible biblical scholarship," Father Brown said.

Father Brown, who at times has been the object of conservative criticism, said he suspected some people at a January 28 press conference hoped the cardinal would say

something negative about him. He was "surprised and pleased," he said, to instead receive public commendation.

The Rev. Neuhaus also noted Cardinal Ratzinger's praise of Father Brown, not only at the press conference but also at a dinner after the two-day dialogue at the residence of Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York.

The minister also praised Cardinal Ratzinger as "sharp" for putting down a press conference suggestion about returning to the anti-modernist approach of Pope Pius X's 1907 encyclical "Pascendi Dominici Gregis."

"Many traditionalist Catholics really have to hear that," the Rev. Neuhaus said. "There's no way a Cardinal Ratzinger or a Pope John Paul II represents a rolling back of Vatican II. They are looking to the future."

U.S. Catholics

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are in "deep loyalty" to the Holy See, and deal frequently with controversial issues in the news. The cardinal cited as an example the case in which Catholic University of America theology professor Father Charles Curran was censured for his dissenting views on Church teaching.

"I think the letters provide us with a reflection of typical Catholics," Cardinal Ratzinger said. "They are people who are preoccupied with the thought that the Catholic Church should remain the Catholic Church."

In response to another question, he said that letters "are only now beginning to come in" in connection with the controversial statement on AIDS issued in December by the Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference, public policy arm of the U.S. bishops. A number of U.S. bishops have objected to the statement's reference to tolerance for educational programs that would permit the use of condoms as a means of preventing the fatal disease.

Cardinal Ratzinger declined to express a personal opinion on the controversy.

"We in the congregation have begun to study the matter," he said. "It is difficult for me to express myself publicly on this before talking to American bishops. And this I will do beginning in March as the American bishops begin their 'ad limina' visits to Rome." The visits are required of all heads of dioceses every five years.

On the question of AIDS itself, however, the cardinal was especially voluble. In dealing with the illness and its victims the Church has a vital role to play on two counts, he said, the first pertaining to the question of moral education.

"There must be fidelity to the Church's moral teaching on sexual behavior, which in this case coincides with the best medical advice," Cardinal Ratzinger said. "We have a great duty to renew our moral education to help people understand that Christian teaching is not arbitrary or antiquated. It is not a teaching against the freedom of the human being, as some would contend, but instead it is the key to happiness for humanity. It is clear that the Christian way of life is the way of reason also."

Secondly, the cardinal added, the Church must provide "compassionate care" to those who have been stricken with AIDS. "We must be near those who are suffering," he said, adding that it is essential to explain the relationship between human suffering and the crucified Christ. He also pointed out as long as there is no cure for the deadly disease, spiritual help can offer the only real assistance for victims.

"That is why we must be there," he said, "to be near them with our hearts and with all our love."

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