

Editorial & Opinion

Preparing Rochester's report to the Bishop of Rome

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I mentioned last week that 1988 is the year assigned to the bishops of the United States to make their *ad limina* visits to Rome. "Ad limina" means literally "to the threshold," and the sense of it is to visit the very place where Peter and Paul gave their lives for the faith.

The heart of the visit is for the bishops to profess their faith at the tombs of Peter and Paul, and to pay their respects to the successor of Peter in the See of Rome, currently John Paul II.

The profession of faith is made at St. Peter's and at St. Paul's Outside the Walls. It is likely that we will celebrate Mass in those places and make the profession in the context of the eucharistic liturgy.

Our association with the current Holy Father is realized in three ways. Each diocesan bishop will have a private interview with him. That session will include a conversation about the state of the bishop's diocese and other matters of mutual interest. In addition to the private meetings, the bishops are invited to a luncheon with John Paul II. I remember well that the luncheon in 1983 was quite lengthy and most pleasant because of the significant and open conversation we held with the pope. For many of the bishops, including myself, the luncheon was the most enjoyable event of the visit five years ago.

The third and final meeting between John Paul II and the bishops of New York state will be a more formal gathering.

Along the Way



Cardinal John J. O'Connor will greet and address the pope on behalf of all of us; John Paul, in his turn, will deliver an address on some pastoral theme of his.

A third element of the *ad limina* visit is an opportunity we will have to visit the several congregations of the Roman Curia. Cardinal O'Connor has made appointments for us to talk with the officials of several congregations, including those for the Doctrine of the Faith, Education, Bishops, Sacraments and Worship, and Religious and Secular Institutes.

Although it is not technically a component of the *ad limina* visit, each diocesan bishop is asked, prior to the visit, to

submit in writing a rather detailed report on the spiritual and temporal condition of his diocese in the five-year period since the last *ad limina* visit. This report is reviewed by the authorities in Rome, and a response to the report is eventually sent to the diocesan bishop by Cardinal Gantin, who is cardinal prefect of the Congregation for Bishops.

Last evening I read through the last working draft of the report we will be sending to Rome. It was a beautiful experience to go through it because it gives the reader some sense of the faith and vitality of the people who form the particular church called the Diocese of Rochester. It is impossible to capture all of that in the written word, but I think our friends in Rome will not miss the energy and generous spirit that are so characteristic of our community of faith.

The bishop's ring I wear is the one given to me by John Paul II when he ordained me a bishop in May of 1979. It is in the shape of a miter, and bears in its face representations of Jesus flanked by St. Peter and St. Paul. It has always meant a lot to me because of the giver, and because of the reminder it offers each day of the bond of faith and affection that join us to the Bishop of Rome, as together we seek to be faithful to the Good News proclaimed by Peter and Paul.

I shall be grateful for your prayers that our *ad limina* visit to be held during the week of October 9 will be a sign of and give renewed strength to these bonds.

Peace to all.

Reader finds little wheat among chaff in Father McBrien's column

To the editor:

Father Richard P. McBrien's column "True Catholics and phony Catholics" (C-J July 14) reminds me of the reporting of a Sam Donaldson or a Dan Rather. Sift it down and there's about 10 to 20 percent wheat.

Father McBrien, for example, states: "Conservatives maintain that by publicizing various social problems like drugs and prostitution, the advocates of reform have only acted to make these evils 'normal' and have thereby encouraged young people to embrace them." Father McBrien should and does know better.

The point of dispute is not the publicizing of drugs and prostitution practices, etc., but the omission of any reference to the application of Christian doctrine to these "social problems." Let me cite some of the Christian doctrine I refer to: the Ten Commandments; the Four Cardinal Virtues; the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit; the Eight Beatitudes; the Seven Deadly Sins, and the opposite virtues; Nine Ways of being accessory to another's sin.

A prime example of the moral deficiency extant in pronouncements of the American Catholic Church is the USCC document "Many Faces of AIDS," which does not even mention the moral virtues. Our Holy Father noted this condition recently when he told journalists on his trip to South America that the bishops should "reflect" on "Many Faces." "The American bishops know what the doctrine of the Church in this area is," he said, "And they should find their own expression for that which is in accord with the universal doctrine of the

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Church."

If the infusion of Christian doctrine into social reforms seems negative and constrictive to Father McBrien, that is his problem.

Next Father McBrien states that the reforms and renewal inspired by the Second Vatican Council are opposed by some Catholics. Let's put that data into context. Vatican I was solemnly confirmed by Vatican II (Lumen Gentium 22). Vatican II also states that "religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*" (Lumen Gentium 25).

What are the reforms mentioned in Father McBrien's column? We don't know since he is not specific. For all I know, they may be such issues as female ordination, sexual morality, abortion and homosexual behavior, to name just a few, which are described by Father Charles Curran as "human made" or "peripheral."

What Father McBrien seems to lack is an understanding of the basic structure of the Church. Let me cite some of its major charac-



teristics.

1) It contains "The mystery of the communion sanctorum that does justice both to the worth of the individual person in his direct relationship to God and to the interdependence of all believers — because each one is indispensable to the 'completeness' of the members; the 'full stature of Christ' — cannot be rendered in purely sociological categories. This direct relationship of the individual to God — which, from the Christian point of view is what gives the individual his worth for the community — is made to appear as a 'private' matter (per modern sociology, Hammill) while there is nothing private in the Body of Christ. The interdependence of all appears here as ecclesial 'democracy,' a totally inadequate category when applied to the Church.

2) It provides a pluralism, i.e. a plurality of thought within the faith. Balthasar asserts: "Within the faith of the Church plurality of thought need not be feared. Doctrinaire pluralism, the results of research outside the Church, is not as alarming as the attitude of scholars (or any other Christians — who stand with one foot in the faith of the Church and the other in a self-fabricated religion or in a uneclesial neutrality, pursuing an existential pluralism that borders on the schizophrenic. If a person seriously and systematically denies the possibility that the faithful could live by the trinitar-

ian, christological, and pneumatological mysteries and, despite this negation, lays claim to being a good Catholic — perhaps even better than the pope — his error must be exposed to the faithful by the pastoral office, just as such errors were exposed by the apostles, without fear of offending against charity, in their actions and writings in the service of faith (Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 14:1, 16:17 etc.);" Ibid pg. 45.

3) It is a bulwark of resistance "to every attempt by secular powers, be they political, spiritual, or ideological, to ensnare the People of God an use it for particular ends.

Father McBrien chooses to label us disparagingly as rigid and unyielding. The rules are there — Christian doctrine, the deposit of faith — and their interpretation is provided by Holy Mother Church, not conservatives or liberals.

There is dialogue, there is pluralism — always has been, but it has been done in the milieu of the papal magisterium, the pope and the bishops, and not by individual theologians and national conferences of bishops operating in a manner that bespeaks an independence of the papal magisterium and produces an amalgam of theology, politics and heterodox attitudes.

William T. Hammill
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Commission

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hours passed before an ambulance arrived on the scene, when in fact reporters at the scene saw an ambulance arrive shortly after the shooting. Walker acknowledged that this was indeed a mistake based on just one eyewitness's account.

The report also raised questions about whether Relin had offered the grand jury the full range of charges on which they could move to indict Smith. Relin said that he did tell the grand jury about the range of charges, and that if the commission had contacted him, he would have told them what he said.

Commission member Gaynelle Wethers, principal of St. Monica's School, said that even if Relin did give all the possible charges to the grand jury, the issue was which charge he recommended and why he didn't encourage the grand jury to release its report. "It was his prerogative — he could have encouraged the grand jury to release the report," she said.

Another question raised about the citizen's commission report was why the commission did not call Relin as a witness.

"We knew what his position was and we felt (calling him) would be a waste of time," Walker explained. He noted that Relin had made his position clear at a community forum held June 15 at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection. "He was solid in his contention that everything was cut-and-dry in terms of finality," the chairman said.

Walker further noted that the commission did invite Public Safety Commissioner Paul Bringewatt to testify, but Bringewatt declined, saying that he didn't feel he could reveal information that had not been made public. Commission members decided not to invite any other police officials as witnesses, believing the officials would similarly decline to testify, Walker said.

Much of the criticism leveled at the commission stems from the charges of racism contained in the report and for its labeling the death of Green a murder.

"There might be some hyperbole in the report," acknowledged commission member Ken Maher, director of justice and peace for the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry. But exaggerated statements were used "to help us examine ourselves and to get the authorities to address the issue," Maher added.

Relin charged, however, that the hyperbole undermined the report's credibility.

"The purpose of the report is not to assist the community, but to inflame the community," he asserted. "Someone made up their minds as to what they wanted the report to say before they wrote it."

The district attorney also questioned the emphasis on racism in the report.

"No one can ever deny that there is racism in any society," Relin said. "The question is, does that racism affect public policies in a government office? I can say it would be the worst violation of public trust to allow actions to be affected by any racist tendency."

Nevertheless, commission members maintain that racism did affect the handling of the

case, Maher noted.

"We shouldn't be surprised that racism is a part of our judicial system," Maher said. "It's a part of our society. It's a part of our Church."

Maher acknowledged that he was uncomfortable calling someone else a racist without calling himself one. But the report, he noted, isn't just labeling Relin or Smith racists. "They are just as much victims of racism as anyone else," he said.

Father Tracy noted that the section of the report discussing racism began with the statement: "Institutional racism is endemic to the fabric of American society."

"I think it's important to put it in that context," the priest said.

"What (the report) has done is to raise the level of consciousness of the black community that it could happen to them or to their sons and daughters," Wethers noted. Even if the report produces no concrete results, this consciousness raising will help the black community work as a unit in the future, she noted.