

Columnists

# The sadness of Father McBrien

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

When our bishops met recently in Collegeville, Minnesota, they voted to collaborate with Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). This move made nationally syndicated columnist Father Richard P. McBrien sad, exasperated and fearful for the future of the Church. Here is an analysis of his column on the subject, which appeared in the *Courier-Journal* of August 11.

**Father McBrien:** "When the history of this period in U.S. Catholicism is written 100 years from now, one of the standards by which current Church leaders will be measured will be their response to the challenge and opportunities presented by the communications revolution, particularly television — a medium heretofore dominated by Protestant Pentecostals and fundamentalists. To correct this imbalance, an ecumenical network, VISN, is about to be launched with a projected audience of more than 50 million cable subscribers. Catholics have been invited to participate."

**Comment:** For years this column has lamented the ineptness of the Church in the U.S. in the use of radio and television communications. With the loss of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen we have had no comparable spokesman. The bishops of the United States have never been able to get together in a collegiate Catholic TV apostolate. Who stepped into the breach? A woman, Mother Angelica. In 1981 she established a Catholic TV apostolate which was and is financed by gifts from thousands of Catholics who have found in Mother Angelica's cable the Catholicism which is loyal to the Church and to the Holy See. This is disturbing to Father McBrien who is saddened that the bishops did not join VISN to share with the dozens of contending Christian denominations in an equality that would imply a denial of the uniqueness of the Catholic Church, a uniqueness declared by Vatican II.

**Father McBrien:** "Our bishops voted 122 to 93 to enter instead into a two-year contract with Mother Angelica's EWTN, which has an audience of some 10 million. One archbishop called it the worst decision made by National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 20 years. Others simply shook their heads in disbelief?"

**Comment:** More bishops shook their heads in agreement, which Father McBrien cannot comprehend.

**Father McBrien:** "Mother Angelica, the head of the Benedictine monastery in Alabama, founded her own television network in 1981. A folksy, self-assured woman, Mother Angelica has been described as an old-fashioned, pre-Vatican II nun with the person-

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ality of an old-fashioned, pre-Vatican II rectory housekeeper."

**Comment:** Because the bishops were doing nothing, Mother Angelica has trundled along with EWTN, letting the world know about Our Lord, Our Lady, the Catholic Church and her devotions, the Holy See, healthy family life and all those things that were pre-Vatican II and continue in their reality in post-Vatican II. Why does Father McBrien assume everything pre-Vatican II was bad? The Bible, Thomas Aquinas, Father Damien, most of the saints, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the wonderful sisters who established our once-flourishing school system and, yes, the mothers and fathers of most of us were all pre-Vatican II. Why be snide rather than praising them? And let's bless the housekeepers, pre- and post-Vatican II!

**Father McBrien:** "She appears benign and jovial, but many sense underneath a strong-mindedness, fortified by a piety and theology largely untouched by the biblical, liturgical and socio-ethical developments of the past several decades."

**Comment:** What bothers him is the strong-mindedness that is strong for the Catholic Church, the magisterium, the Holy Father and traditional devotions, regarding which many believe Father McBrien is weak-minded.

**Father McBrien:** "Perhaps the most important question of all is whether the 122-to-93 vote is indicative of a drift to the right on the part of the conference as a whole. Given the pattern of episcopal appointments in the post-Jadot years, one should not be surprised if that is the case." (Archbishop Jadot was the Apostolic Delegate in Washington before John Paul II, and influential in the appointment of bishops.)

**Comment:** Father McBrien sighs in sorrow that Pope John Paul's appointments to bishoprics tend to represent the faith and devotion of the People of God. Others rejoice that fidelity to the pope and the magisterium is returning to honor. Let us praise especially Bishop Thomas Daily, bishop of Palm Beach, Florida, and national chaplain of the Knights of Columbus for leading the bishops to so happily a decision.

# 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord'

By Cindy Bassett

All that God promised the angel Gabriel soon came to pass. Elizabeth gave birth to a son and with her relatives gathered around her proudly announced, "The child will be called John."

"No one in our family has ever been named that," the relatives told her. Some of them motioned to the baby's father for an opinion. But Zechariah, who still could not speak, wrote the name, 'John' on a tablet.

As soon as Zechariah had done so, he suddenly was able to speak. "Praise be the God of Israel!" he proclaimed. "For he has come to save his people. He brings the salvation promised long ago through the prophets. And you, John, will prepare the way."

Many of the people in the surrounding villages heard about what happened that day and began to ask, "What will this child become?"

But John was only the prelude for something greater. A few months later, a child was born to Mary, Elizabeth's cousin, in the town of Bethlehem. The town's simple folk were the first to become aware that something extraordinary was going on that night. The shepherds heard the angels singing about the Savior who had been born. Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, was among his people at last.

Both children lived in relative obscurity until 30 years later. In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar John emerged from the desert that he had made his home. He did not come quietly.

"Repent! Prepare yourselves for the Messiah is coming! Repent for your sins!" John cried.

As a sign of their new lives, John baptized his converts in the Jordan River. Soon he became known all over the region as John the Baptist.

"What should we do to prepare ourselves?" the crowds asked.

"Share all of your food and possessions with the poor," John told them. "Be fair and honest in your dealings with others."

John the Baptist attracted such a large fol-

# The Bible Corner

lowing that soon many started to believe that he might be the Christ. But he dismissed their claims. "I baptize with mere water. But when the Messiah comes, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit," John said. "I am not even worthy to unloose his sandals."

For this reason, when Jesus came to John one day to be baptized, the baptizer refused. When Jesus insisted, John finally baptized him, and immediately, people reported a strange occurrence by the Jordan River. A dove as white as snow, came down from nowhere and descended on Jesus. Some in the crowd said the sound they heard was thunder; others said it was a voice saying, "This is my beloved Son. With him, I am well pleased."

Afterward Jesus, like John before him, withdrew into the desert to prepare for beginning his work. John's work, on the other hand, was completed. He had been courageous and bold in all that he had said. He had seen the evil of sin and rebuked it everywhere. He condemned Herod for having married his brother's wife.

John's words stung the king, and he waited for his opportunity. One day, soon after the baptism of Jesus, Herod had John arrested. He locked John in prison, but even this could not silence him. Eventually, on a whim of his wife, Herod ordered John beheaded. But it didn't matter. John had accomplished everything God had given him to do.

Scripture reference: Luke, Chapter 1:57 Chapter 4.

Meditation: What work has God given me to do?

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