

Columnists

Seeking those who are lost

By Cindy Bassett

My name is Zacchaeus. Some people consider me to be the wealthiest man in all of Jericho. I wonder how many of them know that I am the loneliest. You see, I decided long ago that having money and possessions was the key to power, especially for a short man.

No one ever paid any attention to me until I became the chief tax collector in Jericho. Although Romans ruled my own people, the Hebrews, the rulers thought it better if a Hebrew collected their taxes. I was given no salary, but I could keep all that was left after I paid what was due to the Roman government. In this process, I managed to make a handsome profit for myself.

Money and power didn't win any real friends for me. The Romans never trusted me. Even worse, I felt a strong rebuke from my own people. Even though I was certain that even God would reject me, I began to pray about my situation.

One day, just before the Passover celebration, Jericho was crowded with people who stopped en route to the temple in Jerusalem. Today, people lined both sides of the main street as if they anticipated the arrival of someone important.

"What's all the excitement about?" I asked someone in the crowd.

"Jesus is coming to Jericho today," he replied. I had been hearing stories about Jesus for several weeks now, and I lined up with the others. As I struggled to see, those who knew me shoved me back angrily. "Get out of here, Zacchaeus! There's no room for you with us," they shouted.

I looked around for another place, and saw a sycamore tree along the road. Quickly, I climbed the tree. To my surprise, a group of people stopped in front of the tree. "Zacchaeus, come down!" a man said. "I am going to be a guest at your house today?"

When the people nearby heard this, they be-

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gan to complain, "Doesn't Jesus know that this man is a sinner? How could he go to his house!"

As I made the necessary preparations for Jesus' arrival, I began to wonder if he would really come. But in a few hours, Jesus and his apostles were gathered around my table.

Jesus told me all about a new kingdom that day. This kingdom was open to anyone who wanted to be one of his followers. It didn't matter what you looked like or how much money you had.

When Jesus was ready to leave, a crowd was waiting outside my house. I stopped Jesus, saying, "Before you go, there is something I must do."

I went out to the people and said: "I promise that I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus came and stood with me. "Salvation has come here today," he said. "I didn't come to help those who have no need of me. I came to save those who are lost."

Nothing in this world can ever equal God's love for us. He is always listening to our prayers and ready to forgive us if we are sorry for our sins.

Scripture reference: Luke 19:1-10.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, help us to know with all of our hearts that none of the things of this world that we seek can ever compare to the things you have prepared for us.

Observations from a great theologian

By Father Richard McBrien

Father Yves Congar, O.P., surely stands as one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the 20th century. Now 84 and in frail health, Father Congar has recently published a series of conversations entitled *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology*, (Fortress Press).

What follows is a sample of the observations one finds in this remarkable little paperback.

Regarding Vatican II: "But it would be dangerous to think that the composition of texts was all that there was to it ... the ideas then have to be put into practice. And to be specific, if the Council has had any significance, it has been that of a transition from the ideal or ideological sphere to the everyday life of the Church."

On Pope John XXIII: "John XXIII was the kind of man for whom ideas were not as it were ready-made schemes to be applied as they are, but were truly realities which had to be lived out pastorally."

On national episcopal conferences: "But while it is true that the episcopal conference is not of divine institution, I would say that the councils are not divine institutions either. Have they only a practical function? I do not think so."

On the universality of God's saving work: "Clearly the Church is a preparation for the kingdom. But it is not the only preparation. The wider world, the lay world and the other religions, is also a preparation for the kingdom ... We are the repository of the message of liberation, but sometimes it is others who liberate."

On the evolution of papal power: "There is no doubt that for me the great turning point in ecclesiology is the eleventh century ... embodied in the person of Gregory VII."

"When the Church opposed the temporal power ... it was led to adopt very much the same attitudes as the temporal power itself, to conceive of itself as a society, as a power, when in reality it is a communion, with ministers, servants."

On the monarchical concept of papal authority: "But this ... monarchical ... theory cannot be sustained. It is historically indefensible. For eight or ten centuries the Popes never intervened in the creation of bishops or the nomination of bishops."

On Pope John Paul II: "So this man seems to me to be a grace given to Christians and to our age: coming from the East, a Slav, he has a new contribution to make to the Church."

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Of course, you can criticize him, for example in connection with his travels which have 'too much of the Pope' about them and do not allow him really to listen and to take note of what is going on in the local churches.

"Nevertheless, I believe that he sees a good deal, since he is a very perceptive man with a great sensitivity to people and cultures."

On the present health of the Church: "I have often said, and I may say it again, that we are in one of the most evangelistic centuries of all history. I know that it is a century of unbelief and religious indifference, that is also the century of the expansion of Islam, but among the minority of faithful who truly believe, it is a really evangelistic century."

"I am amazed to see the commitment of a large number of faithful who are concerned with drug-addicts and delinquents, but also with immigrants, illiterates, catechetical work, etc., so that there can be a church."

On historical-mindedness in theology: "I am very fond of Peguy's saying, 'Not the true, but the real,' provided that it is properly understood ... I hold to the truth, but the real, i.e., truth with historicity, with its concrete state of becoming, in time, is something else ... everything is historical — absolutely everything including the Bible and Jesus."

On disagreement with Church authorities: "My conclusion is as follows: one has the right to disagree when one has a duty to disagree, in the name of a recognized truth, whether this is historical biblical truth (Loisy), apostolic truth (worker priests), pastoral truth (Grosseteste ... a 13th-century English bishop critical of ecclesiastical corruption in Rome. .), or political truth (the Centre Party ... a 19th-century German party that opposed Pope Leo XIII's efforts to placate Bismarck. .). One has the right when one has the duty."

On his own present situation: "Withdrawn from active life, I am united to the mystical body of the Lord Jesus of which I have often spoken. I am united to it, day and night, by the prayer of one who has also known his share of suffering."

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