

Columnists

Rebutting Father McBrien's views

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Father Richard McBrien and I are priests of the same Catholic Church. His vision and mine sometimes coalesce, and sometimes collide. He was outraged that the American bishops last October voted to unite with Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network in the Catholic television apostolate. What did he want? He did not want EWTN. He did want the bishops to join a watered-down ecumenical national network, to be a segment within multidivergent Protestant denominations.

Mother Angelica's ETWN has been producing good Catholic programming for several years, and has an estimated 15 million viewers. This national cable network has produced programs faithful to Catholic tradition, to the magisterium, and produces devotions like the rosary, the Mass, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It has avoided a rabble-rousing dissidence which might please Father McBrien. In his indignation, he castigates the nun as "an old-fashioned pre-Vatican II nun with the personality of a pre-Vatican II rectory housekeeper."

Since I was a priest for 30 years before Vatican II, and have been one for 23 years since, my knowledge and experience within the Church is not minimal. And a mean-spirited degrading of pre-Vatican II nuns and housekeepers should give everyone pause. And the enthusiasm for ecclesial developments since Vatican II should be discussed, making proper distinctions. The January 2 *Courier-Journal* had Father McBrien's satisfaction with post-Vatican II liturgy. Now an analysis.

Father McBrien: "The altar is facing the congregation. ... The priest celebrates the liturgy facing the community."

Comment: A questionable deal. Having celebrated Mass for many years, both with the back to the people and facing the people, I conclude that the Byzantine rite is better liturgy. In the Byzantine rite, used by Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, when the priest is addressing the people as he reads the Scriptures and expounds

A hypothetical job exchange

By Father Richard C. McBrien

A playful columnist recently suggested that Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz ought to become chairman of the university's theology department.

As the one presently occupying that office, I want to go on record in favor of the proposal — with one modification. I think it only fair, in the spirit of the James Baker-Donald Regan swap of a few years ago, that Lou and I exchange jobs. After all, he couldn't manage both at the same time, and I might become bored if excluded from both. I'd have too much time on my hands for the perpetration of further "tragi-comedy."

I think I'd like Lou Holtz's job — or at least the fringe benefits. We're all that way, aren't we? We covet another's position, but we want no part of the work and the stress that it demands. Only the rewards.

My salary would increase at least four or five-fold — a conservative estimate, no doubt — what with the product endorsements, the television and radio shows, and the big-ticket speaking fees at sports-night dinners and the like.

I'd become even more popular with my friends, especially when they begin searching for tickets to the annual Michigan, Miami, Southern California, and Penn State match-ups. Not to mention the bowl games.

But the greatest boon would be the media exposure. There are those — and we are assured they're not all reactionaries — who'd like to see less of me on TV and in the press. Give me Lou Holtz's job and I'd even be on cable, in *USA Today*, and on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. What's an occasional mention in *The New York Times* compared with all that?

Lou, in his turn, could bring an enormous measure of coaching talent to the theology department. He's a winner in more ways than one, and we're all proud of him at Notre Dame.

I can just hear him now, with rumors flying for months that he's about to hire one of the biggest-name Scripture scholars in the country. "Look," he would patiently explain to the press, "right now we're trying to hire a part-time secretary for the ministry program. That's the only concern any of us have at the moment."

"That's not easy, you know. Good part-time secretaries are hard to find. There's a lot of work to reading applications, developing a short list, interviewing candidates, consulting all parties involved, and then making the choice."

"And who's to say she'll accept the job? Who's to say the dean's office will put enough money in our budget to cover it? Who's to say

On the Right side

on them, he faces the people. But when he is leading them in prayer, he as priest and leader of the community, faces with the people, all in the same direction, adoring the Most High.

Facing the people can be disconcerting. You can often observe the celebrating priest praying at the people, eyeing them right and left, directing God's prayers at the people, instead of directing them to the Eternal God.

Fr. McB.: "The liturgy is celebrated in the vernacular."

Comment: Most of us are glad for the vernacular, though sad about certain vulgarities which have entered through poor translations and problematic lecturing. Consider the "songs." The early liturgists, with their passion for change and vagueness, buried the religious term "hymn" for the secular term "song." Why? There was a time when people going to Mass in San Diego or Hoboken could sing the same hymns, known throughout the whole country, and taught in Catholic schools and in the churches. Now a congregation from Owego or Scipio or Elmira Heights would be hard put to be uniformly familiar with the constantly changing "songs" at Painted Post or Sodus or Dallas.

The great Latin hymns, like the heart-melting "Panis Angelicus," the soul-stirring "Salve Regina," the soulful "In Paradisum," the many Ave Marias, the common Gregorian Masses — all great devotional music — have been buried. A non-Catholic organist said to me: "Your Church had the tradition of the greatest spiritual music in the world, and now you have let the secular and the vulgar intrude into your liturgy." He was indignant, as if it were my fault. I could have quoted him the directions of Vatican II.

Essays in Theology

that our Personnel Office will approve?

"So, don't talk to me about Father Raymond Brown. We face one challenge at a time here in the department. Right now, I've got a part-time secretary to hire. See you later, fellas."

And you can imagine what Lou Holtz would do if a couple of his faculty were to come late a few times too many to departmental meetings. He'd send them home. In fact, he'd take them to Michiana Airport himself. They'd travel coach class. No frills. No ceremony. And they'd have learned a lesson for life. If you're going to teach theology at Notre Dame, you're going to show up on time for meetings. No ifs, ands, or buts. You betcha.

But Lou Holtz may have one character flaw that could eventually get him into hot water with some alumni — you know, the kind that like to second-guess football coaches and theologians. Lou argues with the officials. Sometimes he gets downright angry. No, make that stronger. Sometimes he blows his stack. He's been known to whip his cap off and fling it to the ground.

Theologians can't do that, because they're subject to the magisterium. That means no arguing with the umpires. Ever. The referee is always right. And there are no distinctions in theology between big penalties and little penalties. You can have a five-yard offside penalty, or you can get one of your players thrown out of the game for unsportsmanlike conduct. In theology it's all the same. It all comes from the same magisterial mountaintop.

So if Lou Holtz were offered my job, he'd have to be ready for at least four, and possibly five, major adjustments: 1) He'd be paid an awful lot less; 2) He'd have far less exposure in the media, and even in the university's public relations handouts; 3) He'd not be able to discipline his faculty the way he can discipline his players — he really couldn't send them home; and 4) he'd have to get used to being nice to the umpires — or at least to making them think he's being nice to them. It's an art-form of sorts.

But he'd especially have to watch out for #5. It could be his biggest adjustment. He might have to suffer the occasional slings of a columnist who always wanted to play for Notre Dame, but never got the chance.

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