

Many Catholics depend on cafeteria options

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Cafeterias are places where you make your own individual food selections. From soup and salad to dessert, you pick and choose whatever you want, pass by what doesn't please you and, at line's end, pay the cashier for whatever happens to be on your tray.

Many Catholics are accused these days of practicing a kind of "cafeteria Catholicism." They are charged with picking and choosing among the Church's doctrines and disciplines, deciding entirely for themselves and in light of their own personal tastes what teachings they will accept and what rules they will observe.

Those Catholics who make this charge against their fellow Catholics are particularly bitter about the role of theologians in the emergence of "cafeteria Catholicism."

They are convinced that, without the "bad example" of theologians, the "simple faithful" would never have taken up the cafeteria habit in the first place.

Their remedy is to force the theologians to take an oath to eat *everything* that's put on their plates.

Once the "simple faithful" see the theologians dutifully swallowing their last morsel of magisterial spinach, they will be properly motivated to clean their own plates.

But driving only the theologians out of the cafeteria, like money changers out of the temple, won't cure the problem.

The reason is that many of the same Catholics who raise the charge of "cafeteria Catholicism" are themselves secret cafeteria aficionados, so much so, in fact, that some of their critics wonder if they hate the sinner, but love the sin.

Father Avery Dulles, SJ, reminds us in a short, but important, contribution to the January-February issue of *New Oxford Review*, that dissents and even heresy are just as likely to come from the right as from the left.

"Historically," he writes, "rigorists and archaists have caused as much trouble for the Church as liberals and progressives."

"The Montanist and Novatian heresies, Jansenism, and the more recent disturbances connected with Fr. Leonard Feeney are cases in point."

"The Church today abounds in right-wing Catholics who dissent from the social teaching of popes and bishops or reject the liturgical reforms of Vatican II and Paul VI."

And that's just the point: Many Catholics who insist that theologians take an oath of



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absolute fidelity to Pope Paul VI's birth control encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, for example, can give you all kinds of reasons why they themselves are not similarly bound by Paul VI's encyclical on social justice, *Populorum Progressio*, issued only one year earlier.

But consistency has never been their strong suit. And one can understand why it is not. Just consider for a moment what the new oath would commit us all to, if taken at face value.

The text of the oath released this spring by the Vatican allows for no exceptions. Doctrines at three levels are covered: teachings solemnly defined, teachings "definitively" proposed, and teachings of the ordinary magisterium that are neither solemnly defined nor definitively proposed — in other words, *everything else*.

Take just a few of the examples given by my colleague Father James Burtchaell, CSC, in a devastatingly whimsical piece on the oath in the April 7 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

The Council of Trent taught that sacramental confession is by divine law necessary to salvation. Outside the confessional, no salvation? Really? Even for non-Catholics?

The Council of Nicea established once and for all that bishops must be elected by all the bishops of a province, with final confirmation by the metropolitan, and that no bishop can be transferred to another diocese. Shall theologians swear to that, too?

The same council also held that clerics who receive interest on their funds should be deposed (a sobering thought," Father Burtchaell notes, "for all who hold savings or interest-bearing checking accounts").

The Second Council of Nicea decreed "definitively" that no one can be made a bishop without knowing the Psalter by heart and without having read the entire Bible, "thoroughly, not cursorily."

And what of the teaching of the Holy Office — and of Popes Alexander III, Innocent III, Leo X, Paul III, and the Third Lateran Council — that slavery is "not at all contrary to the natural and divine law"?

Boniface VIII taught that no one can be saved except in obedient subjection to the Roman Pontiff, while Leo XIII declared that free thought and speech and publication must not be allowed by civil governments. Do we swear to these, too?

Before badgering theologians into taking an oath of fidelity to *everything* the magisterium has ever taught, our oath-advocates ought to go up into the Church's attic and have a closer look around.

If they come back downstairs and tell us we can forget about some things — like Father Burtchaell's examples — ask them on what basis they distinguish between teachings of the magisterium we have to accept and teachings we don't have to accept.

And when they finish explaining, hand them back their cafeteria trays.

Young David mercifully spares King Saul's life

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Your Majesty, as your chief commander, I must advise against maintaining your search for David," Abner said. "I have just been informed that the Philistines have invaded the country. Our finest soldiers cannot keep pursuing one man while the rest of the country perishes."

"David is my enemy!" King Saul shouted. "He must be eliminated as a traitor!" Then seeing Abner's worried expression, he added, "If we don't find David today, we will turn back."

Meanwhile, David was standing at the entrance of a nearby cave, with some of the men who had taken his side. "It would have been far better for me if I had stayed on my father's farm in Bethlehem and tended to his sheep. There will never be any peace in my life while King Saul hunts me down. We are like wild animals, always on the move and living in caves," he said mournfully.

"Quiet! I hear someone coming," one of David's companions told them. "Go into the cave. I'll hide here and see who it is."

This same soldier was jubilant when he rejoined the others in the cave a short time later. "David, there is no need for you to



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be downcast any longer," he said. "An army of King Saul's men is camped just below us — at least several thousand men. But your greatest enemy is resting at the entrance to this cave!"

"King Saul?" David questioned. "Yes, God has placed him in your hands," he replied. "Go and kill him quickly and be done with it."

As his own men looked on and the king's army remained camped below, David crept slowly to the cave's opening, sword in hand.

"David's life as a fugitive is over at last," someone commented as they waited.

"Let's go forward and congratulate him on his great victory," another said when they were sure the struggle had ended.

When they reached the entrance to the cave, David's companions were astonished to see Saul still alive and David holding a

piece of the king's robe in his hand. King Saul, unaware that anything had occurred, had risen and was heading down to the camp.

"Your Majesty!" David cried.

A surprised Saul looked back to see his most hated enemy bowing low in respect to him. Rising, David said, "King Saul, only moments ago, I had the opportunity to kill you as you rested. I was standing so near that I cut off a portion of your robe." David waved the garment for him to see.

"My actions should finally convince you that I would never do anything to harm the man God chose to be king of Israel," David continued. "What crimes have I ever committed that you hunt me relentlessly? May the Lord judge us both and see who is wrong!"

King Saul was speechless. David's words cut him more deeply than if he had struck him with his sword. He fell on his knees and began weeping in front of everyone.

"David, the Lord has already judged," He sobbed. "I am wrong and you are right. If I had come upon you, I would never have spared your life. I know that you will become the king of Israel someday. When you do, please don't remember the evil I have done. Be merciful and gracious to all my descendants."

"I promise to show kindness to everyone in your family," David said, "especially to your son, Jonathan, and his descendants."

King Saul took his soldiers and went back to fighting the real enemies of Israel. The war with the Philistines was to continue for many years.

Scripture reference: 1 Samuel, Chapter 24.

Meditation: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28).

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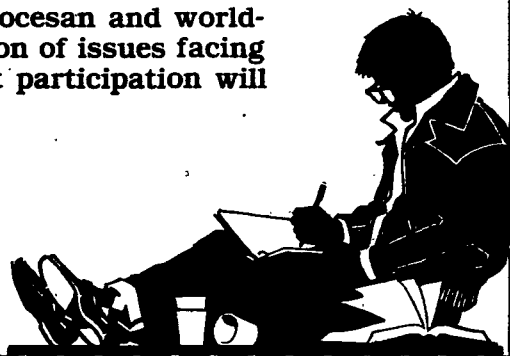
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