

Confident writers might ask new questions

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Some 17 years ago the U.S. Catholic bishops issued an important message on Catholic education, which they entitled, "To Teach as Jesus Did."

Many religious educators would probably agree that the content of the document has stood up remarkably well against subsequent theological and catechetical developments.

Nonetheless, it is the document's title rather than its content that seems to have etched itself in our collective consciousness.

We've grown accustomed in recent years to hearing church leaders call the media to task for habitually inquiring about the possibility of a change in one official church teaching or another, whether it concern the ordination of women, birth control, divorce/remarriage, homosexual behavior, abortion or other matters pertaining to the discipline and teaching authority of the church.

We're not at liberty to change any of these teachings, the bishops regularly insist. They're not our teachings. They were given us by the Lord himself. We have no alternative but "to teach as Jesus did."

At which point the reporters nod, close their notebooks or turn off their tape recorders, and break for lunch. Once more they have tried without success to crack the Rock of Peter.

Were religion writers somewhat more secure in their theological footing they might be emboldened now and then to ask the logical follow-up question: What evidence do we have — in the Bible or anywhere else — that Jesus taught anything at all about, for example, the ordination of women or contraception by artificial means?

Of course, no such evidence exists, neither for these nor for most of the other controverted moral questions we have been so exercised about in recent years: abortion, masturbation, *in-vitro* fertilization, sterilization, homosexuality and the like.

Would Jesus have absolutely condemned every form of homosexual behavior or forbidden the celebration of the Eucharist for gays?

We don't know because we have no evidence that he ever said a word about the subject.

When and where did Jesus say that it is impossible for a loyal Catholic to criticize the pope on any matter whatsoever, or to dissent from one aspect or another of his non-infallible teachings?

Indeed, where in Jesus' teachings do we find the concept of infallibility or the distinction between infallible and non-infallible teachings.

On what recorded occasion did the word "magisterium" fall from Jesus' lips, and where in his several discourses did he speak of "ordinary" magisterium or "ordinary universal" magisterium?

I wish to stress, especially for the sake of column-clippers with a heavy investment in overseas stamps, that none of the preceding questions implies a denial of the legiti-



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

mate evolution of the church's own subsequent teaching and practice. My point is that we shouldn't try to defend, or lock in, that evolution on the grounds that Jesus himself explicitly taught such things.

Therefore, the next time the press asks if the Church will ever change its teaching on contraception, we might still want to say, "No." But our reason should not be that we are somehow constrained by the teaching of Jesus himself.

We haven't a shred of documentary evidence that Jesus said a word about birth control. Not a word.

On the other hand, the evidence for other teachings of Jesus, much closer to the core of the Gospel, is clear — indeed, uncomfortably clear.

Jesus taught explicitly and repeatedly that we must treat one another as brother and sister, even those whom we regard as enemies (Luke 6:27-28).

He taught explicitly and repeatedly that we must avoid judging and condemning one another, and that we must renounce revenge (6:37, 29).

He taught explicitly and repeatedly that we must be ready at all times to forgive one another if we expect God to forgive us (Matthew 6:12).

He taught explicitly and repeatedly that we will be judged in the end on the basis of our treatment of our neighbor in need: the hungry, the homeless, the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46).

He taught explicitly and repeatedly that traditions and rules are never to become more important than people, warning against the temptation to equate religion with ritualism and legalism (Mark 2:27; 7:1-23; Matthew 23).

Parables counsel us to be humble, charitable

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 14:1, 7-14; (R1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; (R2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24.

Two virtues are extolled in Sunday's readings: humility and almsgiving. Sirach says: "Conduct your affairs with humility ... Humble yourself and you'll find favor with God." "... alms atone for sin."

In the Gospel, Our Lord endorses both virtues. He was invited to the home of a leading Pharisee. The spirit behind the invitation is obvious from Luke's remark "they observed him closely." But He, too, was observing them, seeing how they were trying to get the places of honor at table. Nothing escapes the eyes of God.

So to avoid embarrassing the guests, Jesus told a parable about another kind of banquet, a wedding party. The point was, "everyone who exhorts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Thomas Wheeler, chief executive officer of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, tells this story about himself. While he and his wife were out driving, he noticed they were low on gas. So he pulled off at the first exit and came to a dumpy little gas station with one pump. There was only one man working the place, so Wheeler asked the attendant to fill it up while he checked the oil. As he added a quart of oil, he saw his wife talking and smiling at the gas-station attendant.

Wheeler paid the man and he and his wife pulled out of the seedy little station. As they drove down the road, Wheeler asked his wife if she knew the attendant. Well, she admitted she did know him. In fact, she had known him very well. For it seems that they not only had gone to high

school together, but they dated seriously for about a year.

Well, Wheeler couldn't help bragging a little and said, "Boy were you lucky I came along. If you had married him you'd be the wife of a gas-station attendant instead of the wife of a chief executive officer." He wife replied, "My dear, if I had married him, he'd be the chief executive officer and you'd be the gas-station attendant."

Jesus warned us time and time again not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. As with Wheeler, the put down is inevitable. God loves honesty, and the truth is that we haven't a single talent or thing that doesn't come from God. Humility means recognizing that. God who loves truth, loves the humble and exalts them.

Then Jesus turned to the Pharisee who had invited him and said that men ought to do good to those who cannot give anything in return, leaving the question of recompense to God.

Leo Tolstoy wrote the story of a Russian cobbler, Martin Avdyeeich. Martin lived in a cellar with a single window. All he ever saw was the boots of those who passed by. And most of those boots he himself had made.

While Martin was still an apprentice, his wife died. Their one son grew to be the pride of his life. Then he, too, suddenly died. Martin despaired and murmured against God.

An old peasant visiting him one day, said: "Martin, thy speech is not good. How canst thou judge the doings of God? It is because thou wast to live for thine own delight that thou dost despair."

"But what is man to live for?" Martin asked. The old peasant answered, "For God, Martin. He gave thee life, and for Him thou must live. Then things will come easy to thee."



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

The story goes on with Martin finding fulfillment in serving God by serving others.

Similarly, many of us would find life more fulfilling too if we understood that we have been blessed primarily so that we can be a blessing to others. If we hoard our possessions and despise our less-fortunate neighbors, we will discover too late that we have missed the Kingdom.

Great Lakes Center slates workshops on work lives

The Great Lakes Center is offering "Humanizing the Workplace," a fall lecture series exploring three issues facing organizational leaders.

Ann Smith, director of Caron Family Services in Wernersville, Pa., will present "Co-dependency in the Workplace: Responding to Unproductive Work Behavior" on Sept. 15. On Oct. 20, John Engels, president of the center, will direct "Life/Work Planning: The Roots of Effective Career Development."

The final workshop, "Work and Relationships: Achieving Greater Balance," will be given on Nov. 20 by Brother James Zullo, FSC, senior consultant of the Christian Brothers Counseling Center in Westchester, Ill.

All three workshops will take place at the Marketplace Inn, 800 Jefferson Road, Rochester, from 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

For information, call the center at 716/461-5490.

Women's retreat slated

Sessions for the "At Home Retreat," which is based on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, are scheduled to begin Monday, Sept. 18, at 7:30 p.m.

The group, which was formed for women unable to experience a weekend retreat, meets two hours weekly for 13 weeks. The retreat will take place in the home of one of the participant.

For information, call Sister Anna Louise Staub, SSJ, 716/586-8291 or Kathy Murty, 436-1284.

Greece blood drive slated

Holy Name of Jesus Church and Eagle Scout Brian Ebertz of Troop #240 will host a blood drive open to the Greece community on Monday, Sept. 11, from 2:30-7:30 p.m. at the church, 1 St. Martin's Way, Greece.

The goal for the drive is 40 pints. Anyone who is at least 17 years old, weighs at least 110 pounds and is in good health is eligible to give blood.

Call 716/256-4140 for information.



SERVICES for SENIORS

Call 254-8788

Personalized to meet your needs:

- Companionship • Light Cleaning
- Senior sitting • Transportation
- Shopping • Household Chores

Reasonable Rates!
Fully Insured. Bonded.

We've Brought Your Eyecare Back Where It Belongs...to Our Private Office


Now accepting new patients

Dr. Ronald E. Monacelli, Optometrist
Medical & Surgical consultant
Joseph D. Silverberg, M.D.

Building B • Ridgewood Medical Building • 3101 West Ridge Road
225-1890

Edward F. Shaw, M. Bell Price-Opticians

SHAW OPTICIANS
723-0800 • also 1295 Portland Ave. 544-3430





SHARED LIVING
for older persons

BROCKPORT/BRIGHTON RESIDENCES
Single family homes for seniors

- Affordable Housing
- Security • Companionship
- Independent Living • Maintenance

For information on eligibility contact:

THE HOUSING COUNCIL
242 Andrews Street
• 546-3700 •