

Criticism doesn't fit most theologians' work

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, addressed the heads of the doctrinal commissions of European bishops' conferences in early May.

The cardinal spoke of the shortcomings of modern theology and blamed them for the rejection of doctrines concerning contraception, homosexuality, divorce and the ordination of women.

He said a decline in three theological areas had prepared the way for these modern attitudes toward church doctrines.

First he cited an "almost complete disappearance of the doctrine on creation from theology."

Secondly, he spoke of a "weakening of

Christology," involving "the disappearance of the cross and, consequently, the meaninglessness of the resurrection, of the paschal "mystery." Jesus is no longer seen as the Son of God, but as a "bourgeois liberal" or as a "Marxist revolutionary."

It is not clear how precisely Cardinal Ratzinger connects criticism of church teachings on contraception, homosexuality, divorce and the ordination of women with what he calls a "decline" in modern theology's treatment of creation, Christology, and eternal life.

Nonetheless, one can readily agree with Cardinal Ratzinger that each of these three theological areas is of the highest doctrinal importance. If, indeed, there are Catholic theologians who neglect or, what is worse,

reject these doctrines, one can only share the cardinal's sense of distress and alarm.

My own work, *Catholicism* (Harper & Row, 1981), tries to present a reliable synthesis of modern Catholic theology. Therein one will find no evidence of a "decline" in any of the three areas cited by the cardinal.

The cardinal's concern about a corresponding "weakening of Christology" is also puzzling. He suggests that there has been a "disappearance of the cross" and a sense of the "meaninglessness of the resurrection."

"Christian theology today," I wrote in *Catholicism*, "in keeping with the results of modern New Testament studies, more commonly understands the resurrection as central to, not simply confirmatory of, Christian faith, and as the beginning, not



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the end, of the story" (p.405).

And with regard to the decline of a belief in eternal life: "If everything were to return to a kind of undifferentiated unity, then creation itself would have been pointless in the first place" (p. 1140).

Christian faith includes more than the doctrines of creation, Christ and eternal life, to be sure, but Christian faith is radically incomplete without them. The Catholic theologians I know and read would agree.

Cardinal Ratzinger must have someone else in mind.

David turns to the Lord for guidance in his future

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

After the Hebrew nation finished a period of mourning for King Saul, David prayed and asked the Lord, "Do you want me to go and rule in one of the towns of Judah?"

"Yes," the Lord told him. "Go to Hebron."

The people there came to David and said: "You have led us in many victories against our enemies. We know that God is with you and wants you to rule us." So they anointed David and proclaimed him their king.

One day, David said to the prophet Nathan, "Here I am living in a beautiful palace while the Covenant Box remains in a tent. Is that any way to treat the symbol

of the Lord's presence among his people?"

"What do you propose to do about this?" asked Nathan.

"I want to honor God for everything that he has done for his people," David replied. "He has always been with us from the time he led us out of our captivity in Egypt. I shall build a temple here in Jerusalem."

However, the next day, Nathan returned and said to David, "Last night, I had a dream, and the Lord gave me a message for you. He does not want you to build a temple. Someday, one of your own sons will be king and accomplish this."

"If that is the Lord's will, then I shall not disobey," David replied even though he was puzzled.

"The Lord has made a great promise to

you, David," Nathan continued. "He will be with you and your descendants forever. Your kingdom will continue for all time."

After Nathan left, David went into the tent where the Covenant Box was kept and prayed.

"Lord, I am not worthy of what you have done for me. You have made the Hebrews your special people and through me have given us victory over our enemies. And now, you promise a kingdom that will never end."

God's promise was even greater than David ever realized. The book of Matthew states: "So then, there were 14 generations

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