

# A state where freedom's spirit struggles

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated Columnist

"The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power," the first paragraph from the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom stated.

How, then, does one attain such truth?

It is to be sought after, the council continued, "in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue."

The council continued in the third paragraph, "In the course of these, men and women explain to one another the truth they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men and women are to adhere to it."

The council's Declaration on Religious Freedom is one of the most moving and compelling pronouncements of the hierarchical magisterium in the entire history of the church.

The words of the council are just as resoundingly pertinent today as they were some 25 years ago. Indeed, in light of recent events behind what used to be called "The Iron Curtain," these words are even more pertinent than before.

As we observe with astonishment and guarded hope this year's momentous developments in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, the People's Republic of China — among other communist bloc nations — we are reminded anew of the resiliency and irrepressibility of the human spirit.

We followed with amazement, for example, the reports of thousands of East German citizens storming the train station in Dresden as a train carrying hundreds of their fellow citizens from Czechoslovakia to West Germany passed through town. The police had to restrain the mob by force.

As the train raced past the Dresden station, those inside the locomotive wept as they heard their fellow East Germans shouting a single word over and over, "Freiheit, Freiheit, Freiheit!" Freedom!

They, too, wanted the chance for a new life, liberated from an oppressive state power. They, too, wanted the chance to pursue the truth, freely, without coercion; through dialogue, not through indoctrination.

Those of us who live in what we all like to call a free country cannot begin to imagine what it is like to live in a country that is not free: where information is packaged and its dissemination controlled; where people who dare to think are denied access to the media and their names not even allowed to be mentioned; where the party line is the only line.

A recent feature in *The New York Times*

describes a state radio system in one such place where the spirit of Vatican II still struggles to break free.

An executive of the system, speaking without attribution for fear of reprisal, conceded that there are "a list of taboos."

"There are names," he said, "that can't be mentioned because there are people here who are scared of opening windows and doors to a more creative debate in the context of public opinion within the community."

Certain people can never be interviewed, lest the impression be left that their views enjoy a certain legitimacy within the broad

range of opinions approved by the bureaucracy.

"Just because we interview someone," the executive shrugged, "doesn't mean we agree with them." Nevertheless, it is not allowed. Even worse could have been said of the state's official press, had *The New York Times* extended its report. Never a criticism of the reigning authority. Never a word of praise for opponents of the party line. Never a line of access for those holding to a different point of view.

Would that we were talking here about stubborn holdouts in the communist bloc — East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Rumania,

## King Solomon reveals the secret of his success

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"There has never been a king like this. Solomon anywhere in the entire world," said the visitor standing before the queen. "His wealth alone is an astonishment. He has 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses from which to choose!"

"Perhaps you are just exaggerating," replied the Queen of Sheba. "There have been wealthy rulers before."

"Even his drinking cups are fashioned from pure gold," the visitor continued.

"But what makes King Solomon so extraordinary?" she asked pointedly.

"I suppose it would have to be his great wisdom," her guest answered. "Other kings send representatives to listen to his judgments."

"Still, I have heard such things many times before," the queen said. "I must go and see this King Solomon in all his grandeur for myself."

The Queen of Sheba set out on her journey the very next day. Her own kingdom was more than 1,500 miles to the south of the city of Jerusalem. It was a long, slow trip. Not only were there many attendants to wait on the queen, but the large caravan included camels loaded with spices, jewels and gold.

King Solomon received his royal visitor



graciously. First he showed her his magnificent palace, where the throne had been carved from ivory and inlaid with gold.

King Solomon's court was always crowded with visitors from all over the world. They came with gifts of silver, gold, fine robes, spices and precious stones.

The king had appointed 12 governors and other officials to help him rule the people of Israel. As the queen watched, they came before Solomon to ask for his decisions. She was amazed at his great judgment skills.

After the queen had seen the palace, King Solomon invited her to a sumptuous feast. They drank from golden drinking cups, and many of their utensils were also made from gold. As they dined, musicians played for them on the finest instruments she had ever seen.

All during her visit, the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon with difficult questions and riddles. He answered them all with great ease. Finally Solomon posed a question to her. "Now that you have come and seen



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Albania, the People's Republic of China — where Gorbachev's new spirit of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) continue to be resisted by the old guard, by bureaucrats clinging to power at the expense of their own fellow citizens' thirst for freedom. *The New York Times* report, which appeared in the September 21 issue, has a Rome dateline and is entitled: "Vatican's Voice Minds Its P's and Q's."

It's a story about Vatican Radio.

for yourself, what do you think?"

"You are famous for many things and I came here expecting to see a great exaggeration of everything that I had heard. What I have seen is much more than anything I could have imagined for myself!" she replied. "Your God must very pleased with you. That is why he made you the king over all of Israel."

After the Queen of Sheba had presented Solomon with all of the gifts she had brought, he told her, "There is one last thing to show you."

King Solomon brought her before the temple that has taken seven years to construct. "This temple was built to glorify God," he explained. "It is God who gives great wisdom and understanding. Without God to guide me in what I say and do, everything else is for nothing."

Then, at last, the Queen of Sheba knew what made Solomon the most extraordinary king in the world.

Scripture reference: 1 Kings 10: 1-13.

Meditation: "Never let yourself think that you are wiser than you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong." (Proverbs 3:7)

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### THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



EDWIN SULEWSKI  
FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Grief  
Is help available?

Grief is the name of a complex combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences. It occurs when we lose someone or something very important to us.

It is a natural reaction to the realization that we are not all powerful, that we ourselves are mortal.

Everyone deals with grief in a different personal way.

GRIEF RESOURCE INFORMATION FORUM and the PASTORAL CARE CENTER at Rochester General Hospital jointly sponsor a monthly bereavement group called WORKING THROUGH LOSS.

The group provides information, education and peer support for adults recovering from the death of a significant person in their lives.

The group meets the second Thursday of each month from 7:30-9:30 p.m. in the E-5 conference room at Rochester General Hospital.

Easy-to-follow signs are posted upon entering the hospital from the parking ramp.

Open to all adults. There are no dues or fees. You may attend as long as you choose.

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