

# Conservatives seek either/or view of Council

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated Columnist

It's becoming clearer now. Conservative Catholics are in the process of reinforcing certain defenses against some of the major discomforts of the post-conciliar church.

Unhappy with the increasingly critical spirit of Catholic scholars and with the growing openness of clergy, religious, and laity alike, conservatives are beginning to challenge the commonly accepted view that the Second Vatican Council introduced something really new into the life and practice of the church.

Not so, they reply. The council was fine. We have no problem with it. We're even prepared to say that it was a great event.

But Vatican II didn't say or do anything new. It reaffirmed, in different words perhaps, what the church has always believed, taught, and practiced.

Accordingly, there is nothing in pre-Vatican II Catholicism that isn't still valid today. The council neither repudiated nor substantially modified any of it.

The argument of these conservatives is

fashioned in terms of a false either/or dichotomy between continuity and discontinuity.

The correct view of the council (their own) has it that the council was wholly a work of continuity, and not at all one of discontinuity.

The erroneous view of the council (that of their liberal opponents) holds that the council essentially repealed pre-Vatican II Catholicism and replaced it with something totally discontinuous with it.

One finds traces of this continuity-versus-discontinuity dichotomy in a recent review in *America* of a book entitled, *Educating in Faith* (Harper & Row), by Sister Mary Boys, SNJM, an associate professor of religious education at Boston College.

The reviewer chastises the author for propagating "the myth of radical discontinuity between the pre- and post-Vatican II church."

He asserts that this "myth of radical discontinuity" has been "an important reason for the polarization of contem-

porary Catholicism."

Although a gifted and experienced religious educator himself, what the reviewer implies is that religious educators have no mandate to challenge or to correct outdated notions of Catholic belief and practice because the category of "outdatedness" is meaningless.

Moreover, in challenging or in seeking to correct certain post-conciliar beliefs and practices, religious educators contribute to the polarization of the church. They make "traditional" Catholics uncomfortable, angry and upset, and that's why these Catholics have no choice except to strike back in defense of their own version and vision of the church. A state of war ensues.

In his excellent overview of Catholic ecclesiology over the past 50 years (*Theological Studies*, September, 1989, issue), Father Avery Dulles, SJ, identifies as "progressives" those who have "interpreted the council on the principle that its innovations were more central than its reaffirmations of previously official positions."



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

He calls this "the hermeneutics of discontinuity." (I should point out that Dulles identifies me with this view, along with Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, and Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck of Yale University.)

On the other side, he places Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and another German theologian, Hermann Joseph Pottmeyer, who interpret Vatican II as "continuous with previous Catholic teaching."

Given Father Dulles' extraordinary sense of balance and fairness, I would have expected him to state explicitly that no dichotomy exists between the one and the other.

It's not *either* continuity or discontinuity; it's both continuity *and* discontinuity.

# Jacob's deception of Isaac leads to theft of blessing due to Esau

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier Columnist

"Jacob, wake up!" Rebecca called as she shook her son. "Hurry, there is much to do."

"Mother, it's not even light yet. What's this all about?" Jacob asked drowsily.

"Your brother, Esau, has gone hunting. When he returns, your father has promised to give him his blessing."

Jacob bolted upright in bed. "The blessing belongs to me! Esau gave up his first born rights to me long ago."

"You know your brother," Rebecca replied. "He does what suits him. Did he think about God when he went off and married two pagan girls? Why would he remember his promise to you?"

"What should I do?" Jacob asked.

"Leave it to me," urged his mother. "For now, go out and slaughter two goats from our flock. Bring them back here to



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me."

Rebecca went about her preparations with great speed. "This is just how your father likes his meat," she smiled at her worried son.

"Mother, this is never going to work. When Father discovers our trick, he will bring not a blessing, but a curse on my head."

"Hush, son, all will be well," Rebecca said. "Let any curse fall on me."

Jacob continued to fret. "Father may be nearly blind, but one touch from him on

my smooth skin and he will know that I am not his hairy son, Esau."

For her part, Rebecca continued to work despite Jacob's anxiety. When she finished the meal, she brought Esau's finest garments. "Hurry, put these on!"

When Jacob was dressed, she took the skins of the slaughtered goats and carefully wrapped them around his arms and neck. "There, now you are even hairier than Esau!"

She handed him a tray with the tasty meal, saying, "Be quick about it! And stop your worrying. Esau doesn't deserve to be blessed."

Jacob shuddered as he walked slowly to where his father sat. "Father, here I am with your meal."

"Which of my sons is it?" Isaac asked. Jacob swallowed. "Esau, of course. I've come for my blessing just as you asked."

"How is it that you have returned from hunting so soon?"

"God placed the animal in my path," Jacob lied.

"Come closer," Isaac told him.

Jacob set the tray down next to his father and bent over him. It was difficult to control his trembling as his father ran his hands up and down his arms.

"Hmm, this is strange," Isaac said. "I

was certain that the voice belonged to Jacob. And yet these are the arms of Esau. Are you Esau?"

"I am," Jacob lied again.

When at last his father settled down to eat, Jacob began to relax. The deception was nearly accomplished.

"Come, here, Esau," Isaac said at last. "May God bless you with everything good. Let other nations become your servants and may you rule even over your relatives. May those who curse you, be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed."

Several hours later Esau returned. When he discovered the deception, he cried bitterly to his father, "Give me a blessing, too!"

Isaac shook his head sadly. "It is too late. Your brother is now your master. There is nothing to be done."

It was at that moment that Rebecca remembered the Lord's prophecy to her before either of her sons had been born. "Two nations are within you; you will give birth to two rival peoples. The older will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23).

Scripture reference: Genesis, Chapter 27. The descendants of Jacob were the Israelites. Esau was the father of the Edomites.

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