

Right offers own 'spin' on church teachings

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated Columnist

I suggested in last week's column that conservative Catholics are in the process of reinforcing certain defenses against some of the major discomforts of the post-conciliar church.

One line of defense is to argue that the Second Vatican Council didn't introduce anything really new into the church's beliefs and practices. The council was an exercise in continuity, not discontinuity.

As a result, conservatives like themselves don't have to change their thinking or their devotional habits in any significant way. Their version and vision of the church are just as valid as anything that goes under the name of post-conciliar Catholicism — perhaps even more valid.

A second line of defense is to argue that the renewed emphasis on Catholic social teaching in the post-conciliar Church is having the unfortunate effect of politicizing the gospel.

Jealousy leads brothers to sell Joseph and to lie to their father

By Cindy Bassett
Courier Columnist

"Come on!" Reuben called to his brothers. "Time for a break."

"I'm tired and hungry," complained Judah as he came to join the others sitting around the camp. "These days the sheep receive better care than any of us."

"That would not be true if you were a certain younger brother," Levi said. "Then you could stay in the comfort of home while the rest of your brothers are out here in Dothan slaving for father."

"Yes, it is a burden that we all share," said Dan, laughing. "Joseph is father's favorite boy. The sooner you accept it, the better off you'll be."

"Better off?" Judah asked. "Did father

Jail ministry group set

ROCHESTER — Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, an agency which serves prisoners in the Monroe County Jail, will hold a training session for prospective volunteers on Saturday, Feb. 10, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The session will take place at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, downtown.

Training is free of charge and free parking is available. Call 716/325-1942 for information.

Trip to Mexico in May

A pilgrimage from Rochester to Our Lady's Shrine in Guadalupe, Mexico, is scheduled for May 4 to 9.

Seating is limited. For information or to make a reservation, call Pat Weber, 716/392-7565.

One finds this line in the writings of a tiny group of neo-conservative Catholics (and their Lutheran *amicus Curiae*).

They have vigorously opposed the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letters of 1983 and 1986 on peace and the economy, and they have worked very hard at putting a right-wing spin on their favorite pope's disconcertingly liberal social encyclicals — that is, when they're not reduced simply to embarrassed silence.

One of their number complained recently that many Catholic liberals, both clerical and lay, have "confused their partisan political opinions with authentic faith and practice."

That's a classic instance of the pot calling the kettle black.

It is politically conservative Catholics who have to twist and bend papal teaching on social justice, human rights and peace, to fit their own right-of-center agenda.

That task is patently impossible in the case of the U.S. bishops' pastorals, and so

they don't even pretend to agree with the episcopal magisterium. On the contrary, they ridicule the bishops for their incompetence and naivete.

Nowhere is this effort to reconstruct reality to fit a politically conservative mold more evident than in their negative reaction to the church's efforts on behalf of human dignity and human rights in such places as El Salvador.

They have even attacked the new Paulist film, "Romero," for politicizing the Gospel. Which means, of course, that they must feel that way about Archbishop Oscar Romero himself.

One suspects that they had a similar reaction to the work of the six Jesuit priests who were assassinated last November.

Why were they killed? Because they took seriously Catholic social doctrine and tried to apply it to the situation in their own war-torn country. For that they were branded as revolutionaries.

But Catholic social doctrine itself is rev-



THE BIBLE CORNER

When Joseph arrived at the camp, his brother formed a circle around him. "Do you think we should bow down to you?" Dan cried. Then they ripped off Joseph's long coat and cast him off into a deep well.

"Listen to him," Simeon laughed as he sat down with his brothers to eat. "Joseph is crying and sniffing like a baby."

"Some of the sheep have strayed," Reuben announced suddenly. "I'll be back shortly." To himself he thought, I'll sneak back and pull Joseph out of the well and send him back to father. This whole thing has gotten out of hand.

But when Reuben came back, all that remained of Joseph was his coat and 20 pieces of silver. "What have you done?" Reuben cried. "Where is Joseph?"

"Joseph has finally done us some good," Judah told him. "We sold our brother to a caravan of traders. Joseph is young and strong. He will do well as a slave in Egypt."

"You will kill father with this news!" Reuben shouted.

"There's no need for him to know," Judah said.

So before they returned home, they killed a goat and sprinkled its blood on Joseph's special coat. "We will tell father that Joseph is dead," they agreed.

Scripture reference: Genesis, Chapter 37.

Meditation: "If a family divides itself into groups which fight each other, that family will fall apart" (Mark 3:25).

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ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

olutionary when placed against the economic, social, and political interests of the rich and the powerful.

Catholic social doctrine teaches that private property is not an unconditioned right. Private property carries with it social responsibilities.

Catholic social doctrine teaches that wealth (in the form of land, for example) has to be redistributed when the social order is clearly unjust.

Catholic social doctrine teaches that when those individuals and nations who have more than they need even for luxurious living share their resources with those individuals and nations who have less than they need even for bare human survival, that transaction of sharing is a matter of justice, not charity. It is a matter of obligation, not magnanimity.

Catholic social doctrine teaches that the arms race robs the poor by diverting essential resources away from them into the enterprise of death and destruction.

Catholic social doctrine teaches that we are all interdependent and that, in some crucial instances, governments have an obligation to intervene on behalf of individuals and groups when their rights are violated or when private and voluntary institutions and agencies are either incapable of intervening or unwilling to do so.

Catholic social doctrine defends the rights of individuals and of groups to assemble on behalf of their own interests, to speak their minds freely, to worship without harassment, to earn a living with dignity and with justice.

A social, political, or economic order which suppresses human rights or which violates human dignity or which denies the obligation of government to act as an instrument of justice — such an order is contrary to the social teachings of the church because it is contrary to the gospel itself.

To teach Catholic social doctrine in certain circumstances (like El Salvador) is, of course, a revolutionary act. No wonder that so many priests, nuns, and lay people have been killed for doing just that.

If that's "politicizing the gospel," then Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* politicized the gospel.

And Pope John Paul II's three major social encyclicals have politicized the gospel. And so have the whole 100 years of Catholic social doctrine, from Pope Leo XIII to the present.

The second line of defense is just as weak as the first.