

Religious education faces future challenge

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated Columnist

Religious education is the whole process of handing on the faith. Everything we do to open the eyes and hearts of young and old alike to the presence and activity of God in our daily lives, in the world around us, and in the church itself is religious education.

In the days before Vatican II, we Catholics didn't use the term "religious education." That was considered a Protestant word, like "fellowship" and "kingdom" (as in "for Thine is...").

What we now call religious education was known simply as "catechism" because it involved the memorization of the Baltimore Catechism — and catechism, furthermore, was something exclusively for children. For all practical purposes, adult education didn't exist.

Religious education in those days was also done almost exclusively by nuns, with some input from the clergy. Occasionally a few lay volunteers would be enlisted, but they were never formally trained for the task (and neither were many of the nuns, if truth be told).

Today things are different. First, religious education is no longer catechism-centered. Religious educators have a variety of excellent texts from which to choose.

Secondly, religious education is no longer the preserve of nuns and clergy. Most religious educators today are lay persons, and the overwhelming majority of these are women.

Thirdly, religious education is no longer left to the untrained. More and more, religious educators are professionally prepared for their important ministry, either through accredited degree programs

at Catholic colleges, universities, and seminaries, or in teacher-training programs sponsored and certified by the diocese.

Fourthly, religious education is no longer exclusively child-centered. Religious education is as much for adults as for children, even though adult education still has a long way to go in most places.

But there are also some ongoing problems in religious education today.

We have excellent religious educational resources at our disposal now. One thinks, for example, of Thomas Groome's *Coming to Faith* series, published by Sadlier, or the *This Is Our Faith* series, written by Carl Pfeifer and Janaan Manternach, and published by Silver Burdett & Ginn.

The material one finds in excellent series like these is *praxis-oriented*. It starts where people are. The approach is experiential rather than one of indoctrination.

Unfortunately, too many of our teachers

are still rooted in the indoctrination approach — or worse. I say "worse" because I recently heard of a case in a New England parish where a volunteer teacher proudly announced at an organizational session that her primary goal for the year was to teach her junior-high students the proper way to say the rosary.

Most of our teachers are over 40, which means that most were themselves educated in a pre-Vatican II Church, with pre-Vatican II methods and content.

Some of these "over-40" Catholics are also ideologically motivated. They volunteer to teach in order to "set things straight." They want to insure that the children are taught the right things in the right way. And so they are constantly on the director of religious education's back about textbooks, curriculum, and devotional aids.

Because the church cannot depend indefinitely on its "over-40s," the biggest

Lost brother resists temptation to avenge 20 years of separation

By Cindy Bassett
Courier Columnist

"Put these men in jail!" ordered Joseph, the governor of Egypt. "They are spies!"

Joseph's face remained expressionless as he watched one of his own brothers step forward. "Please, sir, we are honest men. We've come here only to buy grain because of the famine," he said.

The governor of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself, offered no comment. Suddenly, after 20 years, all of his brothers — except Benjamin — stood before him. Joseph stared at each one of them. They didn't know him.

Reuben, the brother who had spoken before, did not realize that Joseph understood Hebrew. He turned to Judah and said, "We are being punished by God for what we did against Joseph many years ago. Now we'll never see our home or be a family again!"

Joseph softened. Speaking through an interpreter, he asked his brothers, "Are there any more members of your family at home?"

"Yes," Judah told him. "Our youngest brother, Benjamin, and our father wait for us at home in Canaan."

"Then only one of you will remain here in prison," Joseph said, pointing at Simeon. "Bring the young brother back here to me as proof you are telling the truth. Then I will release this brother."

Old Jacob was unyielding in his refusal when his nine sons returned from Egypt with his request. "No! I will never allow you to take Benjamin. First, I lose my beloved son, Joseph. Now Simeon is gone. This is too much for a father to bear!"

Several months passed. "Father, the animals are dying," Judah said. "Soon we will die of starvation, too. Let me take Benjamin to Egypt to buy grain. I pledge my own life for the boy's safety."

At last Jacob relented. All 10 brothers returned to Egypt. This time, a servant ushered them into a room where a special feast had been prepared for them. Simeon came and joined the celebration. Nearby, Joseph sat alone at a table and listened to his brothers as he ate in silence.

"See, Reuben," Judah smiled. "Did I not tell you that all would be well? Tomorrow we will be on our way home."

The brothers set out early the next day.

ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

single challenge facing religious education today is the recruitment of qualified teachers from the younger generations of Catholics.

These younger teachers must not be ideologically driven. They have to be open to educational approaches and techniques that are rooted in human experience and the pastoral life of the church.

And they must be themselves real believers — active and committed members of the church by conviction, not simply by habit, or "for the sake of their children," or out of a need to belong to something.

We have our work cut out for us as this second Christian millennium enters its final decade.

THE BIBLE CORNER

They had only traveled a short distance from Egypt when they saw Joseph's servant coming after them.

"How could you repay my master like this?!" the servant shouted angrily.

"Like what?" Reuben asked.

"One of you has stolen my master's silver drinking cup!"

"We are trustworthy men," Judah proclaimed boldly. "Search our belongings. If you find the silver cup with any of us, that person can be put to death. The rest of us will become your slaves."

When the grain sacks were emptied, Joseph's silver cup was found with Benjamin. "Only the youngest will return as a slave with me," the servant ordered.

A short time later, all 11 brothers again came to stand before the governor of Egypt.

"Sir, I do not know how your cup got in Benjamin's grain sack," Judah said to Joseph. "But, if we don't return with the boy, the loss will kill my father. Let me stay here instead as your slave forever."

Joseph could contain himself no longer. He began to sob openly before them. "Come closer," he said. "Don't you know me yet? I am your brother, Joseph." They were terrified and thought that Joseph meant to harm them. "Don't be afraid. My greatest dream was to be united with my family. Go back to Canaan and get father. The famine will continue for another five years. Come back here and we will all live together."

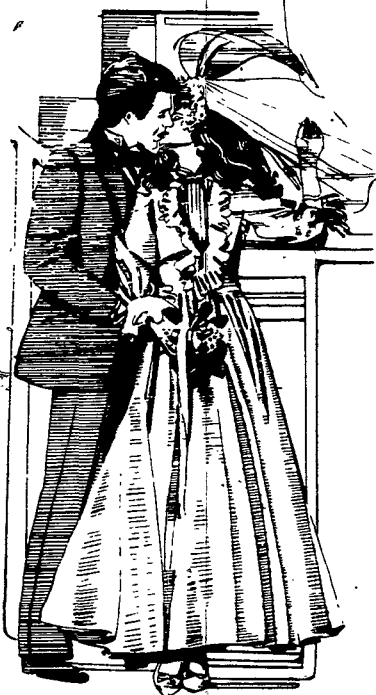
Scripture Reference: Genesis, Chapters 42-45.

Mapledale PARTY HOUSE

HAVE YOUR NAME IN LIGHTS

The Perfect Party Place

At the Mapledale Party House your wedding reception continues in our grand tradition. Because we know: *Certain moments must last a lifetime.*



Wedding receptions should be remembered always as perfect occasions. We offer elegant facilities and cuisine, plus meticulous attention to detail that you have come to expect from the Mapledale.

Wedding Special


Available Friday evenings, Saturday afternoons & Sundays
\$9.75 per person. Includes buffet & 3 hour open bar
(service charge & tax not included in price.)

*Minimum of 100 people

**Previous reservations not included.

Still Some Choice Dates Available for 1990

1020 MAPLE STREET • 436-2112 • ROCHESTER, NY 14611



Bernunzio's Bakery

full line

2501 Browncroft Blvd.
Penfield 586-2157

1049 Gravel Rd.,
W. Webster 671-2590

- Wedding Cakes
- Cookie Cakes
- Sweets Table
- Shower Cakes

Mention this ad and receive 10% off any Cookie Cake or Tray

Uniquely Designed Cakes to Fit Your Specifications
Individual Consultations by Appointment

