

Article sheds light on hopes of the church

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Redemptorist Father Bernard Haring, an emeritus professor at the Alphonsianum in Rome and one of the church's most distinguished moral theologians, has recently produced an important two-part article on the future of the church (*The Tablet*, July 28-Aug. 4). It offers moving and hopeful testimony from an exemplary priest now in the ninth decade of life.

Father Haring is not blind to the church's "dark side and shadows," but he attributes the noisy and militant opposition of a certain few Catholics against the changes encouraged by the Second Vatican Council to a "collective paternalistic neurosis" characterized by fear, "complexes of in-

security and false security," and power.

This minority, he writes, "still lives intellectually and emotionally with that old image of the Church as not just the possessor but the sole possessor of all truths."

As a result, the church's external relationships are destroyed or at least seriously impaired, and neurotic internal relationships are produced. Indeed, the life of the church is now being poisoned by an atmosphere of mutual distrust in which delation by informers is encouraged and conformity is rewarded.

On the one hand, only strict conformists are appointed to the episcopacy, while, on the other, critical Catholics are threatened with punishment or are confronted with

loyalty oaths.

"But let us not overlook the fact," Father Haring continues, "that what is involved is a relatively small group, even if at the moment apparently still a powerful one. Despite everything, and in face of this intensification of the crisis, I have every reason for looking forward with great hope to the first century of the third millennium."

Why so? Among other reasons, because the excesses of this neurotic minority have served to reawaken the dynamism of Vatican II.

The church is becoming more attentive now than ever before to the crucial distinction between what is essential and what is accidental in its life and teaching.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The church of the third millennium, he insists, will even more surely recognize the Eucharist to be at the very center of its life above any ecclesiastical discipline, including obligatory celibacy.

"The eucharistic experience of faith, through symbols that address profoundly the inner being of men and women in the spirit of praise and awe," Father Haring continues, "plays a much greater role than the declarations of any Vatican congregation."

All efforts at structural reform and the whole style of exercising authority will be measured against the needs of the whole Body of Christ, not just those of the Catholic Church. "In this way, the Petrine ministry, purged of the evil inheritance of the papacy's tangled struggle for power, will become ecumenically accepted and fruitful."

"All projections onto God of human revenge disguised as 'justice,'" Father Haring insists, "will be exposed and discouraged once and for all. We shall think of God not primarily as lord and master or even as the avenging judge but we shall worship his maternal tenderness and thus follow the basic commandment: 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36)."

Indeed, it is this notion of an angry God who must be pacified by our sacrifices and acts of penance which is perhaps "a chief cause of ecclesiastical fears and neuroses and of all kinds of religion based on fear and the moralism that breeds fear."

In the final accounting, our hope is not in laws, rules and authority figures. Our hope is in the power of the Holy Spirit who comes to us as "encourager, supporter and consoler," bearing gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

Humble prayer from the heart is pleasing to God

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Where has Jesus gone?" John asked.
"He's gone off to be alone," I told him.
"After all of those crowds today, I don't blame him."

"It's not just that," I said. "When Jesus goes off by himself, it's to pray."

Jesus had taught us, his closest followers, about so many things. As soon as he came back, we began to ask him how to pray.

"It's really very simple," Jesus answered us. "My Father already knows what you need even before you ask Him."

"So shouldn't we ask God for what we need?" Peter asked.

"Yes, but you must first begin with the right attitude when you pray," Jesus replied. "It's like the two men who went to the temple to pray."



"The first one, a Pharisee, was an important member of the community. He went up to the very front of the temple and said: 'Thank you, God, for making me such a good person. I'm glad that I'm not like the outcasts of society — robbers, adulterers, and other sinners. I not only know your laws by heart, but I've kept them all, too. I fast every Tuesday and Friday. And last year I made a large contribution to this temple — 10 percent of my earnings.'"

Jesus continued, "Just before the

Pharisee left the temple, he noticed a tax collector standing at the back.

"The tax collector didn't even raise his eyes as he prayed: 'God, I am not even worthy to stand here and speak to you. Have mercy on me. I am a sinful man.'"

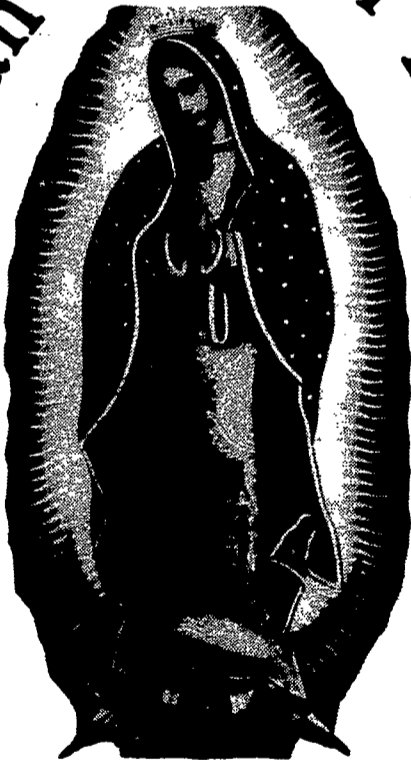
"It is the humble prayer that comes from the heart that my Father will answer," Jesus said. "Pray with faith. It is not necessary to use a lot of words. And after you have done so, don't forget to listen for the answer."

"There's something else, too. It's important to forgive those who have wronged you. If you do not forgive, then my Father will not forgive your sins. This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.'"

Scripture reference: Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:9-14.

Meditation: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

★ **Marian Hour of Prayer** ★



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