

Archbishop endorses 'unorthodox' speaker

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Certain Catholics whom the press would describe as ultraconservative have complained bitterly about the spread of dangerous ideas and practices in the Catholic Church since Vatican II.

Their complaints have ranged all the way from what they regard as unwarranted tinkering with the liturgy to doctrinal deviations in catechesis and theological education.

The usual objects of their criticisms have been individual pastors, theologians and religious educators, but bishops have not been exempted.

A recent news item leads one to believe that, yes, perhaps these critics are right after all. It may indeed be the case that

even our bishops have lost their doctrinal compasses and are leading us now along the most circuitous of paths.

An archbishop on the East Coast has sent to all of his parishes a letter in which he "warmly endorsed" a leading religious figure who will be speaking throughout his state this autumn.

The speaker rejects the primacy and infallibility of the pope, does not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, does not recognize any connection between the Mass and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, rejects the teaching of the Council of Trent on the seven sacraments, rejects the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, denies the necessity of ordination for the priesthood, denies the necessity and sac-

ramental character of episcopal order, accords no place at all for devotion to Mary and the saints in the life of church, holds that birth control by artificial means is a legitimate moral option, and refuses to recognize the role of the authentic magisterium in the interpretation of sacred Scripture.

The archbishop nonetheless "warmly endorsed" this speaker's lectures throughout his state this fall because of the speaker's "efforts on behalf of the Gospel and for his Scripture-based preaching."

No wonder the ultraconservative Catholic is angry. What logic is there in such an endorsement?

The speaker is praised "for his Scripture-based" talks, but he rejects the role of the magisterium in the interpretation of



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Scripture. The archbishop must have sensed that his endorsement might confuse "the simple faithful." He noted in his letter that the speaker "has avoided issues on which Catholics and Protestants disagree." But isn't the archbishop placing a bit too much faith in his man? How can he be so sure that in absolutely none of his many talks throughout the state this speaker will never touch, directly or indirectly, upon any of the important doctrinal and moral issues mentioned above?

At the same time, there are several other respected Catholic theologians whom this archbishop would not allow to speak in his diocese, much less "warmly" endorse.

The theologians I have in mind have never had their doctrinal orthodoxy challenged by any competent ecclesiastical agency.

They preside at the Eucharist, celebrate and receive the other sacraments, incorporate devotion to Mary and the saints into their prayer life, acknowledge the authority of the authentic magisterium to pass judgment on matters related to the interpretation of sacred Scripture, and so forth.

They would not be welcome to speak at an archdiocesan event, not because of any doctrinal deviations, but because they have been critical of the certain policies and practices of the current leadership of the church.

The speaker whom the archbishop "warmly endorsed" takes no stand on matters such as the appointment of bishops, or the role of theologian in the church, or the ordination of women.

True. He doesn't believe in the Eucharist. He doesn't accept the seven sacraments. He doesn't acknowledge the primacy of the pope. He doesn't believe in the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of Mary into heaven. And he doesn't recognize the ordained priesthood.

But the archbishop assures his flock that this speaker will never touch upon those issues in any of the many talks he will be giving this autumn.

But confusion isn't the central problem here. It's inconsistency.

Jonah tale shows God hates sin, but loves sinner

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Darkness. It surrounded Jonah with an overwhelming dread deep in his heart. When the sea beast had first swallowed him, he thought he would die. That would have been far better than being trapped in the belly of a fish for three days. From this somber prison, Jonah thought back on all that had happened.

How could he have ever been foolish enough to believe that he could run away from God? His disobedience to the Lord's command to preach to the Ninevites had almost killed an entire ship's crew. But the very worst thing was that he had not heard a word from God since he had fled.

"I'm sorry, Lord," Jonah prayed aloud. "If you give me a chance, I will do as you have commanded."

The next thing the prophet heard was a great rushing of water from behind. He thought he was going to drown, and he closed his eyes.

Jonah kept his eyes shut tight until he landed with a jolt on dry land. He was free! Yet it was not toward home that he headed, but straight for Nineveh.

Once Jonah arrived in Nineveh, it took him three full days to travel from one end of the city to the other. Everywhere he went, Jonah proclaimed the same message.



"Thus says the Lord: because you have done evil, in 40 days, you and your city will be destroyed."

The reaction was immediate and it surprised even Jonah. The Ninevites rushed to put on sackcloth and ashes, the clothes of mourning. They also began a fast as a sign of their repentance.

When the king of Nineveh heard the news, he, too, put on sackcloth. He also issued a decree that was posted all over the city: "No one, not even the animals, may eat or drink. Let everyone pray to God. Promise that you will turn from sin. Maybe God will show mercy and not allow us to perish."

After Jonah had gone through the entire city, he went to the outskirts and waited. He constructed a make-shift hut for himself.

After 40 days, Jonah looked back at Nineveh. The city was still standing. He began to sulk.

He sulked and he grumbled from his make-shift hut. "It would have been better

for me if I had died," Jonah muttered. "I knew this would happen, Lord. For you are a compassionate God. My enemies have been spared."

"Have you any right to be angry?" the Lord asked him.

Jonah did not answer God. All he could do was sulk and mutter under his breath from his make-shift hut where the weather was becoming hotter and hotter.

The Lord said nothing more to the prophet. But he caused a great vine to grow up overnight. The vine's huge leaves provided a shelter for Jonah from the sweltering sun. Still he sulked.

The next day, the Lord sent a worm which chewed on the vine until it withered and died. The sun beat on Jonah's head so much that he thought he'd faint. Again he said, "It would have been better for me to die."

"Jonah, now you are angry over a mere vine that you had nothing to do with. It grew and died in two days time. The city of Nineveh has more than 120,000 people. And you thought that I should not concern myself with them?"

And, at last, the reluctant prophet stopped sulking. He got up from his make-shift hut and returned home.

Scripture reference: Jonah, Chapters 2-4.

Meditation: God's love is for everyone. He hates the sin, but loves the sinner.

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