

Health exists at both political poles

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Political shorthand can be useful in defining and describing differences in the church: liberals versus conservatives, or progressives versus traditionalists, with moderates and centrists safely situated in the middle.

But political labels of this sort can also mislead us. They can obscure a more fundamental difference that exists between members of the church — a difference having to do with health rather than with positions on debated issues.

All would agree that what Christ offers us through the church is salvation. What many don't realize is that the word for salvation in Latin (*salus*) means "health." And health, like holiness, is wholeness.

To be a healthy human being is to be a whole human being. The promise of salvation ("health") is the promise of human wholeness.

Because health pertains to the whole person, it is never simply a matter of physical vigor, or of freedom from bodily sickness.

Indeed, there are people with serious

physical disabilities who are nonetheless healthy, while there are people with the physical capacity to run a marathon who are nonetheless unhealthy.

Healthy people have many human characteristics in common with one another.

They are kind, patient, understanding, forgiving, slow to anger, eager to be helpful, serious about their responsibilities to others and respectful of their freedom, self-confident but not vain, humble but not self-loathing, joyful, at ease with other people (including those of the opposite sex), and they are blessed with a sense of humor.

Unhealthy people, on the other hand, tend to be self-righteous, judgmental, unforgiving, resentful, vindictive, grim, rigid and authoritarian, punitive, controlling, obsessive, ill-at-ease in the presence of others (especially those of the opposite sex), burdened with guilt, and they find gratification in the humiliation and misfortunes of those of whom they disapprove.

Let the point be made clearly and unambiguously: The line between the healthy and the unhealthy is not the same as the line between liberals and conservatives.

There are unhealthy liberals and unhealthy conservatives; and there are healthy liberals and healthy conservatives.

To the extent that there are serious problems in today's church, they are created not by liberals or conservatives, but by unhealthy people — liberal and conservative alike.

The reason why unhealthy conservatives stand out and are subject to more public criticism than are unhealthy liberals is that unhealthy conservatives have access to power in today's church, while liberals — healthy and unhealthy alike — are generally closed off from power.

Healthy Catholics are increasingly concerned about the seepage of unhealthy people into positions of power and influence in the church and about the negative pastoral effects of their rule.

The controversy over the recent pattern of episcopal appointments, for example, is not about the conservatism of the appointees, but about their aptitude for pastoral leadership.

If an appointee is healthy (and pastorally experienced), he will likely be a good pastor. If unhealthy, he will certainly be an ineffective, and probably destructive, pastor.

Healthy liberals should have no problem with the appointment of healthy conservatives as bishops, just as in a different regime healthy conservatives should have no problem with the appointment of healthy liberals as bishops.

What those who love the church are looking for in their pastoral leaders are the marks of salvation (*salus*, health), not liberal or conservative credentials.

One model of a healthy pastoral is Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin who was "a teacher of the law, respected by all the people" (Acts 5:34).

When the apostles were brought before



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him with the demand that they be put to death, Gamaliel calmed the passions of their accusers: "Let them go," he said. "For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God" (5:38-39).

Our supreme model of healthiness, of course, is the Lord himself, who came "to rescue and not to sit in judgment" (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, n.3).

He was always meek, patient, and humble of heart (Matthew 11:28-30). He never forced faith nor his rule upon anyone (Matthew 26:51-53; John 18:36).

"Stop judging," he said "that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).

As we encourage and even prod one another in the church today, let it be an encouragement and a prodding, not from conservatism to liberalism or from liberalism to conservatism, but from unhealthiness to healthiness.

In the end, this is what salvation is all about.

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Storms call us to awaken faith in Jesus

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 4:35-41; (R1) Job 38:1, 8-11; (R2) 2 Corinthians 5:14-17.

King Canute (994-1035) was the dane who had conquered Britain. He must have been thinking of the first reading from the book of Job one day when he was flattered by his courtiers on account of his power.

He once ordered his throne to be placed by the seaside. The tide then rolled in, threatening to submerge both him and his throne.

Planting his scepter in the sand, Canute said to the waves, "Thus far shall you come but no farther." Of course, the waves did not heed his command. Then to his flatterers, the king said: "Behold, how small is the might of kings!"

God asks holy Job, "What right have you to question me? It is I who wrap the sea, like a restless, struggling child, in swaddling band? I have set its limits and have said: 'Thus far shall you come but no farther.'" It is for God to question us, not for us to question God.

God's speaking out of the storm to Job — and about the sea — ties in the first reading with the Gospel.

Mark tells us that Jesus had been teaching all day long. As evening drew on, he was too tired to send the people away. All he said was, "Let us cross over to the far-



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ther shore."

After he was taken away in the boat in which he was sitting, Jesus fell sound asleep. Here we see the truth and real humanity of Jesus. His sleeping is not mentioned on any other occasion. He needed sleep, just as he also needed food. For he was truly man.

A sudden violent storm came up, characteristic of the area. Jesus slept through it all. In a tone of resentment and reproach the disciples questioned, "Teacher, doesn't it matter to you that we are going to drown?"

Remember the old television series "All in the Family?" Edith Bunker would often take a long time to tell a story. Archie, her husband, was not the most patient of men. After Edith had gone on and on with her story, Archie would finally yell: "Stifle!" Silence followed on the screen, while laughter roared from the live audience.

The calm nature of Jesus during the storm reveals his utter trust in God. Upon

waking, he reveals even more. He commands the winds and the waves: "Quiet! Be still! Stifle!" Meekly, they obey, showing clearly that Jesus is not only man, but also God. He has the very powers of God. Therefore, he merits our trust no matter the crisis in life.

A man was driving along the thruway when he noticed a woman stranded on the side of the highway, trying to fix a flat tire. Being a gentleman, he stopped and offered her help. The day was hot and humid so fixing the tire was hard, dirty work. When he had finished, he moved to the back of the car to release the jack. The woman said to him, "Please let the car down easily, my husband is asleep in the back seat."

That woman didn't need help. Her help was asleep in the back seat. So it was with the disciples in their crisis. Their help was asleep right in the boat. All they had to do was wake up Jesus and the crisis would be solved.

Christ often seems asleep in times of distress, but he isn't. Jesus was amazed that the disciples were terrified in spite of the fact that he was present. He must wonder at us, too, when fear grips us in times of sorrow or troubles, or when the storms of anxiety besiege us.

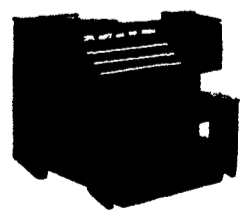
For he is also as present to us as he was to his disciples in the storm at sea. All we need do in our crises in life is to awaken our faith in him.

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