

Encyclical isn't conservative manifesto

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Since few people actually read papal encyclicals, the way encyclicals are treated in the initial news reports and Op-Ed columns tends to create a lasting impression on interested members of the Catholic community and general public.

Consequently, those who are among the first to offer comment have the greatest opportunity to shape those impressions.

Advance copies of the pope's new encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* ("The Hundredth Year"), were made available, directly or indirectly through ecclesiastical channels, to a select group of neoconservative Catholics in the United States, including Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things* magazine; Michael Novak, of the American Enterprise Institute; and George Weigel, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Each published an Op-Ed piece within two or three days of the encyclical's release (in Neuhaus' case, a day before the embargoed release date).

Having an early look at so lengthy and substantive a document afforded these commentators an opportunity (individually

or in concert with one another) to fashion their own political "spin" for the media before different sorts of eyes had a chance even to see the encyclical.

For those, especially in the business community, who will never read *Centesimus Annus* but who are aware of the glowing reaction it has received in these neo-conservative quarters, the new encyclical is perhaps forever fixed in their minds as a ringing endorsement of American-style democratic capitalism and, in the case of the Neuhaus column, as an implicit repudiation of the U.S. Catholic bishops' economics pastoral letter of 1986.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. *Centesimus Annus* is a well-balanced, even-handed document that can proudly take its place alongside Pope John Paul II's previous two social encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* ("On Human Work") in 1981, and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("On the Social Concern of the Church") in 1988.

Whatever else *Centesimus Annus* is, it clearly is not a neoconservative manifesto. And neither is it a repudiation of the U.S.

such major church leaders as Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York voted to ap-

prove.

Neoconservatives who seem to exalt democratic capitalism as if it were the moral as well as the economic norm for the rest of the world cannot, on the basis of this encyclical, enlist the pope in their cause. Pope John Paul II is more cautious and more critical.

The encyclical puts the question directly: "Can it perhaps be said that after the failure of communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World, which are searching for the path to economic and civil progress?"

If I understand the neoconservatives' position correctly, their answer would be, "Obviously yes."

For Pope John Paul II, "The answer is obviously complex" (n. 42).

"In spite of the great changes which have taken place in the more advanced societies," the pope observed, "the human inadequacies of capitalism and the resulting domination of things over people are far from disappearing" (n. 33).



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

More forcefully still: "We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of 'real socialism' leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization" (n.35).

Indeed, with the collapse of "real socialism," the pope warned, "Western countries, in turn, run the risk of seeing this collapse as a one-sided victory of their own economic system and thereby failing to make necessary corrections in that system" (n.56).

And yet many in the business community have now assured themselves, on the basis of a few Op-Ed pieces, that the pope's new encyclical poses "no problem" for them.

They will never read *Centesimus Annus*. If they did, they wouldn't be so happy about it.

More on this remarkable encyclical next week.

The Greeks' great faith inspires Barnabas and Paul

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"I've just received a message from a group of followers in Antioch," James said to Peter.

"Antioch! None of us has been to Antioch," Peter replied. "How did these people come to hear about Jesus?"

"When Stephen was stoned to death, many of our followers fled in fear," James said. "We thought they had left our church. But it seems that some of them continued to preach the good news."

Peter smiled broadly and said, "It's amazing, isn't it? We were so discouraged the day that Stephen died. His death has only helped to increase our numbers."

"These new followers are asking for our

help," James continued. "Who can we send to minister to them?"

"How about that fellow that we've nicknamed 'Son of Encouragement?'" Peter suggested.

"Yes," James agreed. "Barnabas is the man who sold all of his land and gave the money to help the new church. He is the perfect choice."

A couple of days later, Barnabas set out from Jerusalem to Antioch. When he arrived in the city, he was overwhelmed at the number of new followers. He taught them everything that he knew about Jesus. And soon, even more people joined the new church.

So Barnabas traveled on to Tarsus to look for his old friend, Paul.



THE BIBLE CORNER

"What brings you here?" asked Paul.

"I am looking for someone to help me with the new church in Antioch," Barnabas replied. "These Greeks will inspire you with their faith."

"I am most willing to be of service to you, Barnabas. You were a good friend to me when I needed your help," said Paul. "If it weren't for you, I don't think the leaders in Jerusalem would have accepted me into the church. After all, I was the leader of those who persecuted their followers."

Barnabas hesitated. "There is something else that you should know, Paul," he said.

"What is it?" Paul asked.

"It was some of the very followers who fled during these persecutions in Jerusalem who have started the new church in Antioch," Barnabas said. "They may have trouble accepting you at first. Are you certain you want to come?"

"I will be ready to leave with you tomorrow," Paul replied.

Barnabas smiled. "And I will stand with you no matter what happens."

Paul wasted no time in telling his story to the new followers. As soon as he arrived with Barnabas in Antioch, he met with the church leaders and told them what had happened to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul ended his story by saying, "If God can use a person like me to further his cause, how much more can he use you? But, even so, if you do not want me to stay and help, I will understand."

"We have already forgiven you as the Lord has done. And we are grateful for your kind offer to help us," one of the new followers said.

Later, Paul told Barnabas: "You were right about these people. I am amazed at their great faith."

Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a year, ministering to the new church there. Antioch was where the followers were first called Christians.

Scripture Reference: Acts, Chapter 11:19-26.

Meditation: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

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