

Column marks 25 years of reflection

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

On July 8, 1966, some 25 years ago, my first column appeared in the pages of *The Catholic Transcript*, the weekly newspaper of my home Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn.

The very next week the column was picked up by *The Pilot* in Boston, with the enthusiastic support and patronage of Cardinal Richard Cushing, with whom I had established a warm personal relationship during my years on the faculty of Pope John XXIII National Seminary.

Cardinal Cushing had only one piece of advice for me at the time: "Write about anything you want," he said, "but don't write about money!" As one of the great episcopal fundraisers in history, he regarded that topic as his own special preserve.

After Cardinal Cushing died, the column began appearing only intermittently in *The Pilot* and then disappeared completely. It was "banned in Boston" long before it was ever banned in Brooklyn.

Cardinal Cushing would not have been pleased by either development, because the new bishop of Brooklyn who canceled it was originally a Boston priest with many of the cardinal's populist and missionary instincts.

I am hardly recognizable in the youthful

photo accompanying my inaugural column in *The Transcript*. Perhaps it's because of all those unpleasant letters I've received ever since.

That first column called attention to "a wide gap between the theological advances of (the) council and the theological understanding of many Catholic people — clergy included."

I noted that "if the theologian is to be a servant of the Church, then he must be willing to make his findings — or better still, his tentative reflections — available to others within the same Christian community."

"Failing this responsibility," I suggested, "others with no theological qualifications will fill the vacuum by default. And the theologian has no one to blame but himself."

"A Church cannot long endure without the theological understanding which is at a level comparable to the maturity of her members in related areas of thought and knowledge." I pointed out.

"The Second Vatican Council is meant for the whole Church. This series of essays is a modest attempt to bring this hope to fruition." And so the weekly column was born.

For good or for ill, I have tried over these past 25 years to remain faithful to

that original intention and purpose, and I want to recommit myself to that mission in whatever years still lie ahead.

In the meantime, I am exceedingly grateful to *The Catholic Transcript* and to the Catholic Press Association for the marvelous Certificate of Appreciation which they jointly conferred upon me at the recent CPA convention in Tempe, Ariz.

The citation reads: "Through his insightful column, 'Essays in Theology,' Father McBrien has chronicled the journey of the Church since Vatican II with extraordinary clarity. He has provided provocative insights to the challenges facing the faithful, making theology (faith in search of understanding) accessible to the people of God and bringing it home to readers of the Catholic press."

I was unable to accept the certificate in person, but I prepared a brief statement for the occasion, which my editor at *The Transcript*, David Fortier, read on my behalf.

In that statement I reiterated my intention that the column serve as "a form of ministry to Catholics who want and deserve a more serious and critical interpretation of their faith and of its public implication."

"Such a purpose, however, leads one inevitably into the realm of controversy. Unfortunately, controversy sometimes creates



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anxiety, even for professional journalists.

"To those papers who carry my column, to their editors, and to the bishops who publish them, I extend a warm word of admiration and gratitude. I am honored to have a place in your pages."

I devoted the rest of my brief statement to my initial sponsor and mentor.

"I should not want this occasion to pass, however, without a word of profound personal gratitude to Monsignor John Sexton Kennedy, former editor of *The Catholic Transcript*, which has syndicated my column these past 25 years.

"It was Monsignor Kennedy who first encouraged me to do the column and who gave me his constant support over the years. The awards for general excellence which *The Transcript* received during his editorship were testimony to his own high professional standards.

May this weekly column continue to honor him, as the Certificate of Appreciation so generously honors me.

Paul and Silas imprisoned for exorcism

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

After spending a long time ministering to the Christians in Antioch, Paul decided to revisit all of the new churches that he and Barnabas had started a few years earlier.

This time, Silas, a young leader of the church in Antioch, accompanied Paul on this second missionary tour.

Paul and Silas were very pleased with what they saw in every town. The new churches were growing and strong. When they had completed this long journey, they did not return to Antioch. Instead, they traveled further into Macedonia, stopping at towns along the way to tell the people about Jesus. They ended their journey in Philippi, one of the leading cities of that region.

"There's not even a synagogue here," Silas said to Paul after they had a look around the city.

"This is Roman territory," Paul replied. "And there is certain to be much idol worship. But we will preach wherever we can."

After a couple of days, they found a peaceful spot by the river just outside the city gates. A small crowd came to hear them preach each afternoon.

Everyday as they crossed the town square to go to this place of prayer, a slave girl followed them and hurled insults at Paul and Silas. This girl was possessed by an evil spirit and she was able to foretell the future. Her owners made a handsome profit from her ability to make predictions.

"These men are God's servants," she shouted after Paul and Silas. "They will show you how to save yourself."

Finally, after several days of her taunting, Paul could stand it no longer. He turned and looked directly at the slave girl and commanded: "Evil spirit, in the name of Jesus, come out of this woman!"

Everything about the girl changed after that. Her face, once so twisted with sarcasm, became filled with peace. And to the dismay of her masters, she could no longer predict the future. So they cast her out into the street.

"She's utterly worthless," the one man

said. "What good is she to us now?"

"We've been ruined by those two men," the other shouted. "And they must pay for their crimes!"

The two men went down to the river and seized Paul and Silas. They dragged them back to the city and brought them to stand before the authorities. By this time, because of the furor, a great mob had formed and a riot broke out.

"These two men have come to our city to overthrow the government," one of the slave girl's owners told the authorities. "They care nothing for our Roman laws."

"Because of them, our own citizens are disobeying our laws!" the other man continued the lies.

Before the authorities could even deal with Paul and Silas, the crowd pressed forward to attack them. So the magistrates brought the two men to the town square and had them beaten in full view to satisfy the mob.

After the public flogging, two Roman soldiers brought Paul and Silas to the



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prison. They handed them over to the head guard, saying, "Any more trouble from these two and it will be on your head! We'll see to them both in the morning."

Paul and Silas did not seem like dangerous criminals to the guard. Nevertheless, after such a stern warning, he brought them both into the inner dungeon of the prison. Not only did he chain Paul and Silas to the wall, he fastened their feet into stocks. Then he bolted and locked the door carefully behind him.

Scripture Reference: Acts 16:1-24.

Meditation: "If you belonged to the world, its people would love you. But you don't belong to the world" (John 15:19).

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