

Testimony checks Opus Dei cause

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A few readers may recall the confusion and discomfort created some years ago when the Catholic Church acknowledged that St. Philomena had probably never existed, and the even greater consternation when it cast a pall of doubt over the authenticity of St. Christopher, whose medal was found in almost every Catholic-owned automobile before Vatican II.

Many older-generation Catholics learned a hard lesson then, but we have grown used to it now and it doesn't shock most of us any longer.

The lesson is that the official church sometimes makes mistakes like the rest of us, even when the church is engaged in the seemingly simple and innocuous task of making saints.

The Philomena and Christopher cases taught us that the church may not always have its facts straight. More recent controversies surrounding the proposed beatification of Queen Isabella of Spain, for example, remind us that there isn't much in the life of the church unaffected by ideology and politics — even the canonization process itself.

Ever since the widely beloved Pope John XXIII died in 1963, Catholics all over the world have expressed the hope that he would be advanced quickly to sainthood.

But politics and ideology intervened. It seems we couldn't have John XXIII as a saint unless we also had Pius XII. A progressive pope had to be balanced off by a conservative pope.

Perhaps there is something still percolating behind the scenes, but very little has been said or written in recent years about the John XXIII/Pius XII linkage. It may be because the competing claims seem less and less equivalent as the years pass by. Suffice it to say that John XXIII's image continues to grow.

But the receding of public controversy over the relative merits of those two popes doesn't mean that politics and ideology have lost their grip on the canonization process.

The July 27 issue of *The Tablet* (London) carries a disturbing report about the continuing, behind-the-scenes efforts to advance the canonization cause of Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer, founder of the theologically and pastorally conservative *Opus Dei*.

According to Father Pedro Lamet, SJ, former editor of the Spanish Catholic weekly *Vida Nueva*, even Cardinal Tarancon — past president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference — has expressed surprise at the speed of the beatification process in Monsignor Escriva's case, "while that of Pope John XXIII, who was much more widely known and beloved by all, has hardly be-

gun." Father Lamet notes that the pontifical decree issued in April, 1990, on Monsignor Escriva's "Heroic virtues" said nothing at all about the virtue of humility which one expects to find in a saint.

Five months later the beatification process was interrupted. The lawyer defending Monsignor Escriva's cause was informed by a Vatican official that there were errors of form in the submission. Specifically, some negative testimonies had been left out, and *Opus Dei* was said to have glossed over the matters raised. A new promoter general of the faith (more popularly known as the Devil's Advocate) was appointed.

Among the testimonies that have recently been made public against Monsignor Escriva's beatification is that of his nephew, Carlos Albas Minquez, a businessman in Zaragoza. He has stated that "arrogance was one of my uncle's traits."

Maria del Carmen Tapia, Monsignor Escriva's secretary for four years, has also stated publicly that Monsignor Escriva had "great ambition" and "a great ability to manipulate."

A former member of *Opus Dei* who was dismissed in 1966, she recalls that Monsignor Escriva used to say with false modesty, "I'm just a poor donkey," but at the same time he expected to be canonized and actively worked toward this end.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

"He often said to us," she claimed, "My daughters, you will see various popes, many cardinals and archbishops, but only one Founder."

Another witness, Jose Luis Almunia, recalled asking Monsignor Escriva how a priest could assume the title of marquis. Monsignor Escriva called the question impertinent and two members of the organization escorted the man to the door.

A journalist, Luis Carandell, referred to Monsignor Escriva's change of name from Escriva to the more sonorous Escriva, and the addition of the ostentatious "de Balaguer," from the town in Lerida from which his grandparents came.

The journalist also pointed to the monsignor's love of honors, luxuries, and works of art. According to Father Lumet's *Tablet* article, *Opus Dei* has torn down the modest dwelling where the founder was born and has erected a more elegant house which is now pointed out as his birthplace.

Not surprisingly, the information office of *Opus Dei* has denied these allegations.

Meanwhile, the cause of Pope John XXIII stagnates.

Salvation sometimes requires sacrifice

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48; (R1) Numbers 11:25-29; (R2) James 5:1-6.

The behavior of the followers of God is the subject of next Sunday's readings. Even God's people tended to identify God's way of doing things with their group or organization, or their own ideas of how things ought to be done.

Jesus taught the disciples that they are not an exclusive club, for "anyone who is not against us is with us." Like Moses, Jesus pleaded for tolerance: "Do not try to stop him." The only intolerance Jesus showed was toward anyone who leads simple believers astray. James showed the same intolerance for those who make wealth the supreme value (R2).

One of the great stumbling blocks to fol-

lowing Christ is one's own self, the sin of pride. So likely is this failing that Jesus warned about it three times. The chant-like refrain ("cut it off! tear it out!) plus three illustrations were meant to drive home this single point: that to win salvation, one must be ready to do things as drastic and painful as cutting off one's arm or leg or tearing out one's eye.

In olden days, a group of adventurers set out from the European mainland to conquer the territory known today as Ireland. Their leader was a daring man of fortune who announced that whoever touched land first would possess the entire territory.

One of his band was named O'Neil. He was determined to have the new land. He rowed mightily, but a rival boat pressed him hard, caught up with him, and then passed him. What could O'Neil do? This strong-nerved, iron-minded O'Neil dropped his oars, seized an ax and cut off his left hand, and threw it upon the shore, so that he would be the first to touch the

land and make it his own.

Jesus used gory and gruesome words in today's Gospel. He meant that every one of His followers must be ready to sacrifice what is nearest and dearest rather than disobey God by personal sin. He did not mean to be taken literally about cutting off an arm or plucking out an eye. Rather, He was using Oriental hyperbole to emphasize that no sacrifice in life is too great to make in order to win eternal life.

For instance, breaking a habit of alcoholism can be a veritable hell. But to win salvation, one must be ready to endure the pain.

Sometimes much effort is required to get up for Sunday Mass or to go to daily Mass. The true follower of Christ is willing to pay the price.

It's so easy to sit and stare at the "boob tube" until the last minute before bed, rather than take some time to say a prayer or to read a few lines from Scripture or the



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Catholic paper or even to talk to one's loved ones. It costs, but it is worth the cost.

The great St. Ignatius won St. Francis Xavier to the company of Jesus by repeating one phrase to all his objections against leaving the academic world of fame and glory for the religious life: "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mt. 16:25).

The following is a prayer we should say daily: Dear Jesus, teach me to be generous. Teach me to love and serve you as you deserve; to give without counting the cost; to fight without heeding the wounds; to toil without seeking rest; to labor without seeking any reward other than that of knowing that I am doing your holy will. Amen.

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