

Ordination was shrewd, not prophetic

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

This week's column is composed of bits and pieces.

• Father George Stallings Jr., who left the Catholic Church two years ago to form his own African-American Catholic Congregation, had almost dropped completely out of sight and out of mind until his shrewd decision to ordain a woman to the priesthood on Sept. 8 in Washington, D.C.

Had the ordination been a male-only ceremony, no one outside of the congregation would have been aware of it. The media would not have been interested, and the self-appointed bishop (recently self-promoted to archbishop) would have remained in the obscurity into which he and his movement had fallen.

Notwithstanding the desirability of a change in the present discipline of the Catholic Church, it seems premature to say, as the Women's Ordination Conference has reportedly said, that the ordination had been "a prophetic act."

Because prophets are neither self-appointed nor self-promoted, only the People of God themselves, over time, can reach such a judgment. One sees no evidence of an incipient move in that direction.

• Two world-class European Jesuit scholars died this past summer within the space of a few weeks of each other: Cardinal Henri de Lubac (at age 95) and Father Oswald von Nell-Breuning (at age 101).

Cardinal de Lubac had been a controversial theologian in the 1940s and 1950s because of his writings on the supernatural order, and was often lumped together with proponents of the so-called "new theology." Many were convinced at the time that Cardinal de Lubac was one of Pope Pius XII's targets in his 1950 encyclical letter, *Humani Generis*.

But Henri de Lubac changed course in his later years, adopting a strongly critical view of post-Vatican II Catholicism. Some said that the conferral of the red hat in 1983 was in grateful recognition of his shift to the right. Whatever the case, Cardinal de Lubac did become a favorite of conservative Catholics over the past decade, and his recent death was widely mourned among them.

By contrast, Father Oswald von Nell-Breuning's death has been practically ignored, even though he had been one of the leading pioneers in the field of social ethics and was in all probability the principal source of Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Banned by the Nazis from writing or publishing, he was sentenced to three years in prison in 1944, a term cut short by the ending of World War II.

Both Henri de Lubac and Oswald von Nell-Breuning were Jesuit scholars of the first rank. Ideological considerations should have no place in the assessment of their life-long ministries or in the marking of their deaths.

• British Prime Minister John Major's government recently rebuked the new Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, for saying that "social deprivation, poverty, poor housing and illiteracy" played some part in Britain's urban violence.

Prime Minister Major and his spokesmen declared that the riots were carefully planned and that the rioters came from a variety of backgrounds.

One British newspaper carried the headline, "The Church and Tories at War," but Archbishop Carey insisted that he was not looking for confrontation with the government. On the other hand, he stood by his remarks that crime must be seen in a social context.

Given the progressive social teachings of our respective churches and given the conservative temper of our respective governments, one should not have been surprised by the recent testy exchange in Great Britain.

• Vice president Dan Quayle, a

ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

favorite of the conservative wing of the Republican Party and of the pro-life movement, said recently in an interview that his party needed to send a strong signal in 1992 that it is a "big tent" with room for differing views on abortion. (The metaphor had also been used by the late GOP national chairman, Lee Atwater.)

"We are a party," he said in the Oct. 7, 1991 edition of *The New York Times*, "that, though we have a position on abortion, that those who disagree with us should not feel excluded because of that issue."

But if every abortion is murder, purely and simply, how can the pro-life movement's party of preference not exclude from its tent those who favor abortion, or who take a so-called pro-choice position?

And how can a pro-life movement which certainly puts morality ahead of politics not criticize the vice president, not only for what he said in the interview, but also for his stated view that abortion (that is, murder) is legitimate in the cases of rape or incest, or when the mother's life is endangered?

We should never lose our trust in God

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sundays Readings: (R3) Mark 12:38-44; (R1) 1 Kings 17:10-16; (R2) Hebrews 9:24-28.

Sunday's readings tell us about two widows.

The first widow was out by the town gate one day gathering sticks. A stranger approached and asked her for water. He then called out, "And bring me, please, some bread."

This was more than she could handle. "As the Lord, your God, lives," the widow replied, "I have only a handful of flour in my jar and little oil in my jug. I'm collecting sticks to make a meal for me and my son; then we shall die."

She was in a desperate situation, the same as millions of people in our world today. She felt hopeless, but not the stranger because he was a prophet

of the true God. Elijah knew that God is a giving and loving God. So he told her not to fear but to go home and make bread for him first, then for herself and her son. He promised that the jar of flour would not be used up and the jug of oil would not run dry.

The second widow was in the temple. She made her way quietly through the crowd. Wealthy worshipers were throwing large amounts of money into the temple treasury. Shyly, the widow put in two very small copper coins — the least one could put into the treasury. Rabbinic law forbade putting in just one coin.

Jesus was watching. "This poor widow," Jesus said to His disciples, "has given more than all the rest."

One sociologist recently estimated that one of every three young families in America today are only one paycheck away from bankruptcy. It's tough. As one fellow put it, "I used to

live in the lap of luxury; then luxury stood up."

For one thing: don't give up. That was what the first widow was ready to do. She was going to sit down and die, until Elijah came along. He turned her scars into stars.

Secondly, trust in God. As much as we talk about faith, some of us have a hard time trusting in God. Trust means to go gaily into the dark. It means to let go, let God take over.

Lastly, remember this: someone is always watching!

Jesus was watching as the second widow dropped in her two small coins. She had not quit trusting. Those two coins were all she had in the world, and she was willing to turn them over to God. No wonder Jesus praised her. But what we also need to see is that someone was watching the first widow as well.

It was at God's command that Elijah



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

came to this widow and helped her through the drought. We read in 1 Kings 17:8: "So the Lord said to Elijah: 'Move on to Zarepheth of Sidon and stay there, I have designated a widow there to provide for you.'" Elijah, this holy man of God, thought God was providing for his needs. Yet God was also looking out for this widow and her son. They were all under His watchful eye. And so are we all.

Often we can get caught up in our problems: financial troubles, marital heartaches, family concerns, health problems, our job. Don't give up! Trust God. He is watching. He has not forgotten. He will never let one drown.

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