

Who reads the Catholic press?

By Father Richard McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A recent survey of Catholic press readers — people like yourselves — yields some significant results.

According to a national study commissioned by the Catholic Press Association, readers of Catholic newspapers and magazines are better educated and more professionally successful than the average American.

While 19.1 percent of American adults are college graduates, 32.1 percent of readers of Catholic newspapers have graduated from college. The percentage is even higher (43.4 percent) for readers of Catholic magazines.

Of those employed outside the home, more than half the readers of the Catholic press are in professional or managerial occupations. This is double the proportion found in the nation's general work force.

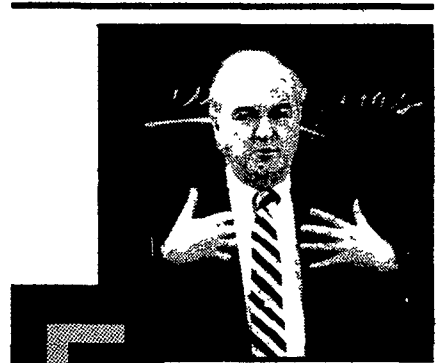
The survey found a strong interest on the part of the respondents in the Catholic publications they read.

Two-thirds of subscribers to these papers said they read all four of the last four issues they received, and most said they pick up each issue at least twice and spend a half-hour or more reading it.

The survey also uncovered a strong connection between readers of the Catholic press and financial support of the church.

Only one-fourth of those in the general survey noted that they gave more than \$200 a year.

More than a third of those same



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readers reported their charitable contributions in the previous year to be \$1,000 or more.

Owen McGovern, executive director of the Catholic Press Association, has said that the survey contains valuable information for bishops who — in almost every case — are the publishers of their diocesan newspapers.

The data on contributions to the church establish a strong link between readership of the Catholic press and commitment to the church.

McGovern is absolutely right in suggesting that the survey contains valuable information for bishop-publishers of weekly Catholic newspapers.

But it is information many of them are likely to ignore or deny.

Based on the intellectually thin content of most Catholic newspapers in the United States — replete with photos of the local bishop, sanitized news reports of church personalities and events, and exceedingly safe editorials and columns — one can only conclude that most bishop-publishers must believe their general readership to be intellectually and psychologically fragile. These bishops must think readers of Catholic newspapers are incapable of understanding and sorting out issues of substance and easily disturbed in their faith.

In the minds of such publishers, readers of the Catholic press need to have their intellectual food neatly cut up and fed to them, spoonful by spoonful. If left to decide for themselves what they will eat, they might choose something that won't be spiritually good for them.

The assumption is that Catholics in America, and particularly readers of Catholic newspapers, are basically "simple" people. It would be religiously traumatizing to expose them to ideas and opinions that differ from what they were taught in catechism class 30, 40, 50 or 60 years ago, or different from the ideas and opinions of various ecclesiastical officials and spokesmen.

According to this approach, the so-called educated Catholic is regarded as but a tiny minority of the church and of the readership of the Catholic press.

The church can afford to take them for granted. Their alleged need for a theologically mature ex-

amination of their faith has to give way to the more pressing need of the great majority, who labor under severe educational and intellectual deficiencies.

We did not need this latest survey — conducted by the Simmons Market Research Bureau on behalf of the Catholic Press Association — to remind us that U.S. Catholics are among the most educationally advanced Catholics in the entire history of the church.

Nowhere in the world, today or even in the past, has there been such an extensive network of Catholic elementary and secondary schools and of Catholic colleges and universities.

This educational network represents perhaps the greatest achievement of Catholics in America.

But schools — and particularly colleges and universities — are in the business of helping people to think, and to think for themselves.

The readership of the Catholic press, according to this latest survey, includes much more than a handful of educated and professionally successful Catholics.

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World insisted that "all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence;" (n.62).

That teaching is still not honored in most of the Catholic press today.

We should show love to our enemies

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 6:27-38; (R1) 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

Christianity's hallmark is love — a love so unique that the early Christians almost had to coin a new word for it: *agape* (pronounced a GAH pay).

Jesus said to his disciples: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you and pray for those who maltreat you." Wow, that's some order. Yet even before Christ, David did those things (R1). No wonder God called him a man after His own heart.

Agape means to love as God loves — unconditionally. He makes His rain fall on good and bad alike and His sun shine on the just and the unjust. We must do this as well. Christian love is not just an emotion. That is why Jesus did not say, "Like your enemies." You can't like everybody. You must love them!

Love is a will act. It is something we make-up our minds and wills to do. And we do it. No one ever nat-

urally loves one's enemies, or the unlovable, or those one does not like. Agape is a conquest, a victory and an achievement.

Still, there is a hierarchy of love. The closer one is to a fire, the more of its heat one feels.

That is why our first love should be for our family. We say blood is thicker than water. The very word "kind" comes from the word "kin" plus "d." Love is kind, and it must be shown first to kith and kin.

Love, however, should not stay at home. It ought to go to church. Thus our second love should be for the Catholic family. And so at Mass, who do we pray for? Is it not for the pope, souls in purgatory, the assembly and ourselves?

The third object of our love should be our neighbor. The Latin word for neighbor is *proximus*, a word which means "the one nearest." Neighbor can also mean the one most in need of our help, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We should love our neighbor, not only because they are close to us or in need, but also because we need our neighbor. No man is an island.

It is not good for man to be alone.

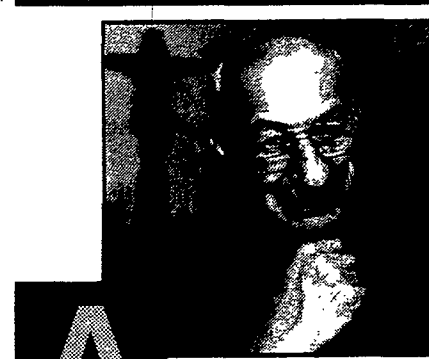
Once there was a radio program called "Ten thousand people make my breakfast." Take toast, for example. How many workers had to be involved, just to make the toaster and the bread. How many more were involved just to make the bread — the farmer sowing the wheat, the reaper, the miller, the transporters, and so on.

Lastly, our fourth love should be for our enemies. A fire's intensity is known for how far it can throw its heat. Likewise our love's intensity for God can be measured by how far it reaches out to others.

We are to love our enemies, not as enemies, not by calling them "darling," nor for that matter "skunk," but by wishing them eternal salvation.

After the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said he was going to destroy all his enemies. When he was found dining with some of his former enemies, his friends asked, "We thought you were going to destroy them." Lincoln answered, "I have. I've made them my friends."

We should love our enemies, because every artist loves to have his



WORD FOR SUNDAY

work loved and praised. And we are God's creations. Besides, all people are children of the same Father and all have the same Mother, Mary. Therefore, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, destined for the same goal: eternal life.

"The mission of the Church," said Pope Paul VI, "is precisely this: to create a civilization of love."

Show love at home, in the parish and society, and to enemies.

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