

# Conversation inside the Vatican

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Arriving late for a special meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Monsignor Carbonnara mumbled his regrets as he made his way to the end of a long table.

Cardinal Tedesco's gaze remained fixed on Father Philip Delphia, a young American priest on the congregation's staff, as he continued to press his case against some unnamed European author.

"And so we have seen, Eminence, how often he speaks of faith as an 'existential' reality, 'not identical with knowledge.'

"The orientation is beyond question. He has even entitled one of his chapters, 'Faith and Dialogue.'" The priest uttered the "d" word with an air of disdain.

"But the ecclesiology is even more disturbing, Eminence. He argues that 'the hierarchical constitution of the church ... presupposes a true equality among all members of the People of God,' and that all take part equally in the task of 'building up the Body of Christ.' For him 'the action of a lay member of the People of God may be more effective than that of a member of the hierarchy or of a religious order.'

Some of the clerics glanced at the cardinal to catch his reaction. There was none. "Proceed," he said, gesturing toward Father Delphia.

"The order of grace is more fundamental to the constitution of the People of God than is the order of authority on which the hierarchy of the church is based.' These are his exact words, Eminence."

"There is little doubt of his intent," the young priest continued. "It is significant," he writes, 'that the council at no point repeats the traditional distinction between the *Ecclesia docens* (teaching church) and the *Ecclesia discens* (learning church).' He says 'this is evidently because it wished to avoid an insufficient consciousness of universal sharing in the *munus propheticum* (prophetic office) of Christ.'

"The anti-clerical bias here is most disturbing, Eminence. Citing the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, our author writes: 'If one may so put it, the Council here utters a warning against clericalism ... According to Vatican II, one of the chief principles of the apostolate of the church is that the laity should shoulder all the tasks that belong to their vocation in the Church and in the world.'"

"This is all troubling, of course," the cardinal interrupted. "But is there anything here that directly challenges the authority of the church, or that countenances the grave scandal of public dissent?"

"I submit that there is, Eminence," Father Delphia replied with

some assurance, "particularly when this work, *Sources of Renewal*, is read in a wider context."

"Let me be specific. 'Vatican II,' he writes here, 'not only endorsed various structures that had already been tried, but introduced various new ones.'

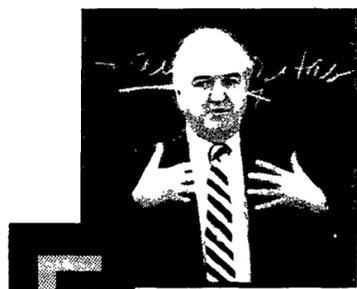
"The whole point and purpose of these structures, he says, is 'to strengthen and consolidate the Church community in its various dimensions. For them to bear adequate fruit, however, the new structures must be complemented by the community spirit, that is the totality of attitudes which will help to build up the community of the Church itself.' The words 'community' and 'attitudes' here are crucial."

"I fail to see your point, Father," Archbishop Maccarone, the Congregation's secretary, interjected. "What does his appeal to 'community' have to do with dissent?"

Father Delphia expected the question. "Excellency, the author had already developed a particular understanding of community in an earlier book — unlike this one, a philosophical tract.

"In that book he defined what he calls 'that acting person' as a participant in community. And community, in turn, depends upon two 'authentic attitudes: solidarity and opposition."

"Solidarity, he says, refers to a 'constant readiness to accept and



**ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY**

realize one's share in community.' Opposition, on the other hand, 'is not inconsistent with solidarity.' In fact, opposition may arise precisely out of what he calls 'deep concern for the common good.'"

The assembled clerics stirred. Their interest had been whetted, and Father Delphia knew it.

Monsignor Carbonnara leaned over to whisper to the priest next to him. "Whom are they talking about, Father?"

"A Polish author by the name of Karol Wojtyla, Monsignor. Do you know him?"

"No," he replied, "but he won't go far with ideas like that."

## Sacrament can make all new again

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 8:1-11; (R1) Isaiah 43:16-21; (R2) Philippians 3:8-14.

In 1884, the New Orleans Cotton Exposition wanted to make an even bigger splash than the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia a few years earlier.

And New Orleans did come up with something never seen before.

Many people fell in love with an exotic water flower from Venezuela, which had an orchid-like bloom — namely the water hyacinth. Thousands sneaked little plant slips into their bags and took them home, hoping they would take root in their own damp Louisiana yards.

Their hopes were more than answered. Before many years, the water hyacinth not only survived but took over every water channel in the south. Soon rivers and canals were solid water hyacinths from bank to bank.

A little too late, horticulturists discovered that each plant produces a thousand tiny water hyacinths every two months. Pieces could break off and float down the river,

transplanting themselves with no help whatsoever.

So it is with the way sin enters our lives. A simple phone call; a drink at a party; growing resentment over a tiny slight; or callused attitudes toward people with less opportunities than you or I have.

These may appear insignificant things, but watch out when they take root. The human heart is fertile soil for everything that is twisted, distorted and evil. You know, the effect of the original sin.

One of nature's deepest mysteries is why whales from time to time will beach themselves and die. In the late 1970s, 41 sperm whales threw themselves up on an Oregon beach and died. Scientists said it would have been useless to move the 15-ton creatures back into the deep, because the freed whales would only turn around and swim back onto the shore. Why? No one knows. It's been happening for centuries.

Yet there is a greater mystery. Why will a bright, healthy, young person risk impairment of mind, soul and body by experimenting with drugs? Or why will a man with a wife who loves him and

children who depend on him risk it all on a cheap, meaningless affair?

For that matter, why would any thinking person engage in promiscuous or premarital sex in this day of rapidly spreading, sexually-transmitted diseases, such as AIDS?

Are we crazy? What gets into us sometimes? The answer can be found in original sin. We have a fallen nature. As Augustine said, "We are like wounded soldiers, striving to rise, yet destined to fall." But God wants to do something about it. "See, I am doing something new!"

When Israel was languishing in the Babylonian captivity, Isaiah told them not to look back at the Egyptian exodus. There, God saved His people through plagues and bloodshed.

Now Isaiah promised God would do something new: save His people without a drop of blood shedding. In fact, Cyrus the Great subsidized their return to Jerusalem and helped them rebuild their city and temple.

The adulteress was brought to Jesus steeped in sin. Yet He who was without sin did not condemn her. He simply said avoid this sin in the future. It was something entirely



**WORD FOR SUNDAY**

new.

Have you fallen into sin?

You have fallen again and again?

You wish there was some wonderful place called the "Land of Beginning Again," where all our mistakes and heartaches and all of our poor, selfish grief could be dropped — like a shabby old coat — at the door, never to be put on again.

We have such a "Land of Beginning Again:" the sacrament of Reconciliation, when all is made new.

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