

Evangelization must reach all groups

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

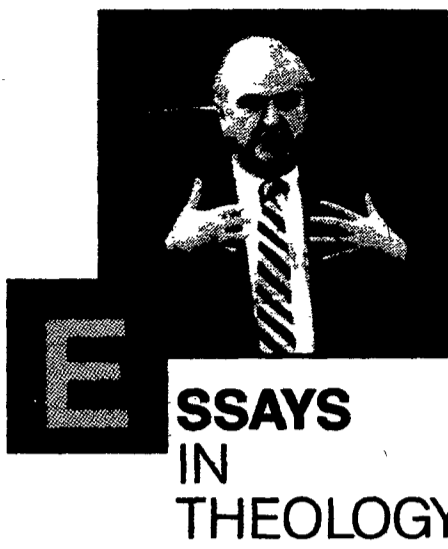
The Catholic community is divisible along several different lines: canonical status (clergy/religious on one side, and the laity on the other); jurisdictional authority (the hierarchy on one side, and the rest of the members, including priests and religious, on the other); theological orientation (traditionalists, neo-conservatives, liberals, and radicals — to use Father Avery Dulles' schema); or degree of involvement with the church's life.

The last item is the focus of this week's column.

Five distinct, though sometimes overlapping, levels of relationship with the church appear to exist: (1) active Catholics; (2) pastorally engaged Catholics; (3) polemically engaged Catholics; (4) inactive, but still affiliated, Catholics; and (5) self-described "former Catholics."

Active Catholics are those who attend weekly Mass with some degree of regularity, who enroll their children in parish religious education and sacramental preparation programs or in parochial school, and who receive the other sacraments of the church as needed.

Pastorally engaged Catholics are active Catholics who also exercise one or more ministries in their parish or diocese: lector, eucharistic minister, minister to the sick and elderly, catechist, parish councillor, and so forth. All active clergy and religious would fall into this second category.



Polemically engaged Catholics are active Catholics who spend a significant amount of time and energy writing letters to public figures, newspapers, magazines, their pastor, the bishop, even the Vatican, or who in other ways — through speeches, articles, newsletters, books — express their unhappiness with certain church policies, practices, and personalities. Such Catholics are almost always of the traditionalist type, but some are also found in the liberal ranks.

Inactive, but still affiliated, Catholics are those who attend Mass rarely (Christmas, a family wedding, a funeral, and one or two other occasions per year), but who continue to regard themselves as Catholics and who want their children baptized and married in the church and their loved

ones buried by the church.

Self-described "former Catholics" are those who claim to have "left the church," often because of divorce or marriage outside the church. They don't bring their children to be baptized, make their first Communion, or be confirmed, nor do they expect or encourage them to marry in the church. If these "former Catholics" attend Mass at all, it is as observers, not as active participants. Although they may on occasion attend services at a non-Catholic church, they have not formally joined another church.

The failure to recognize and sort out these different levels or degrees of involvement with the church often leads pastoral officials and others to misread and misinterpret developments and trends in the Catholic Church.

For example, when many bishops refer to "the faithful," they usually mean only those in categories #1 and #3: church-going Catholics who are satisfied to let others do the ministerial work, and the small, but often strident, minority of ultra-conservatives who seem never to tire of complaining about church policies, practices, and personalities.

Such bishops sometimes act as if pastorally engaged Catholics (category #2) either don't exist or don't count when it comes to meeting the needs or addressing the concerns of "the faithful."

Pastorally engaged Catholics are, in general, highly motivated, well-educated, and mostly women. It is this

group of Catholics keeping the church's work going on a daily basis.

But, of course, these Catholics also constitute the main body of the hierarchy's critics. They differ with certain official policies and attitudes toward women, human sexuality, freedom of information and expression and so forth.

At the same time, such bishops fail to learn very much from the behavior of Catholics in categories #4 and #5, the inactive and the alienated.

Why have so many of these Catholics drifted away from active participation in the church's life and worship?

Is it really all the fault of modern culture, or of "enemies within" the church? Or is it perhaps because of the failures of church leadership to read the "signs of the times" and to respond to them with new and creative means of evangelization, such as those urged upon them by pastorally engaged Catholics?

Evangelization has to be directed in different ways to all five groups: encouraging active Catholics to become ministerially engaged, integrating polemical Catholics into the mainstream of church life, and reaching out with a non-judgmental pastoral heart to inactive and alienated Catholics.

Unfortunately, many of us are so comfortable with the Catholics who are "just like us" that we tend to ignore or even write off the others.

Church teachings helping reform economy

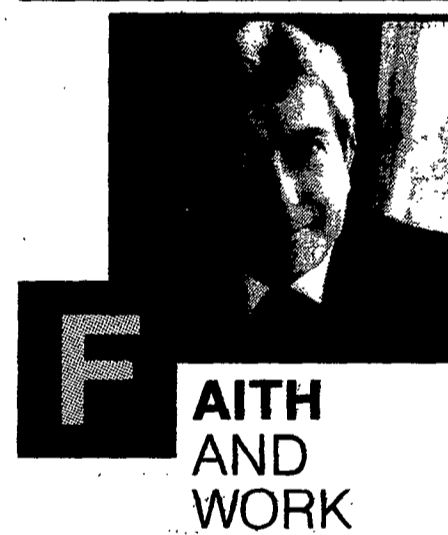
By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

No bishops or priests spoke at the Clinton economic summit in Little Rock, Ark., two months ago, and the Catholic laity in attendance were not identified as such. Yet Catholic social teaching was definitely in evidence.

The Catholic concept of subsidiarity, for example, was everywhere. Speaker after speaker noted the importance of involving people at every level in solving the nation's economic problems.

As Pope Pius XI wrote in his encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate bodies can do."

John Scully, the chief executive officer of Apple Computers, argued,



"We've seen workers on the factory floor being empowered to make decisions. In fact, this is the only way that you can get customized goods and services created quickly, with the highest quality, the lowest cost, and the maximum amount of flexibility."

In fact, the theme reiterated

throughout the conference, "Putting People First," seems to be a bumper-sticker summary view of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*: "The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent — the sacredness — of human beings. The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured."

Many of the speakers at the economic summit made interesting points. "How does one reconcile rampant child neglect and underinvestment and preventable suffering with the biblical warning that to those to whom much is given, much is expected?" asked Marion Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Many of the participants also alluded to another Catholic social teaching, the "common good."

"It will take in this country, I believe, an alliance between capital,

between management, between labor, between shareholders, between everyone involved to form a coalition with common objectives and common goals," said David Glass, president of Wal-Mart. "I think that what we need is a vision that is commonly understood and is shared by everyone."

In the spirit of the Catholic social teaching on the "preferential option for the poor," some speakers also cautioned the participants to take into account those who suffer most from the existing economic system.

Robert Brown of the Black Economic Research Center, for example, warned that some economic reform programs aimed at Third World countries "knowingly — not intentionally, but knowingly — unavoidably impose very severe hardships on the poorest of the people in these countries."

Catholic social teaching has much to offer the debate on economic reform. It's good to see that its principles are part of the conversation.



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