

## Book offers selections of columns from 'loving critic'

*Report on the Church: Catholicism After Vatican II*, by Richard P. McBrien, foreword by Martin E. Marty; Harper Collins (New York, N.Y., 1992); 263 pages; \$19.

By E. Leo McMannus  
Guest contributor

When Cardinal Basil Hume — the "English-through-and-through" archbishop of Westminster and former abbot of Benedictine Ampleforth — celebrated his 70th birthday last month, he credited St. Benedict with providing his style of administering: consultation, dialogue, and listening.

St. Benedict, he pointed out, directs the abbot to "ensure that while the strong have something to strive for, the weak are not crushed."

That is very much Father Richard P. McBrien's plea in *Report on the Church: Catholicism After Vatican II* as he recalls the church's history since the Second Vatican Council.

Father McBrien, a regular columnist in the *Catholic Courier* and several other diocesan newspapers, presents here a selection of 138 of his almost

1,300 published columns.

Composed after the Second Vatican Council up until 1990, these columns are arranged in 11 chapters. Each chapter provides its own brief introduction to place these works in context. Providing a look forward into the next century, the 12th chapter "provides an exercise in extrapolation."

In the 11 chapters of selected columns, the story of postconciliar Catholicism — at times controversial and dissentient — is presented clearly, fairly and honestly.

The candor is always moderate, respectful and respectable. The final "report" on the church is sober, awesome and mixed: the church, as Father McBrien sees it, is marked "by uncertainty, demoralization, conflict, and alienation, on the one hand, and by a remarkable liturgical, ministerial, and spiritual renewal, on the other."

One of the most discerning of his columns is that on fundamentalism as a new phenomenon, the subject also of a recently completed five-year study by some 200 scholars who met at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

For Father McBrien, "Fundamentalism is marked by fear and rage that are directed not at the perceived enemy 'out there' but at coreligionists inside, including bishops, nuns, and theologians." It is biblical fundamentalism, not Hans Kung, that has helped to swell the ranks of Pentecostal sects with former Catholics.

Buffeted so often himself by coreligionists who do not pause to listen, he is especially appreciative of those in authority who befriend the attacked. His book, significantly, is dedicated to his late ordinary, Archbishop Francis Whealon of Hartford, "for his steadfast support." A stickler for detail and an ultraconservative by choice, the prelate understandably did not fully agree with all of Father McBrien's columns of some 20 years, "but he told others that he regarded them as balanced and orthodox."

Another "loyalist" in the interesting chapter on Personalities is New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman. Conservative in theology and devoted to the Holy See, Cardinal Spellman was also loyal to his own priests when he per-

ceived that they were victims of unfair foreign pressure and to the religious liberty cause of Father John Courtney Murray, SJ. Father Murray was then — like Rochester's Father Charles Curran today — a dissenting theologian.

Cardinal Spellman, Father McBrien writes, "would have understood, and applauded, Father Curran's bishop, Matthew Clark, of Rochester, New York, for rising immediately and courageously to the defense of one of his own priests..."

Despite the tensions in today's world and even the church — and Father Avery Dulles, SJ, sees these as healthy and proper — there is no excuse for name calling, denigration, and invective of Catholic against Catholic.

Perhaps Ireland's Bishop Brendan Comiskey put it best several years ago when he observed that the church "has most to fear from its unloving critics and its uncritical lovers. What the church needs is loving critics."

And Father McBrien is one of them.

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McMannus, a professor emeritus of English, lives in Venice, Fla.

## Breaking bread opens our eyes

By Sr. Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ  
Guest contributor

These Sundays of Easter bring us in close proximity to the Post-Resurrection stories that transformed Jesus' apostles and disciples.

The men going to Emmaus were taking flight from what looked to be a dismal situation. They were depressed as they walked this road, musing the events of the past few days. All they knew was that He was gone.

The transformation, the movement to ecstatic joy that compelled them to run back to Jerusalem, came in the guise of a stranger who joined them on this road. This stranger listened to their story and accepted their hospitality to stay with them.

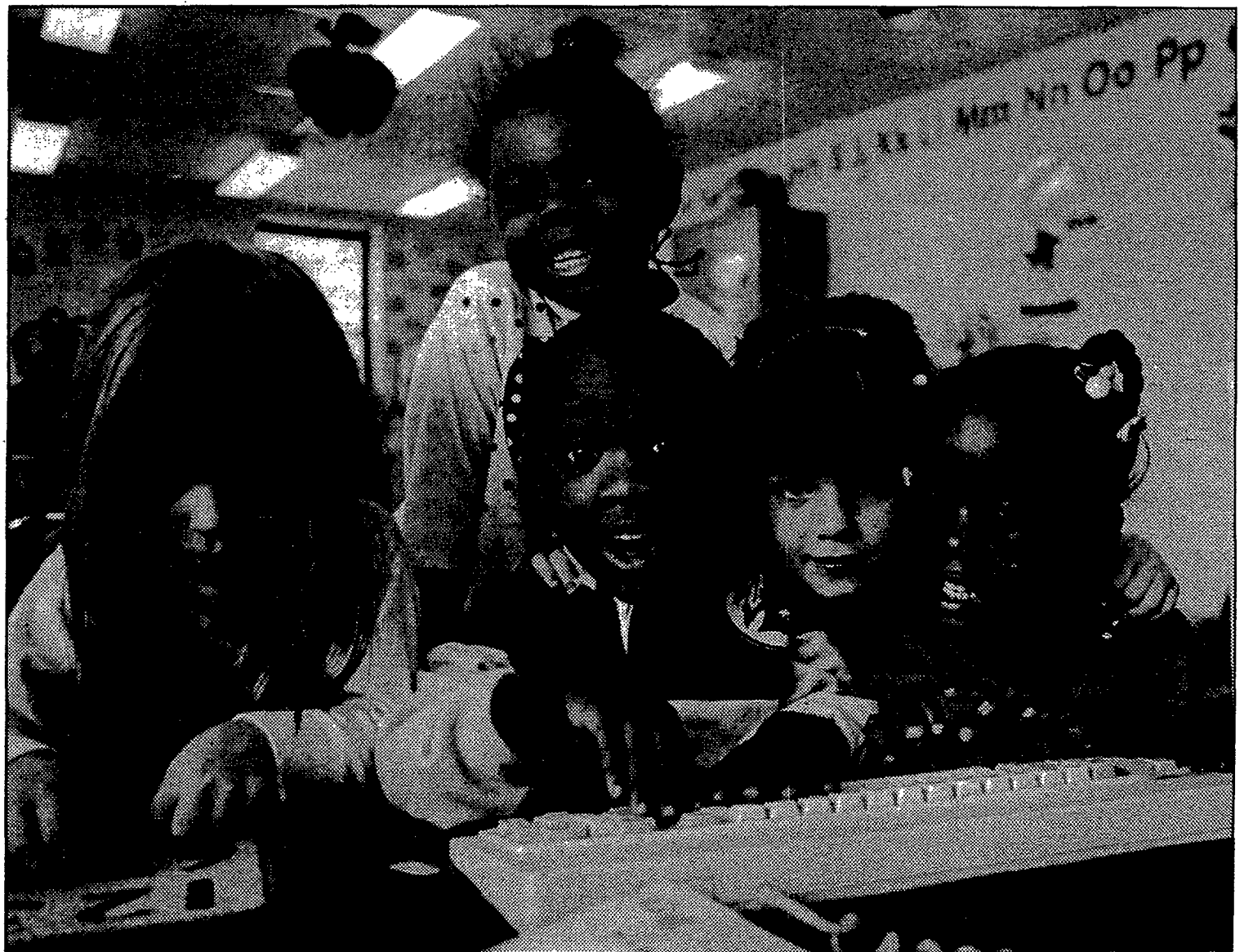
And around this table, during the simple act of breaking bread, His followers recognized the Risen One. Their eyes were opened, their world was whole again, their life had meaning, their despondent hearts were filled with the desire to tell this story to whomever would listen.

Were these disciples more fortunate than we are, in that they saw him, sat with him, heard him and responded to him? I think not because their encounter was one of faith coming alive. The certitude that brought them running back was a transforming heart not just the human knowledge of seeing. This breaking of the bread that opened their eyes is the same bread that opens our eyes. This story and this bread are the elements of our gathering around the table every Sunday.

Gathering around the table is by itself a transforming moment. We come from far and near, friends and strangers, weary, happy and confused, bringing our personal story to mingle with the stories of others. This mingling of stories bonds us and prepares us to encounter the Risen One in the story of the Scripture and the breaking of the bread. Around this table we come face to face with our loving God's self-giving. It is our response in faith to this self-giving that transforms us to receive and give of ourselves.

At the table we are reconciled, transformed and made one in Christ.

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Sister Heffernan is coordinator of the diocesan Office of Liturgy.



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