

## Is there salvation outside church?

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

The recent Women-Church Convergence Conference in Albuquerque, N.M., has probably generated a lot of tut-tutting even among some moderately liberal Catholics.

Some Catholic women stayed away from this year's conference (the Women-Church's third such gathering) because the program signalled, for them, a sharp turn away from traditional Catholicism, even of a reformist kind.

They pointed out that the conference brochure did not use the word "Catholic" and the word "liturgy" was changed to "sacred events." In the planning and in some prayer services, Jesus' name was rarely mentioned.

But other Catholic women took a more positive stance toward the conference, which one described as a "global ecumenical movement of feminist-based communities united in sacrament and solidarity."

They applauded the fact that conference rituals would be led by Buddhists, Native Americans, Quakers, Jews and others.

They were not troubled by its ecumenical outreach. One said, "I can enter into a different tradition, be moved by it and maintain a sense of integrity in terms of my Roman Catholic identity."

That, of course, is this moment in church history's special challenge. As



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

the late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner once argued, the church in this century is just beginning to become, for the first time, a truly world-church, one which is genuinely open to all cultures and all traditions.

Given this radically new situation, can the church retain its distinctive Christian identity and still be genuinely ecumenical, not just in an intra-Christian sense but in a global sense as well? The ecumenical issue that surfaced with the recent Women-Church conference goes to the heart of the problem of salvation for those outside the church.

For almost all of its history, the church has followed the negative

axiom, "No salvation outside the church." The Second Vatican Council transformed that into a positive principle: the church is the "universal sacrament of salvation."

In a recent book on the subject, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (Paulist Press), Father Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, who served for many years as a professor of ecclesiology at the Gregorian University in Rome, traces the discussion's history and shows how culturally conditioned both the theological debate and the official teaching have been.

Thus, during the first three centuries, the axiom, "No salvation outside the church," was used exclusively as a warning to Christians who had separated themselves from the church through adherence to a heretical or schismatic sect.

As long as Christianity was a forbidden and persecuted religion, there was no instance of such a warning being addressed to the pagans who were still the majority in the Roman empire.

From the end of the fourth century, however, after Christianity had become the empire's official religion, we begin to find such warnings addressed to pagans and Jews as well.

It was assumed — quite mistakenly, to be sure — that by then the Gospel had been preached to the earth's ends and that all had an opportunity to hear it and to accept it.

By the sixth century, a bishop named Fulgentius taught that pagans,

Jews, heretics and schismatics would be condemned to hell. His teaching remained the doctrine's standard expression for almost a thousand years, reaching its apex in what Father Sullivan calls the Council of Florence's "atrocious formulation" in 1442.

Thanks to the geographical discoveries of the latter part of the 15th century and beyond, and with the growth in understanding of human psychology, especially as it pertains to faith development, theologians began to look at the problem of the salvation of non-believers in a new light.

The change came only gradually at first, but it reached a decisive turning point at the Second Vatican Council, with its remarkable teaching that God's saving activity also occurs not only in non-Catholic Christian churches, but even outside of Christianity, in the world's many religions.

For the council, the church is the sacrament of what God is doing everywhere and for everyone.

Is the church still necessary for salvation? Yes.

But not in the sense that only those who actually belong to it can be saved. How such people are related to the mystery of salvation in Christ remains an open question.

One thing is certain, however. The negative axiom, "No salvation outside the church," has been set aside in favor of the positive formulation of Vatican II: the church is the "universal sacrament of salvation."

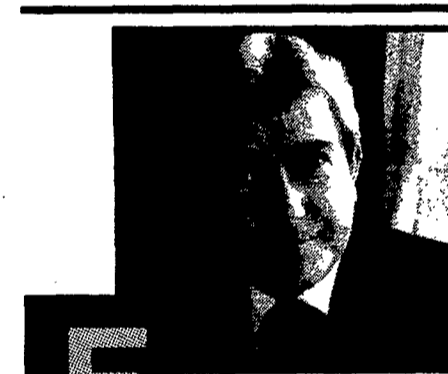
## Intersection of family, work is treacherous

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

The intersection of Family Street and Work Avenue is a very busy one. Traffic is always heavy, causing many wrong turns to be made. In addition, accidents happen often and are usually serious.

The issues surrounding the balancing of family and work lives — which are central to most people's daily lives — have a religious dimension. The faith community should help people in negotiating this treacherous crossroads.

The first question that must be addressed is whether family and work paths are heading in the same direction. Are the basic values underlying each compatible? Is there a basic integrity between the two? Does one take away from or in any way undermine the other?



### FAITH AND WORK

If parents, for instance, promote the equality of men and women in the home by teaching and by example,

they shouldn't tolerate a work environment where women are discriminated against, sexually harassed, or paid less than men for doing the same job. To do so would create an inconsistency of values between family and work certain to cause tension and conflict.

Similarly, if a person's religious beliefs include honesty and lack of covetousness, those beliefs must be in evidence both at home and on the job if they are to be real.

When to stop is another choice to make as one approaches this particular corner. Too many people ignore the stop signs and red lights — or hit the gas when the cautionary yellow signal flashes. The result is the wreckage of marriages and/or careers, with innocent victims often being the bystanders.

The pursuit of career goals without proper attention to family can lead to

disaster. Failure in the workplace to accommodate family needs or provide a living wage can place intense pressure on families. Likewise, family problems that intrude into the workplace, as well as the inability of families to recognize the legitimate concerns of employers, can detract from and even destroy work.

"Workaholism," while conceivably a positive thing for an employer, is devastating to the family. And while family closeness is a great value, that situation can be overdone if it suffocates the family member's ability to perform his or her job.

What is really needed at the intersection of Family and Work is a traffic cop, a role that the church could perform. Homilies, religious education, Bible study and sacramental preparation could all serve to help people learn how to balance these two very important facets of life.

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