

Priest is well thought of at Vatican

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

I suggested in a column four months ago that, had the pope been Irish rather than Polish, commentators would be focusing on the nature of church-state relations in Ireland and the evolution of the pope's theology, spirituality, and socio-political views within the context of Irish Catholicism, politics, and culture. But, of course, the pope is Polish, not Irish.

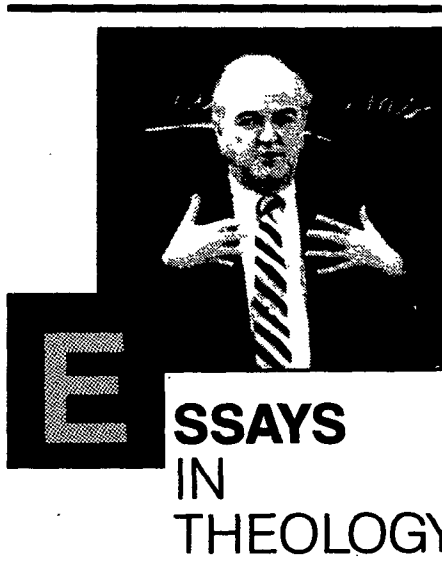
Therefore, it is important that we understand Polish Catholicism's nature, political life and culture so that we can better understand and appreciate the Holy Father's approach to some of the most pressing issues facing the church and the world today.

Of course, there are differences of interpretation — and one expects that.

Imagine, for example, the contrasting views that one would hear about Protestant Christianity in America if someone outside the United States were to consult, in sequence, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and the Rev. Martin Marty.

Imagine the same if the object of interest were the Catholic Church in America. The editor of *The Wanderer*, the executive director of Catholics for a Free Choice, and Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago would offer similarly divergent views. And still the whole spectrum of Catholic interpretation would not be represented.

In the case of Polish Catholicism,



ESSAYS
IN
THEOLOGY

politics and culture, one has to take into account a broad spectrum of views from a broad spectrum of sources, religious and secular alike.

Those who evaluate such material objectively, that is, without a prejudice for or against the Catholic Church in Poland, will detect a growing convergence of interpretation, whether it be in world-class papers such as *The New York Times*, or important international periodicals such as *Der Spiegel*, or the writings of major Polish intellectuals such as Nobel Prize-winner Czeslaw Milosz or Adam Michnik.

Michnik's recently translated book, *The Church and the Left* (University of Chicago, 1992; originally published in 1976), opens yet another window into that rich and fascinating culture and

into one of its proudest offsprings, Pope John Paul II.

Adam Michnik, an historian, political writer, and the chief editor of Poland's most important daily newspaper, was a founder of KOR (Workers' Defense Committee), which alongside the independent workers' movement paved the way for the eventual triumph of Solidarity in the 1980s. Indeed, he was a central figure in formulating the political deal (in the 1989 Round Table negotiations) that brought Solidarity to power.

Like many other leaders in the cause of Polish independence, Michnik had paid his dues with a prison sentence.

His book explains the alliance between the Catholic Church and the dissident Left, fashioned in the aftermath of the terrible repression of students, intellectuals, and Jews in 1968.

That event showed the Communist Party shamelessly tapping fascist traditions while many in the church defended the students. Blacklisted authors, including Jews, could find no place in which to publish except in the Catholic press.

As Michnik sat in jail, he knew that the world as he had known it had come apart. He had to rethink old concepts and strategies pertaining both to the Left and to the Church.

His book's main argument is that only through dialogue between secular and religious forces can a good and desirable democratic order be constructed.

Nevertheless, the book has provoked controversy in Poland. The author's secular intellectual audience applauded it as a significant contribution, while the Catholic hierarchy and some others, including the philosopher, Father Jozef Tischner, received it with considerable skepticism.

Father Tischner rejected totally and without qualification Michnik's rather restrained suggestion that perhaps the church ought to be more self-critical regarding its increasing involvement in the political sphere.

For Father Tischner, the church has nothing to explain or for which to apologize. It is right and its critics are wrong.

It is revealing of Michnik's determination to maintain the dialogue that he agreed to write the Foreword to the English edition of Father Tischner's book, wherein Father Tischner makes it clear that he opposes not just Marxism but virtually the Enlightenment's entire modern liberal legacy.

Liberalism means in this context respect for human rights, tolerance of dissident views, freedom of expression, due process, and the freedom of religion, but without the establishment of a state religion. This liberal spirit also exists in the church.

"Following the confrontation with Communism," Father Tischner wrote in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1990, "Christianity now faces the confrontation with liberalism."

Father Tischner is well thought of in the Vatican.

Jesus can do a lot with a little

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 14:13-21; (R1) Isaiah 55:1-3; (R2) Romans 8:35, 37-39.

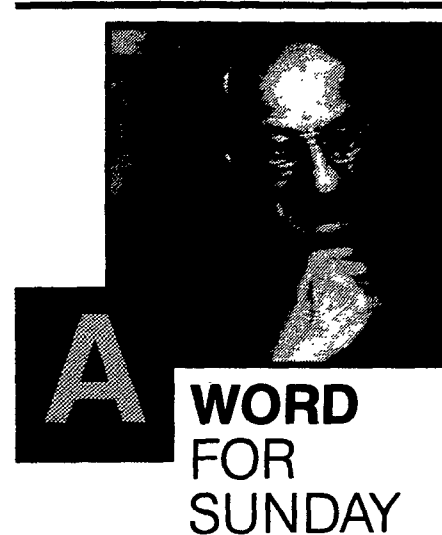
"When Jesus heard of it, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself," Sunday's Gospel begins.

Jesus had just received some tragic news. His cousin, John the Baptist, had been put to death. Jesus and John were close to each other since John had baptized Jesus. Now John was dead, so Jesus "withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself."

In times of crisis we need to seek quiet by ourselves. That was what Jesus was teaching us by His withdrawal upon hearing the news about John. Sometimes we call such withdrawals "retreats." An annual retreat or monthly day of recollection is so very important for our spiritual lives.

In her book, *The Way of Divine Love*, Sister Josefa Menendez claimed our Lord commented on Judas' kiss:

"The grass in the meadowlands has to be mown each year.



WORD
FOR
SUNDAY

The ground needs to be ploughed up, fertilized, and weeded each year.

So too we must watch and pray and fight against our evil inclinations and suffer them not to grow into confirmed habits.

It is not always a serious fault that leads to the worst sins.

The greatest faults are often the

result of the neglect of little things: a small satisfaction indulged in; a moment of weakness yielded to; a consent to do a thing in itself lawful, but unmortified; a pleasure, not sinful, but ill-advised here and now — all these things recur unheeded and little by little the soul is blinded, grace loses its power, passion increases and finally triumphs, as in the case of Judas." (March 14, 1923)

When Jesus disembarked from the boat, a vast crowd was waiting for Him. He could have sent them away by saying, "Can't you see I'm grieving? Don't bother me." He could have ignored them and gone on His way, but He didn't. He was moved with pity and He cured all their sick.

What a contrast to His disciples. It was getting late and the people were getting hungry. The disciples wanted to send them away. They came to Jesus and said, "Dismiss the crowds so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves." For the disciples that was the practical thing to do. But they had reckoned without Jesus. He said to them, "You feed them."

"Do what?," said the disciples. Were they hearing right? Five thousand men — not counting the women and the children — and only five loaves and two fish. Impossible!

They were wrong. Jesus can do a lot with a little. After Jesus blessed and broke them, the five loaves were distributed by the disciples. And there were even 12 full baskets left over after everyone had their fill.

So often we bank solely on our own resources — our bank account, physical fitness, and education. These are good, but they are not enough.

Hospital officials in a Midwestern city once discovered that their fire-fighting equipment had never been attached to the city's water main.

Yet for 35 years the hospital had thought otherwise. The medical staff and patients believed that they were secure if a blaze had broken out. But it was a false security.

Do we put faith in things that in moments of deepest need cannot provide an answer? Money, health, education all are valuable, but are they enough? Never, without Jesus.

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