

Pope made for lively topic in '93

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

I did a "pope-watch" column once before in which I reviewed all of my weekly essays published during the year to see how often I had mentioned the pope and to note what I had said about him in each instance.

The point of a pope-watch column will undoubtedly elude infrequent readers, but regular readers will recognize its purpose. By my admittedly fallible count, there were 14 substantive references to specific popes in this year's columns: seven references to Pope John Paul II, four to Pope Paul VI, and three to Pope Pius XII.

In the Feb. 5 column on the general topic of social justice, I noted that the current pope favors the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in his encyclicals and speeches on social justice.

In the April 23 column on the church's responsibilities toward its own employees, I began: "Since his election to the papacy in 1978, Pope John Paul II has established a splendid record in developing Catholic social teachings. He had issued three major social encyclicals and has given many powerfully prophetic talks all over the globe, not only where human suffering is most acute, but also in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and at the United Nations."

The July 23 column on clerical celibacy began with this paragraph:



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"Pope John Paul II has the courage of his convictions. One can only admire the consistency of the stand that he has taken on the screening of candidates for the ordained priesthood."

The reference was to his address to a group of U.S. bishops on their "ad limina" visit to the Holy See, in which he called for greater care in the selection of candidates for the priesthood, even though as I pointed out, this could lead to a further decline in numbers.

In a July 30 column on Catholicism in post-Communist Poland, I referred to Pope John Paul II as "one of the proudest offsprings" of Poland's "rich and fascinating culture."

In my Sept. 17 column on the

pope's visit to Denver, I referred to him as "a symbol of the unity of the worldwide family of Catholics," who "personifies ... what being a Catholic is all about: faith in Jesus Christ and his Gospel, hope in God's promise of salvation, and love for all without limit." The column went on to defend the pope against certain distortions of his message in the media.

The entire column of Oct. 22 was devoted to the pope's "important address" of Sept. 9 at the University of Latvia in Riga on social justice and Catholic social teaching.

So, too, the entire column the following week (Oct. 29) reflected on the pope's new encyclical, "Veritatis Splendor," which I proposed "belongs on the reading lists of moral theology courses at the college, university, and seminary levels."

I suggested further that "students should be energized anew by the pope's prophetic reaffirmation of the Gospel of love and freedom, so vigorously expressed in the biblically rich opening chapter." I concluded, "One truly finds there 'the splendor of truth.'"

But John Paul II was not the only pope who received substantive mention in the year's weekly essays.

The Feb. 12 column on church reform contained a positive reference to Pope Paul VI's 1975 apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," on the importance of the church's own witness in the work of evangelization. Only teachers who are witnesses to

what they teach, he wrote, can be effective teachers.

My May 7 column was on the month of May as a traditional time for devotion to Mary. This column summarized all of the key guidelines for Marian devotion contained in Pope Paul VI's 1974 encyclical "Marialis Cultus."

The Aug. 13 column was written to mark the 25th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical on birth control, "Humanae Vitae." The column, which was largely a summary of an article in *America* magazine by Jesuit moral theologian Father Richard McCormick, made reference to Paul VI's letter to the Congress of German Catholics in which he welcomed "the lively debate aroused by our encyclical" and expressed the hope that the debate would "lead to a better knowledge of God's will."

My Nov. 5 column identified Pope Pius XII's positive role in promoting the church's renewal prior to Vatican II in the areas of biblical studies, the liturgy, and ecclesiology.

The following week's column (Nov. 12) was on public opinion in the church and drew specifically from Pope Pius XII's 1950 address to an International Catholic Press Congress.

Finally, the Dec. 24 column referred to both Pius XII and Paul VI as two popes who insisted that peace is the work of justice.

Some call this "pope-bashing." Really.

Catholics have the truth, but not the zeal

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 1:7-11; (R1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; (R2) Acts 10:34-38.

Our Lord's baptism brings the Christmas cycle to its conclusion. His birth was meant to lead to our rebirth in baptism.

Baptism is the church's fundamental sacrament, just as birth is the basic prerequisite for human life. One must be before one can become. Action follows existence. We must be born to exist as a son of man; we must be reborn to exist as a son of God.

In His discourse with Nicodemus, our Lord spoke of baptism as a being born again. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes into the soul as in a temple (the divine indwelling). As the Spirit gave life to the first man, so He gives divine life to the baptized (sanctifying grace) — "Spirit begets spirit." As the flame touching the candle's wick enkindles another flame, so the Holy Spirit dwelling in the soul at baptism transfigures it, making it a *child of God* and an heir to God's kingdom.

Baptism does three things.

First, it makes one a child of God,



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for the Holy Spirit imparts a share in the divine nature. Thus the "Our Father" is prayed at baptism. And we call the priest "Father" because he administers this divine life.

Secondly, it makes one a *child of the church*. Nobody is born Catholic. One is baptized Catholic. Baptism makes one a member of the church family. And the church, like any family, acts as a support community. After baptism one can receive all the other

sacraments of the church. At the same time, baptism challenges one to become a good member of the family, not to disgrace it. And so a third effect of the sacrament is a call.

Baptism is a call to be a witness to the good news, to build up the body of Christ, the church. That is why a lighted candle is given at baptism, and the baptized are told to be lights of the world. God gave us two legs, not just to stand on, but to be able to move about. So faith and divine life are given us at baptism, not to be hoarded or to be put under a bushel basket, but to be shared with others.

We are called, not for privilege, but for mission.

Baptism is only one of the sacraments of initiation: confirmation and the holy Eucharist are the other two. Baptism is a call to build up the body of Christ. This is done both from without and from within.

The body of Christ is built up from without by the sacrament of confirmation. This sacrament provides the fullness of the Holy Spirit who empowers the baptized with courage and understanding so that they can be witnesses and evangelists. We might well ask ourselves, "How many persons

have I brought to the priest to be instructed in the Catholic faith?" No one should go to heaven alone.

By being evangelists, we fulfill in part the call at baptism to be lights of the world. To show the tie-in of confirmation with baptism, one renews his baptismal promises at confirmation.

The body of Christ is built up from within by the sacrament of the holy Eucharist. Unity is the sacramental grace of the holy Eucharist. The bond of unity is love. The source of love is God. At each Mass love is poured into us by the sacrament of love, holy Communion, and the God of love, the Holy Spirit. Thus we pray after the consecration, "May all of us who are nourished by the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit" (Euch, prayer II). Thus Augustine could say, "The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church" — a community of loving people.

To show the tie-in with baptism, both water and blood flowed from the side of the dying Christ.

We are called to be evangelists. The Jehovah Witnesses do not have the truth, but they have the zeal. We have the truth, but not the zeal.

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