

1960s were troubling, liberating

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

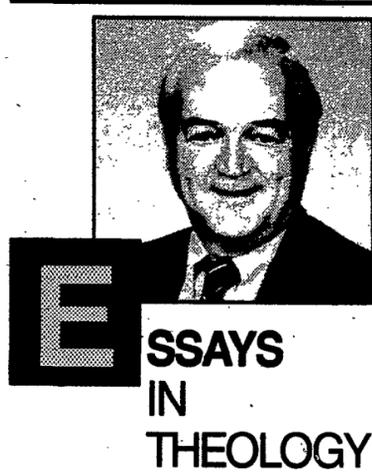
The Jan. 3 issue of *Newsweek*, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary, features a series of essays on the magazine's six decades of existence. Garry Wills' piece on the '60s is exceptionally good. Much that he has to say about U.S. culture is readily applicable to the Catholic Church as well, although this week's column will leave most of that to the reader's imagination.

The '60s, he says, split our history into a before and an after. Where World War II drew us together in a common effort, the '60s drove people apart — husbands from wives, children from parents, students from teachers, citizens from their government.

While authority had been strengthened by World War II, Wills observes, it was challenged by the '60s.

As a consequence, the '60s play the same role in modern conservative thought that the Fall does in Christian theology. Everything bad in our society today is blamed automatically on the '60s: crime, drugs, the breakdown of the family, the collapse of our schools. Catholic conservatives would add the ruin of their church.

But when critics of the '60s characterize it as a violent decade, Wills points out, "they tend to forget that most of the illegality, the coercion, the violence, was official."



It was the police who murdered Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader. It was the FBI that "schemed at" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. It was the CIA that murdered abroad. And it was the Nixon administration that broke laws, in the illegal May Day arrests of hundreds of citizens and in the bribes and bribes surrounding Watergate.

Richard Nixon had vowed in the 1968 campaign to replace Ramsey Clark with a law-and-order attorney general, and instead he replaced him with a crook, John Mitchell. Mitchell subsequently tried to send anti-war demonstrators such as Father Philip Berrigan to jail on the basis of tainted

evidence, but instead Mitchell himself went to jail.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover even opened an FBI file on Garry Wills for some less-than-respectful words about Carl C. Turner, after Wills had interviewed him on the Pentagon's plan to quell demonstrations. But it was General Turner, the provost marshal general of the U.S. Army, who would later be convicted of stealing rare guns for his private collection.

Which is not to say, Wills concedes, that excesses and tragedies were only to be found on the official side of the line. There were excesses of hedonism and there were messed-up and wrecked lives on the other side as well.

"But only the historically myopic would really want to go back to the pre-'60s world," Wills argues. "It was a place, remember, where segregation still reigned, where Emmett Till could be murdered with official connivance, where women were second-class citizens on many college campuses and benches from the boardrooms, federal benches and political office."

The civil rights movement, he points out, brought about profound changes even beyond the field of struggle for racial justice. It set the pattern for others to demand their rights: women, gays, Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans, Asian-Americans.

If it were not for the '60s, Colin Pow-

ell would not be who he is where he is today, nor would Hillary Rodham Clinton, Congressman Barney Frank, or U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

"The greatest change in our lifetime — the women's movement, freeing the talents of the human race — got its greatest boost from the people who became activists in the '60s," Wills writes.

"It is odd," he continues, "to hear conservatives say that the '60s caused disrespect for authority — this from people who applauded Ronald Reagan as he said, while in government, that government is the problem not the solution, that it must be starved and mocked. This position used to be called anarchism."

"The 50s," Wills concludes, "were not a golden age — there is no golden age. Much of the moral contentment of that time was based on moral obtuseness. Some of the moral anguish of our time is based on moral alertness, an awareness of others' rights."

"Insofar as the '60s are still a force in our present, we need more of them, not less — more civil rights, more women's rights, more gay rights, more citizens' say in government, less censorship and less hypocrisy."

"The '60s, too, were not the good old days — there are no good old days. But much of what is good around us took its origin from that troubled and troubling time."

Some people miss Lent's whole picture

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 1:12-15; (R1) Genesis 9:8-15; (R2) 1 Peter 3:18-22.

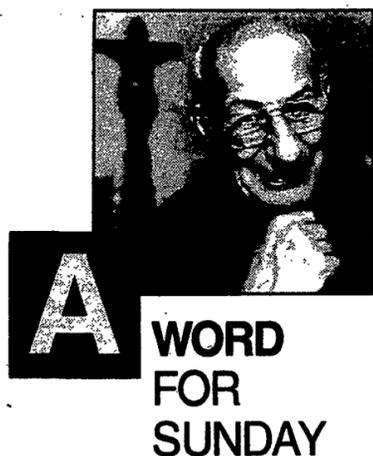
A French priest says what follows actually happened to him:

An armed robber accosted him on a dark street in Paris and demanded his wallet. As the priest opened his coat to reach for the wallet, the thief caught sight of his clerical collar for the first time and immediately apologized: "Never mind, Father, I didn't realize you were a priest — I'll be on my way."

The priest was relieved, of course, and good-naturedly offered the man a cigar. "No, thank you, smoking's the robber said. "I gave up smoking for Lent."

Apparently, the robber didn't get the whole picture of Lent. Then, too, neither do a lot of other people. Lent is not just a season of minor inconveniences. Jesus said, "Reform your lives."

Too often we approach Lent with the attitude of the man who, when told by his doctor that the best thing he could do was to give up drinking and carousing, asked, "What's the next best thing?"



The Lenten Season has a twofold character: (1) it recalls baptism or prepares for it; and (2) it stresses a penitential spirit.

The flood, as St. Peter saw, was a symbol of our baptism. The flood in Noah's day wiped out the flood of sin and thus saved a few from sin's corruption. Baptism destroys original sin and gives the life of grace. When Noah stepped out of the ark, God made a covenant with him to live a good life. Baptism calls us to live the life of grace.

Though baptism removes the original sin, it does not eliminate the strong tendency of man to sin. Our wills are weakened, our minds prone to error, our passions pull us toward unlawful pleasures. Hence the need for penance.

Penance is self-denial. We deny ourselves for two reasons: to atone for our past sins — that's penance properly so-called; or to acquire self-mastery over our passions — that's called mortification.

Our Lenten self-denial should have this twofold purpose. We should atone for our past sins; hence our penances should hurt. Too often lenten penances are merely giving up candy or cigarettes or sugar in coffee or cutting that on TV watching. That's OK. That's mortification: good to get self-mastery.

But we should do penance too — "reform our lives." What about interpersonal relationships? Being faithful to your duties as husband and wife; being loving, kind, patient, and sensitive to each other. Bearing with patience, the trials of earthly life and its utter insecurity. Accepting difficulties arising from one's work or difficulty with others. Linus said: "Mankind I love; people, I hate." It's easy to live with the

saints in glory; but with those on earth — ah, that's a different story.

But best of all, how about daily Mass? Weekly Bible reading? The family rosary. Religious instruction in the home. The other day an attorney visited me with his two children. The boy was 6. As we visited, the boy's father asked his son to recite the "Hail Mary" for me — in Latin!

Believe it or not, the 6-year old recited it beautifully and perfectly. I was astounded. I asked how he learned it. His father said, "I taught him."

Lent is a time of opportunity, a time of grace. Remember the haunting poem, "The Road Not Taken," by Robert Frost?

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And look down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other,*

Then he concludes:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in the wood,
and I — I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

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