

Church needs to lead by example

By Richard P. McBrien
Staff writer

Twelve years ago Pope John Paul II established a new Vatican office called the Pontifical Council of Culture in order to promote dialogue and collaboration between the church and culture.

The pope has taken his cue from the Second Vatican Council. According to the council, every culture has some good in it, which is why dialogue and collaboration make sense.

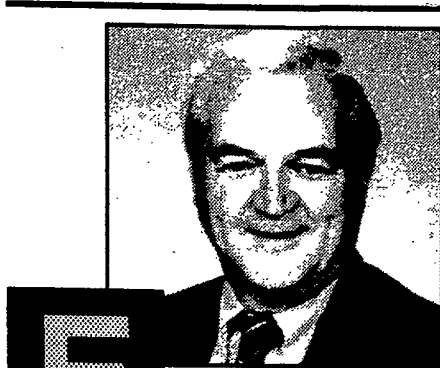
For Vatican II, culture's radical goodness is rooted in the incarnational principle. God has become incarnate in Jesus Christ and — through the humanity of the Son — has "spoken according to the culture proper to different ages" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 58.) Consequently, there are "many links between the message of salvation and human culture."

This is not to say, however, that every culture is fully consistent with the Gospel or with human dignity, which, as Pope John Paul II is fond of saying, is at the heart of the gospel message.

The council acknowledges that "it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching" (n. 62.)

Missionaries were among the first to confront the problem. Many of them came among native peoples with the preconceived notion that everything in their culture would have to be set aside as alien to the Gospel.

Others had a more irenic approach. They saw each culture as touched somehow by the grace of God, and their own



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

task as one of drawing out the good that was already present there.

Two recent films, both involving Jesuit missionaries a continent and a century apart, point up the contrast in theological and pastoral mentalities: *Black Robe* reflects the more negative approach to native cultures: *The Mission*, the more positive.

That tension still exists in today's church. On one side, we have Catholics who emphasize the disparity between culture and Gospel. The church, they say, must be counter-cultural.

A different view is taken by those who, like Father Gabriel in *The Mission*, believe that there is some good in all cultures and who regard it as the church's task to discover it, nurture it, and even learn from it and be enriched by it.

In a recent address to the Woodstock Forum at Georgetown University, a modern-day Jesuit, Father Avery Dulles, takes a position closer to the second view.

Father Dulles is critical of those who "reject the prevalent culture and cling to the culture of medieval Europe as it comes down to us through its baroque and romantic incarnations."

He points out that, while this view may be appealing to a relatively small group of older conservative Catholics who favorably recall the church's Latin liturgy and its strong clerical caste system, it is "not a realistic possibility for most young Americans, for whom pre-Vatican II Catholicism is not a living memory."

Father Dulles argues instead that the church should enter into "critical dialogue with contemporary culture, opposing what is faulty and attempting to supply what is lacking in them," as it did in the cases of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, and of the Germanic and Slavic peoples.

But dialogue is always a two-way street. Not only does the church have something to contribute to a given culture (by way of evangelization), but culture also has something to contribute to the church, as yet another great Jesuit missionary to China, Father Matteo Ricci, maintained.

Nevertheless, what Father Dulles does say about one of the two tracks of the dialogue, that is, from the church to culture, is marked by great practical wisdom.

He warns against indiscriminate co-

operation with others simply because the church may agree with them on one issue or another. "(We) should be wary," he writes, "of entering into potentially compromising alliances that are dominated by other religious groups, such as the Moral Majority of Rev. Jerry Falwell (a group no longer in existence) and the Christian Coalition of Pat Robertson."

One important area where Catholics can profitably enter into dialogue with the dominant culture, Father Dulles concludes, is that of its social teaching, so carefully developed over the past 100 years, from Popes Leo XIII to John Paul II.

"If these principles are ... convincingly proclaimed, the Catholic Church can help to narrow the gap between the Gospel and contemporary culture," the Jesuit priest writes.

But, as Father Dulles points out earlier in his paper, the church's "greatest service to secular society" is not through direct social and political action, but through the religious and moral formation of its own members.

Accordingly, if the church hopes to bring its rich social teaching to bear on contemporary culture, it has to begin by applying it to itself, that is, by practicing within its own household what it preaches to others about justice and human dignity.

If the modern world listens to teachers, Pope Paul VI reminded us in his 1975 apostolic exhortation on evangelization, "it is because they are witnesses." In teaching, there is no substitute for example.

The good shepherd puts flock before self

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

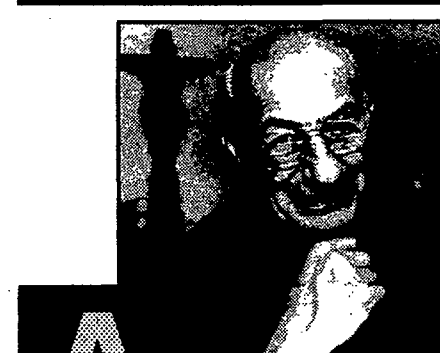
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 10:11-18; (R1) Acts 4:8-12; (R2) 1 John 3:1-2.

Twice in Sunday's Gospel Jesus calls himself "the good shepherd."

Judea's main section is a central plateau, 14 to 17 miles wide, and 35 miles long, stretching from Bethel to Hebron. Judea, therefore, was naturally more suited to shepherding than farming. As a result, a shepherd was a common sight on the Judean uplands.

The sheep needed ever to be watched lest they graze off the narrow plateau. In addition, they needed to be protected against wild animals and thieves. The shepherd was always on duty. He had to be constantly vigilant, fearless and caring for the sheep. Thus he became the symbol of the kings of Judea and the reason why Jesus chose to call himself "the good shepherd."

The shepherd's equipment was very simple. He had a bag made of animal skin in which he carried his food. He also had a sling. His skill in using it was remarkable. He had no sheep dog, so when a sheep tended to stray, he put a stone in his sling and shot it



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

just in front of the straying sheep's nose as a warning to turn back.

David met Goliath with his sling. He had a staff, or wooden club, to beat off marauding beasts and robbers. David with his staff killed a lion and a bear. He had a rod, or the shepherd's crook, by which he could pull back a sheep that was straying or lift one up if trapped on a ledge. "Thy rod and staff they comfort me."

In the Gospel Jesus contrasts the good and the bad shepherd. The good

shepherd grew into his calling; the sheep were his friends and companions. He thought of them before he thought of himself. In fact, he would lay down his life for his sheep.

But the bad shepherd had no such commitment. He was a shepherd solely for the money he could get out of the job. He had no sense of responsibility. Should wolves attack the flock, he would head for the hills to save his own life. The good shepherd thinks of the flock; the bad one, of himself.

The Greek language has two words for "good": *agathos* and *kalos*. *Agathos* simply describes a person or thing as competent, sound, all right. *Kalos* describes a person or thing not only as good, but also as winsome, attractive, lovely. When Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd," He used the word *kalos*. He is more than efficient; he is faithful, kind and loving. When we say that someone is "a good doctor," we mean more than his skill. We are thinking of his sympathy, kindness and graciousness.

Phillip Keller, in his commentary on the shepherd Psalm 23, describes Jesus this way: "He was the most balanced and perhaps the most beloved being ever to enter the society of men. Though born amid most disgusting

surroundings, the member of a modest working family, He bore Himself always with great dignity and assurance. Though He enjoyed no special advantages as a child, either in education or employment, His entire philosophy and outlook on life were the highest standards of human conduct ever set before mankind. Though He had no vast economic assets, political power or military might, no other person, ever made such an enormous impact on the world's history. Because of Him millions of people across almost twenty centuries of time have come into a life of decency and honor and noble conduct."

Keller continues: "Not only was He gentle and tender and true but also righteous, stern as steel, and terribly tough on phony people."

"He was magnificent in His magnanimous spirit of forgiveness for the fallen folk ..."

"He came to set men free from their own sins, their own selves, their own fears ..."

"It is this One who insists that he was the Good Shepherd, the understanding Shepherd, the concerned Shepherd, who cares enough to seek out and save and restore lost men and women."

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"The concern of
the flesh is death,
but the concern of
the spirit is life
and peace."

-Romans 8, 6