

Successors are tough to predict

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Once again the pope's health is a matter of interest and concern, and that, in turn, raises the issue of papal succession. The pontiff has fallen twice in recent months, breaking first his arm and then his hip. Recent reports — especially from priests who have celebrated Mass with him in his private chapel this spring — indicate that the pope also has Parkinson's disease.

In previous columns I have challenged the conventional wisdom that popes are usually, if not always, succeeded by carbon copies of themselves. Many people believe this to be the case because the pope appoints many, if not most, of the cardinals who will elect his successor.

However, for anyone who has studied the history of the papacy, it is clear that popes are just as likely to be succeeded by someone different from themselves in mentality and style as they are by someone cast from the same temperamental or pastoral mold.

Let's take a look at the last two centuries.

After one of the longest pontificates in history (nearly 25 years), Pope Pius VI's successor should have been a for-gone conclusion. According to today's assumption, the cardinals should have selected his mirror-image.

But it took 14 weeks to break a stalemate among the cardinal-electors, and the worldly and extravagant Pius VI was succeeded by a self-effacing Bene-



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dictine, who restored the papacy's prestige after a reign of more than 23 years.

After a long time in office, Pius VII should also have been succeeded by someone just like himself: relatively progressive and open to new currents of democracy in the world.

That might have been Pius VII's personal choice, Cardinal Francesco Castiglione. But at the conclave of 1823 the cardinals wanted a break with the previous pontificate's liberal policies and a return to a more conservative approach. They chose a man who had been private secretary to the worldly Pius VI. The new pope took the name Leo XII.

Although he was himself a simple and devout man, history records him

as one of the most reactionary popes of modern times. After immediately replacing Pius's cardinal-secretary of state with a conservative, Leo condemned toleration, reinforced the Index of Forbidden Books and the Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), restored the feudal aristocracy in the papal states, halted the growing use of laity in ecclesiastical administration, and confined Jews once again to ghettos.

He died after five and a half years and was succeeded — by another conservative? No. His successor was the moderate Cardinal Castiglione, the candidate who had been the favorite of Pius VII. Castiglione took the name of his patron, becoming Pius VIII.

Pius VIII was succeeded by someone more like Leo XII than himself. After a 50-day conclave, the cardinals selected a fellow cardinal who had been a Camaldolese monk. He took the name Gregory XVI.

History records his pontificate as more reactionary (literally so, that is, "in reaction against" modern developments like democracy) than that of Leo XII. Gregory is perhaps best known for having banned trains from the papal states.

The French idiom for railway, or railroad, is *chemin de fer* (the way, or road, of iron). The new pope called them *chemins d'enfer* (the ways, or roads, of hell).

Gregory reigned for 15 and a half years — plenty of time to name enough cardinals to ensure a succes-

sor just like himself. But once again that was not to be.

The new pope was considered a liberal in his day because he favored administrative changes in the papal states and sympathized with Italian national aspirations. At a two-day conclave Pius IX was elected over the reactionary Cardinal Lambruschini.

For reasons too complex to summarize here, by the time Pius IX died, some 32 years later, he, too, was regarded as a reactionary. But was he succeeded by a carbon copy? No. Yet again a very different kind of man was elected. As is often the case, the cardinals, even those appointed by Pius IX, thought it time for a change.

After 25 years as pope, the progressive Leo XIII was succeeded by the very conservative — even if saintly — Pius X. After 11 years, Pius X was succeeded by the progressive Benedict XV, and he, after seven and a half years, by the more conservative Pius XI, and he, 17 years later, by the moderate, but relatively austere, Pius XII, and he, nearly 20 years later, by John XXIII.

One gets the point. And the point bursts the balloon of the conventional assumption that popes are usually succeeded by someone just like themselves, because, after all, they appoint most of the cardinals who will elect their successor.

History teaches us that it doesn't usually happen that way. This news may encourage some — and should give pause to others.

Not every believer is 'in Christ'

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 4:35-41; (R1) Job 38:1, 8-11; (R2) 2 Corinthians 5:14-17.

People are funny sometimes. Many businesses in Utah joined with the tourist bureau to urge residents of that magnificent state to spend their vacation dollars at home. One such promotion sponsored by a food-store chain was a photo contest. The theme was "Travel Utah First." The grand prize was a trip to Hawaii.

Preaching is so much easier than practicing. In Sunday's second reading, St. Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." The important word is "if." Not everyone who believes is "in Christ."

It seems to be a misprint, like the mistake that appeared in a church bulletin, which read: "Our pastor is leaving our Church for a new appointment. We are asking each parishioner to make a small donation. We would like to give him a little momentum."

Not every believer is "in Christ." How do we know? Because St. Paul



WORD FOR SUNDAY

said if anyone is in Christ that person is a new creation. That's a pretty good way to tell: does our commitment to Christ make us a new person?

A Christian was riding in a taxi cab in Chicago. His driver was a Muslim. The driver said, "Now that communism is collapsing, everyone should be a Muslim."

The Christian asked, "Why do you

think that?"

"Because Muslim is a way of life," the driver replied.

Then the Christian asked, "Well, what about Christianity?"

The driver said, "No; Christianity isn't a way of life," and he proved his point by describing some Christians that he knew and observed. That is sad.

A study done a while back revealed that people who attend church were no different than those who do not. But among those who were active church members, those people in Christ, the differences were major. They were found to be more compassionate, much more giving, more Christ-like, if you will.

If anyone is in Christ, you can tell by his or her attitude. They are open to others, compassionate, willing to listen, kind and charitable.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that while he was in prison in Hitler's Germany, he often felt a closer kinship with the non-Christians he met than with his fellow church members who wore their religion on their sleeves. Non-Christians seemed to him to be more genuine human beings, and they at-

tracted him, while some of the religious folks repelled him. The difference was in attitude.

The Trinity is a set of relationships. The Gospel is an invitation to relationships. To be "in Christ" is to be in a proper relationship with God, with one another, and with people at large. A person who is in Christ will be a better neighbor, a better spouse, a better parent, and a better church member.

We are not saved in isolation. God willed to save us through others — through His church. Because people constitute the church, it is not always what it should be. At times it does not seem to be all that God means it to be; yet it is His instrument of salvation.

We should never try to go it alone. We need others and others need us. That is why if we are in Christ, we shall try to build up the community that is the church.

Being in Christ is saying, "because he died for me, I will live for him." To be in Christ is to pray daily for the right attitude, for more authentic relationships, to pray for our church. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

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