

Professor's column gets it wrong

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

One of my editors in the midwest recently faxed me a column by James Hitchcock in which I am mentioned twice. The references are consistently inaccurate.

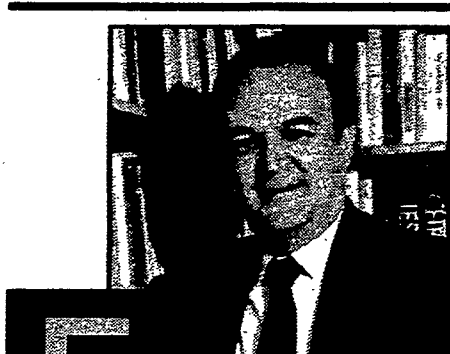
Professor Hitchcock describes me as one "who has seldom met a papal document which he liked." Since I don't regularly see or read his column, I can only guess that my annual average of favorable references to papal documents is higher than his. And that includes documents from the current pope as well — for starters, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991).

And if I were to go all the way back to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and the other popes in between, I would need one or two sequels to this week's column to complete the record.

Professor Hitchcock not only exaggerates, he also misquotes. He claims that I told the media that the pope's recent letter on the ordination of women "must be overturned by (John Paul's) successors." I don't know where he got that quote. I never said it.

If there were such an interview and if the word I used were "could" rather than "must," that would be closer to the mark. There's a world of difference between the two words as any careful scholar — or columnist — should know.

Professor Hitchcock's other refer-



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

ence is to a column by Anna Quindlen in *The New York Times*. He doesn't identify it as such, but that's where he got the quote. And once again (two for two) he gets it wrong.

Being a Catholic, he has me saying, is like "belonging to a private club that won't admit blacks or Jews."

As anyone who actually read Quindlen's column knows, my reference was not to the church but to the priesthood, and it was by way of expressing an anguished sense of solidarity with so many Catholic women who feel hurt and further alienated by the pope's letter.

Perhaps Professor Hitchcock should turn his attention now to a recent interview of Michael Novak which appears in the May/June newsletter of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty.

In the interview, Mr. Novak repeats his praise of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

(I like it, too, by the way. Professor Hitchcock undoubtedly missed by umpteenth favorable reference to it in last week's column.)

Mr. Novak describes the encyclical as "a critical reflection on the best of the preceding hundred years of papal social thought. It draws together the most creative and effective tendencies in that history ..." So far, so good.

But there is a comma, not a period, after the word "history." The sentence continues: "setting aside the wrong turns and the tentative gropings that were not so successful."

Could we replay that? "Wrong turns?" "Tentative gropings?" To whom is Mr. Novak referring? The wicked dissenters and the despised feminists of Professor Hitchcock's recent column? No, not them. Mr. Novak is talking about popes and papal teachings.

Somehow during that grand and glorious century of prophetic papal teachings on social justice, popes took "wrong turns" and were engaged in "tentative gropings."

The obvious question to put to Mr. Novak is how do we know when a pope has made a "wrong turn?" How do we know when a pope is only "tentatively groping?"

By Professor Hitchcock's standards, that never happens. Furthermore, it's not our place as loyal Catholics to second-guess a pope.

Professor Hitchcock, meet Mr. Novak. Mr. Novak, meet Professor Hitch-

cock. One final item: I've been asked in recent days about the new "Catechism of the Catholic Church," and specifically about how it relates to the new edition of my own book, *Catholicism*, just published by HarperCollins in San Francisco.

I regard the two books as complementary, not competitive. In fact, in my Preface I list the catechism among the "basic reference works which the reader might usefully consult," and I cite the catechism several times throughout the book.

Second, the catechism is essentially a compendium of the church's official teachings on a whole range of doctrinal and moral issues. My book does that, too, but it also provides an historical framework for all these teachings, as well as a summary of the theological discussion surrounding them.

Third, the catechism's English translation is deliberately gender-exclusive. It goes out of its way to use words like "mankind" where it could have said "human beings," and to use "men" instead of "people," or "brothers," instead of "brothers and sisters," and "sons" instead of "sons and daughters."

The language and tone of *Catholicism* is closer to the English translation done under the close supervision of Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law. That translation, as everyone knows by now, was subsequently withdrawn and reworked under intense pressure from the sort of "anti-feminist" Catholics Professor Hitchcock so admires.

If Cardinal Law can no longer be entrusted with such a mission, we all need new ecclesiastical scorecards.

Yearn for 'food' to nourish soul

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

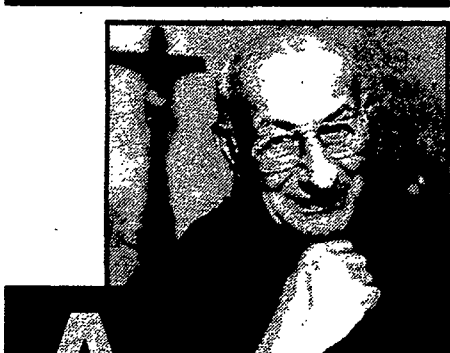
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:24-35; (R1) Exodus 16:2-24, 12-15; (R2) Ephesians 4:17, 20-24.

After the miracle with the loaves and the fish, Jesus walked on the water to Capernaum. The very next day, crowds tracked him down. When they found Him, they asked, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus ignored their question. Instead He told them that they have sought him out because they had eaten their fill of the loaves.

The Greek verb for eating is *xortazo*, which means to give fodder to animals, and then in a derogatory sense of human eating, as when we say, "feeding your face." It was as if Jesus said, "Stop thinking only about your stomachs."

It is only natural to be concerned with life's necessities. God knows that we need such things (Matt. 6:32). But this bread is destined to perish along with the people it nourishes.

Milo, the strongman of ancient Greece, could carry a full grown ox upon his shoulders. The Roman orator Cicero met the athlete when he was an old man. The famous muscles



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

were now but useless sagging strings and Milo cried for his lost vigor. Since Milo had nothing else in life than physical strength, Cicero judged him a failure.

Without neglecting the muscles which inevitably will deteriorate, we must desire more. Just as there is a food which strengthens the body, so there is a food which nourishes the soul. Jesus said, "Work for food that remains unto life eternal, food which

the son of Man will give you." As St. Augustine remarked: "Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not."

But the crowds wanted another kind of bread, like the manna Moses gave their fathers in the desert. But Jesus is inexorable: "I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry."

But the crowds did not savor these words. Christ lost not some hundreds or thousands, but most of His followers through these words.

Bread, in the technical sense of the word, is a discovery of man — one of his first great chemical triumphs. It has been the world's basic food substance since it was discovered, probably 10,000 years ago.

Bread is a product baked in an oven from dough leavened by yeast. Some of the gases produced by the leaven are imprisoned in the dough. The pores containing these gases are hardened and made permanent by heat. Only wheat and rye flour can retain these gases.

Bread reigned over the ancient world; no food before or after exerted such mastery over the human race. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a name which means, "house of bread." The

devil suggested that if Jesus wanted to do something for His people, let him destroy famine — change stones into bread. It was a great temptation: to seek only bread. So Jesus said, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus understood bread's real value as human food. He said, "When your son asks for bread, you do not give him a stone." Bread is even more important than a neighbor's sleep (Lk. 11:5-8). In the Lord's Prayer, He taught us to ask for "daily bread."

But Jesus spoke of another bread, Himself, which would give eternal life. At the Last Supper He gave us this bread when He said, "Take and eat, 'This is my body.'"

St. Thomas Aquinas said of this bread: "ecce panis angelorum, / Factus cibus viatorum; / Vere panis filiorum, / Non mittendus canibus." "Lo! the Angels' Food is given; / To the pilgrim who hath striven; / See the children's Bread from heaven, / which on dogs may not be spent."

How we ought to hunger for this bread which makes men strong and pledges life eternal.

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3. our neighbors
4. wisdom and knowledge
5. carry one another's burdens

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