

Post-Vatican II Catholic speaks out

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

If statements are made often enough and if, for the most part, they go unchallenged, after a while some people will begin to assume them to be true.

One of the most frequently repeated statements about the post-Vatican II church is that, since the council, Catholics no longer know what they are supposed to believe or how they are supposed to behave.

According to this view, theologians propound their own dissenting version of Catholic doctrine and morality, while Catholic school teachers and parish religious educators pass on a doctrinally and morally spineless feel-good, do-good rendition of the faith.

The result is confusion all around, marked by expressions of unorthodoxy at every level of the church, including the hierarchy.

For those who have been inclined to accept this point of view, but who still have an open mind about it, I recommend a recent article in the July 16-23 *America* magazine titled, "The Making of a Post-Vatican II Theologian."

The author is a young Dominican priest, John J. Markey, who is currently studying for his doctorate in theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.

Father Markey was born two weeks before Pope John XXIII officially convoked the Second Vatican Council. Less than a year after the council ended in December, 1965, he was in kindergarten in a parochial school in



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Colorado.

He attended Catholic grammar school, high school, college, seminary, and university, but never attended a Latin Mass, was never taught the Baltimore Catechism, was not imbued from an early age with "Catholic guilt," never went to confession in the "box," and has no memory of meatless Fridays except occasionally during Lent.

None of his Catholic school teachers who happened to be women religious, brothers, and priests wore the full habit other than an occasional veil. He remembers them — with very few exceptions — as interesting, compassionate, and entertaining mentors, marked by a combination of dedication, camaraderie, and joy. Because of their witness, in large part, he was led to his present state in life as a Do-

minican priest.

He wrote this article because it had occurred to him recently that he is among the first of a generation raised and educated entirely in the post-Vatican II Church, that is, in a religious and educational context that differs profoundly from the era that immediately preceded it. His *America* article is a personal account of what he has learned.

He writes of six characteristics of post-Vatican II Catholic education: first, the centrality of Scripture; second, the recognition of diversity and pluralism; third, a more nuanced understanding of authority; fourth, a recognition of the dignity and equality of women; fifth, a sensitivity to the problem of evil in the world; and sixth, a holistic understanding of morality.

Since it is impossible within this space even to summarize Father Markey's reflections on each of these characteristics, I will limit myself to highlighting a single paragraph (broken up here for editorial purposes) that most directly contradicts the assumption mentioned at the beginning of this week's column; namely, that post-Vatican II Catholic education has somehow been controlled by dissenters bent upon spreading confusion and error.

"In 25 years of Catholic education," he writes, "I have never been taught by anyone even remotely dissenting or unorthodox." (His educational experience, I should add, has included the University of Notre Dame.)

"On the contrary, whatever their

personal views may have been, every person who has ever taught me, from first grade through doctoral studies (and I have been taught by some of the most publicly denounced Catholic theologians in the world), has always articulately explained and defended the 'official' position of the church in a way that appeared to be fair and unbiased and was often quite persuasive.

"I was never, ever taught that all morality is relative, nor was I taught any moral theory that could be called relativistic. Every teacher I have had, even the most conservative, has been honest enough to point out possible objections, contrary positions, alternative viewpoints — and those theologians who espoused these contrary opinions never forced them on us as students.

"In short, theologians have been doing their job by presenting the whole tradition and not just its most recent manifestation."

Father Markey is well aware of the conflicts and polarization that characterize Catholicism today. While wishing that the situation in the church were more like the 1970s, when he was growing up, full of hope and promise, he is consoled and uplifted still by the words of Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Under the guidance of Divine Providence toward "a new order of human relations, ... everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the church."

Do good things for right reasons

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:41-51; (R1) 1 Kings 19:4-8; (R2) Ephesians 4:30-5:2.

Oscar Wilde once said the worst advice you could offer anybody is to "just be yourself." I agree in a way. Who wants nothing more to guide us in life than just ourselves, just what seems right to little old me?

I said I agree in a way because Paul tells us to be who we are — Christians sealed by baptism. Preachers love to preach. When someone says, "Now, don't preach at me," you know what that person means: don't be scolding me, belittling, berating. That's what people have come to expect of their preachers.

They think that the purpose of sermons is to give instructions on how you are supposed to straighten up and fly right so that you can become Christians. That may sound reasonable, but the trouble is that it gets the whole thing backwards. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians (R2), urges them to do many good things. Hence,



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he may sound like a lot of preachers ("don't do this, do that.")

But take a closer look. Paul doesn't tell the Ephesians to do all these good things in order to be Christians, but he tells them to do all these things because they are Christians. There is a difference. Paul doesn't urge them to do good things to become Christian, but because they are Christian. Paul

says, "Do good things because God has made you good." He doesn't say, "You ought to act like somebody." He says, "You are somebody, so act like it."

You are people God has loved, people for whom Christ has died. You are nothing less than royalty. Become who you are. Act like kings and queens.

One day a young man, home for the summer from college, worked as a bricklayer on a building site. He had no previous construction experience.

"That young man's quite a natural bricklayer," said the proud foreman.

How did a young man, fresh out of college, learn to be a bricklayer in one month? Well, his father was a career bricklayer. When the foreman said that the young man was a "natural bricklayer," he did so knowing that the young man had watched his father lay bricks all of his life. He had the same physique, much the same personality as his father, therefore he really was a "natural bricklayer."

In baptism, all of us have been made God's beloved children. So St. Paul said, "Be imitators of God as his

dear children." When we show unconditional love toward someone, it's not so remarkable because Jesus showed the same love toward us. When we are gracious toward others, all we are doing is imitating our parent, reflecting some of God's graciousness in our own graciousness. In being ourselves, we are imitating God, acting as God's children.

Therefore get rid of all bitterness and longstanding resentment. Get rid of all passion and anger, sudden bursts of temper or long-lived anger. Get rid of harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind, loud talking and insulting language. A famous preacher used to say that his wife advised him, "Keep your voice down." Whenever in a discussion or argument, it is time to stop when you begin to raise your voice.

In place of all of these, St. Paul advises us to "be kind to one another — concerned about the feelings of others; compassionate — by sharing their sorrows and problems; and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven us in Christ."

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