

The next pope may surprise many

By Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Last week's column acknowledged the extraordinary impact Pope John Paul II made upon the world during 1994. This week's column turns an eye to the future.

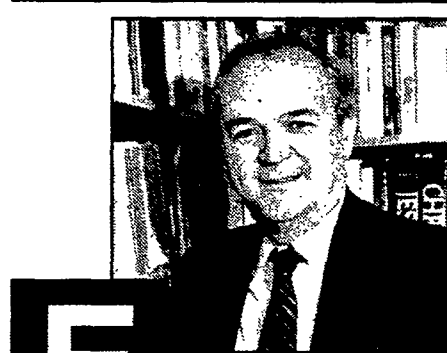
The Dec. 11 issue of *The New York Times Magazine* carried an important article on papal succession by Catholic journalist Paul Wilkes. Wilkes interviewed six high-ranking cardinals, all of whom were present in Rome for the recent World Synod of Bishops' discussion on religious life.

He referred to them in his title as "The Popemakers," that is, men who are likely to play a key role of leadership in the conclave of some 120 cardinals that will elect the successor to John Paul II.

The cover displayed an impressive, full-page color photograph of the pope that disclosed, in spite of advanced age and illness, his strong and determined character. A few words in the caption underneath, however, probably induced heartburn in some conservative Catholic readers: "... a church so divided by John Paul II.

Wilkes reports that the topic of Pope John Paul II's "last days" is now openly discussed in Rome — "a reality ... that just months ago somehow seemed unthinkable."

According to Wilkes, two passions are at work among the cardinals, two visions vying for control of the church's future course. One is still confident of the church's power under this "enormously popular" pope.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The other is concerned about the excessive personalization of the papacy in a pontificate in which the roar of the crowds which he so effectively attracts drowns out the "cries and the whispers of individuals who do not share his vision."

Among the six cardinals interviewed, Cardinal Pio Laghi, former Vatican Pro-Nuncio to the United States and now prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, seemed "totally amazed" that anyone would think that the pope "might not easily brook dissent." Many Catholics might ask whether the cardinal was being disingenuous or inhabits a different planet.

However, Cardinal Laghi himself displayed a characteristically Italian tolerance for diversity and a readiness to look the other way to avoid unnec-

essary confrontation. "Nuance," he said, "is everything." Italians, he pointed out, have "a sense of balance."

Cardinal Francis Arinze, a Nigerian who heads the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and who is often touted as the first black pope in modern times, was careful not to speculate about the succession, but, like Cardinal Laghi, insisted that what the church needs is not uniformity, but unity. "Unity is essential," he said.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, accused of sexual molestation last year — a charge that was later dropped — acknowledged the agony and humiliation the accusation had caused him. "It has changed me" for the better, he insisted. "I am not the same man. And so that is the person who will go into the conclave."

A peacemaker by nature — a quality that some of his friends say is both his strength and his weakness — Cardinal Bernardin was perhaps more frank in this interview than some of those critics might have expected.

After so many years in the hierarchy, he admitted, "I am not overawed by Rome and the workings of the Vatican anymore ... I can be who I am here, say what I think."

Would he, for example, deny Communion to someone who is divorced and remarried, in accordance with the recent Vatican mandate? "Oh, no," he replied, "that would be totally inappropriate to embarrass someone like that."

"We are a church polarized and we have to bring it back together," he said

finally.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, head of two Vatican agencies — the Council on Justice and Peace and Cor Unum, which coordinates the church's charitable work worldwide — is a man with an independent streak, who seems to have treated the interview with a measure of Gallic dismissiveness. He would not discuss the succession.

Cardinal Jozef Tomko, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and one of the pope's closest confidants, made it clear, in spite of his refusal to talk about the succession, that if he were elected to succeed John Paul II, it would indeed be close to a carbon-copy of the current pontificate.

But even Cardinal Tomko displayed a measure of hospitality and informality (Paul Wilkes was calling him "Joe" by the end of his visit) that suggested a softer tone.

Finally, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, archbishop of Mechlin-Brussels, seemed the most outspoken in a progressive sort of way. "People do not want a strict, authoritarian line. They want a pastor," he argued.

"Too much we are stressing the truth, absolute truth. In the future, I would say we should not be so much in the truth as in the mercy. There are exceptions for everything, every human being knows that."

If these are to be among the most influential "popemakers" at the next conclave, those who expect a replay of the current pontificate are likely to be disappointed. Those who fear it will be surprised.

Paradox's implications worth exploring

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

"Jesus: Great Teacher: Lousy Role Model" was the first title that came to my mind when I was asked to run a "Jesus-centered" retreat on work's spirituality for some business and professional people in Hartford, Conn.

After all, Jesus was a penniless itinerant preacher who lived off the land and strangers' generosity. He was not married, had no children, and apparently left his family, job and hometown to preach salvation's good news to strangers, most of whom did not want to hear it.

After a very short public career, Jesus died a violent death over what appears today — at least on the face of it — to be a relatively obscure point of principle. He then was raised from the dead after three days in the tomb.



FAITH AND WORK

None of this is exactly the experience of "ordinary" life. What does Jesus have to offer, then, to the average

person trying to make a living, raise a family, and be a good citizen, neighbor and church member?

What about Jesus's hidden life, you might ask, the 30 or so years he lived before his public ministry? Maybe Jesus was an excellent carpenter who worked in his father's shop and contributed to the holy family's well-being, the Nazareth community and the local synagogue. Well, maybe so, but the evangelists did not see fit to tell us much about those years, and so most of us really can't use Jesus's own life as a role model for our own.

Albert Einstein might have the solution to the question of what Jesus has to say to those of us who live ordinary, non-heroic lives. Einstein once said that genius is the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts in one's mind at the same time.

Let's stipulate that Jesus was a ge-

nius. (He did found one of the world's great religions.) But if Jesus were a genius, what were the two contradictory thoughts he held in his mind at the same time? And what does his insight have to offer to someone trying to live a spirituality of daily life?

Here is what I think Jesus' insight was. I think Jesus thought and taught that — at the same time and all the time — we have never done enough and we have already done enough. Moreover, if we who are not geniuses are ever able to live out the tension of this contradiction, we will find the peace Jesus promised — both in ourselves and in our world.

The implications of this paradox for our daily lives and work are mighty and worth exploring, and I intend to do so periodically in this column during the upcoming year (hopefully with your help).

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