

Jesuits, church must reflect changes

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Although I am not a Jesuit, I should stipulate here that Jesuits have played an important part in my theological education, teaching career, and personal life.

I received my doctorate at the Gregorian University in Rome, a Jesuit institution, and taught for more than a decade at Boston College, one of the premier Jesuit universities in the United States. And — dare I say it? — some of my best friends are Jesuits. J. Frank Devine of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Richard McCormick, a valued colleague at Notre Dame, and Robert Taft of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, are among the closest.

If I have a bias toward the Society of Jesus, therefore, it is a decidedly positive one.

On the basis of what I have heard from delegates to the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus and what I have read in the Congregation's documents on women, justice, interreligious dialogue, and Jesuit service to the church (all of which are reprinted in the April 13, 1995 issue of *Origins*), I would argue that the Society of Jesus is a forerunner of the church of the 21st century and one of the most compelling signs of hope for Catholics poised on the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

In the document, "The Jesuits' Service to the Church," the congregation fully embraces the Second Vatican Council's "ecclesiology of collegial co-responsibility." It is a vision of a church in which there is a fundamental equality among laity, religious, and clergy.

They do not wring their hands over the temporary confusions and conflicts of the present, because their sense of history is sure. They point out that conflicts are "inevitable" when an ecumenical council sets in motion a process of reform and renewal growing out of an "invigorating new vision" of the church.

So, too, is pluralism. They recognize that "more voices are speaking

and that they are not all saying the same thing," but the Jesuits view this phenomenon not as an indication that things have gone terribly wrong, but as the natural and healthy outcome of "this deepened sense of the co-responsibility of all God's people for the whole life of the church."

In a world that poses ever more complex intellectual, cultural, and pastoral challenges, the Jesuits acknowledge that "full fidelity to the magisterium of the church" requires careful adherence to the "accepted norms of assent and to Catholic teaching on the hierarchy of truths and the development of church doctrine." In the face of these new challenges, the Church's scholars are to be encouraged, not inhibited. Their mission is to "ensure that the Christian tradition maintain its respectability as a coherent and valid worldview in dialogue with the world of secular scholarship and science."

But such a mission can only be carried out effectively in "an atmosphere of freedom and mutual trust." Unfortunately, that atmosphere doesn't always exist in the church.

"Despite — indeed, because of — our sincere desire to live in fidelity to the magisterium and the hierarchy," the Jesuits declare, "there may be times when we feel justified, even obliged, to speak out in a way that may not always win us general approval and could even lead to sanctions painful

to the Society and constituting an impediment to our work."

Is this disobedience? No, because, "in accord with the tradition of Catholic theology, ...our first fidelity must be to God, to the truth and to a well-formed conscience."

Obedience, therefore, does not exclude a prayerful discernment that "may in some circumstances differ from the one suggested by our religious and church superiors." On the other hand, there may also be times for silence, for abnegation, and for suffering in the light of the truth and wisdom of the cross.

For the Jesuits, however, it is never a matter of either/or, but always of both/and. Both constructive criticism based on prayerful discernment and solidarity with the church. Both fidelity to the mind of the hierarchical magisterium and to the workings of the Holy Spirit in the life and thinking of the faithful at large.

In the end, the Jesuits acknowledge that they have to practice what they preach if their preaching and teaching is to have any ultimate effect. And so, in their powerfully prophetic document, "Our Mission and Justice," they call for an examination of Jesuit institutions to determine "whether the institution's own internal structures and policies reflect our mission."

That's the real test, after all, not only for the Jesuits but for the church as a whole.

Youths can live their lives 'heroically'

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

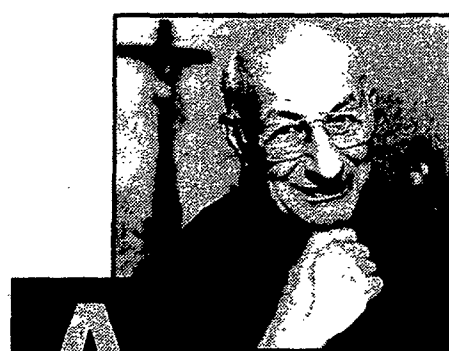
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 10:27-30; (R1) Acts 13:14, 43-52; (R2) Revelation 7:9, 14-17.

One of the crises facing the church today is the dearth of vocations in some areas of the world. But it was always so. Our Lord Himself observed that the harvest is vast but the reapers are few.

In 1269, Kubla, the great Khan of China, asked the Polo Brothers to have their White Father send 100 missionaries to evangelize China. The Holy Father had only two missionaries to send, but even these two never reached their destination.

Can we not think of what might have been had the Holy Father had enough missionaries to send. Imagine a Catholic China — a China with 700 years of Catholic tradition. What a blessing it might have been to the world.

That has always been the story down through the centuries. God gives the church golden opportunities — sheepfolds teeming with sheep — but because the shepherds are few, the sheep often are never gathered



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

into the fold.

In front of our post offices years back, there was often a government enlistment poster featuring Uncle Sam, with his goatee, traditional stovepipe hat, cut-away tail coat, candy-striped trousers. He pointed his finger sternly at all who read the poster, saying, "I want you!" That "you" applied to every boy and girl in America who could fulfill the military's minimal qualifications.

More than 1,900 years ago, Jesus pointed His finger at every boy and girl down through the ages, saying, "If you will be perfect ... come follow me." That "you," also, applies to everyone. As Uncle Sam's call is to every able-bodied youth, so the Good Shepherd's call to the priesthood and the sisterhood is to every youth who has the basic minimum of the "three H's": good heart, good head, and good health.

Jesus's last commission to His Church was to go and teach all nations. The prophets were sent only to one people; the church is sent to all nations. That is a Herculean task. It demands calling an army of religious into existence. If that army is not marching, it is not because God isn't calling youths; it's because youths too often are ignoring the call.

Selfishness and worldliness are speaking out to youths so loudly that they are drowning out Christ's voice. One of the Gospel's saddest stories is that of the rich young man: he valued his riches more than he valued Christ. He missed the chance of a lifetime.

Tolstoy tells the story of a man who could have all the land he could walk around from sunrise to sunset. So de-

sirous was the man to get all the land he could that he arose at the crack of dawn, walked and walked and walked, so fast and so far, that when he returned to his starting point at sunset, he dropped dead in his tracks from sheer exhaustion. So much effort for so little: six feet of ground was all he got.

How much men labor and sweat, grunt and groan, for the nothings of this earthly life. As James Russell Lowell put it:

"For a cap and bells our
lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a
whole soul's tasking."

And yet what vistas of glory Christ holds out to the generous ones who leave all and follow him: "You shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the world." The Good Shepherd needs shepherds; the sheep needs shepherds.

To youths, I say, "Think about a religious vocation, talk about it, pray about it, and then do something about it. You have only one life to live; why not live it heroically?"



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