

Predicting the church's third millennium

By Patricia Schoelles, SSJ
Courier columnist

I don't ordinarily put much stock in predictions about the future, but a book I've just finished reading, has caused me to make an exception.

The book is "Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church," by Kenan B. Osborne, OFM. Father Osborne concludes his book with a sort of prediction about characteristics he thinks will be evidenced by "third millennium disciples of Christ, whether of conservative or progressive stance."

His list of characteristics is interesting and thought-provoking. Here are just a few of the characteristics Father Osborne thinks will distinguish Catholics of the next millennium:

1. An effort to clarify the meaning of our God, who is creator of all and, therefore, loves each and every human in an equal way. We clarify and convey the meaning of our God, of course, not just in what we think, but also in our actions and in the way we organize our communities. Great systems of exclu-



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sion are operating all over the world, and to whatever extent we tolerate and support these, we are betraying our belief in the God who is creator of us all.

2. The rightful emergence of the "lay person" as the primary disciple in the church. We will all continue to grow in our recognition that the baptized-eu-

charistic Christian has been entrusted with continuing the mission of Christ in the world through the community of the church. For centuries, perhaps, lay Catholics have seen themselves as recipients of decisions about church life and mission made by others. Now delegated to make decisions in the social order, the moral order and the spiritual order, lay people will see themselves more and more as "part and parcel of the very process whereby the ... church arrives at decisions, and not simply as recipients of decisions made by others."

3. Third-millennium Christians will take at face value the equality of all human beings, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status or religious involvement. With others, Osborne interprets the last few centuries of world history as the gradual recognition that all human beings are equal.

4. An untiring effort to clarify the meaning of the human Jesus: his message, his ministry, his identity and his life. We will continue to focus on the issue of the Gospel message of salva-

tion for the poor, the margined and the dispossessed.

5. "Above all else, however, the third millennium Christian will return to the gospels again and again, seeking to establish discipleship." Through our participation in the mission of Jesus and our constant effort to live in companionship with Him and to let his life be the vine that gives us life, the church will come to be what it is called to be.

This is only a partial list of the one developed in the book, and I have embellished Osborne's words with my own much poorer ones. As I've already stated, I don't often take predictions about the future very seriously. But Osborne's book shows him to be a careful and responsible theologian grounded in the history and tradition of the church. His predictions are based in the very best theology of the Second Vatican Council and those who have carried it forward over the last 30 years.

He surely gave me something to think about. Perhaps others also will find these ideas thought-provoking.

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