

COLUMNISTS

Guesses at next pope still amusing

God alone knows when the current pontificate will come to an end, whether through death or resignation, but one thing is certain even for us mortals: As soon as it is announced that the Roman See is vacant, the media will be on the phone soliciting opinions from a wide spectrum of commentators, both inside and outside the Catholic Church, regarding the former pope's performance in office (and, of course, regarding likely successors).

Many, if not most, of the comments, I dare to predict, will be formulaic—what journalists refer to as boilerplate.

Those with strongly conservative views will bemoan his passing, perhaps employing clichés like, "Now he belongs to history." Some of them will refer to the present pope as "John Paul the Great," ranking him with Leo I (440-461) and Gregory I (590-604), the only popes to have been so designated. Many will also credit him with having single-handedly brought about the downfall of communism and for having withstood the moral relativism of the age.

But there will be a touch of nervousness in these voices, because they won't really know whom the cardinals will select as his successor. Their hopes will be focused on this or that like-minded cardinal, but hope is not certainty.

Those at the opposite end of the spectrum will have serious difficulty disguis-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ing their sense of relief, even elation, at the prospect of a changing of the guard at long last. Some will be severe in their judgment, giving the pope no credit for anything, listing the usual catalogue of grievances—about women, about an authoritarian style, about inflexibility.

But they, too, will have a touch of nervousness in their voices, because, like their counterparts on the right, they won't know for sure if the lines of the former pontificate will move forward in the same direction, perhaps even more boldly; or take a different, more progressive course.

The conventional wisdom, of course, is that the next pope will be a carbon copy of the current pope, based on the simple (I would say "simplistic") argument that since the current pope has named the overwhelming majority of the cardinals, they will inevitably elect

someone just like the man who appointed them.

I regret having to repeat myself, but one continues to hear this line of argument again and again from people who should know their papal history better—or at least read this column more faithfully!

Anyone who has studied the history of papal elections over the course of the past two centuries alone knows that the carbon-copy argument doesn't work out in practice. Popes are almost never succeeded by mirror-images of themselves—not even long-reigning popes who named almost all of the cardinal-electors.

Two of the most obvious cases in point are Pius IX, the longest reigning pope in history (1846-78), and his successor Leo XIII (1878-1903).

According to our current conventional wisdom Pius IX should have been succeeded in 1878 by someone at least as conservative as himself—which means very conservative indeed. Instead a moderate, Gioacchino Pecci, was elected.

According to the same conventional wisdom, Leo XIII should have been succeeded in 1903 by someone as moderate as himself, like his secretary of state, Cardinal Rampolla, who entered the conclave as the favorite. Instead Leo was succeeded by the conservative patriarch of Venice, Giuseppe Sarto, who took the name Pius X and led an 11-year battle against modern theological and biblical

scholarship.

Notwithstanding these clear precedents, it remains a daunting task for anyone to predict the outcome of a papal election. Indeed, for every individual around today who claims (usually without evidence) to have correctly foreseen the elections of both Albino Luciani (John Paul I) and Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) in 1978, there are many thousands of other papal handicappers who were dead wrong in each instance. They just don't talk about it.

Consequently, until the puff of white smoke appears over the Sistine Chapel and a new pope is announced to Rome and to the world, all predictions are for amusement purposes only. Assessments of a completed pontificate are another matter, because the church can actually learn from them.

But not from any and every assessment. Those of the boilerplate type, whether from the left or the right, are of no use. They are like the applause and the boos that punctuate a political speech—the reactions of the already converted or of the already opposed.

The assessments that will be of value to the church the next time around will come from those whose objectivity is reflected in their capacity and readiness to see both sides, to give credit where credit is due but also to criticize where criticism may be warranted.

God shines light on his mystery

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 2:1-12; (R1) Isaiah 60:1-6; (R2) Ephesians 3:2-3; 5:6.

Following Christmas, the church celebrates the feast of Epiphany. The word "epiphany" comes from two Greek words: epi ("upon") and phaino ("to shine"). Epiphany means "to shine upon," "to shed light," "to reveal," "to manifest." Epiphany is the manifestation of the mystery hidden from the ages; namely, that God loves all and brings his salvation to all—to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

In the Gospel, there are two epiphanies: to the Jews and to the Gentiles. God always accommodates himself to our limitations. The Jewish shepherds did not study the stars, but they knew of angels, so God speaks to them through an angel. The pagans were not familiar with angels, but they studied the stars. They believed stars affected lives, just as the moon did the tides. In the play *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare has Cassius say to Brutus: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars that we are underlings, but in ourselves." So God speaks to eastern astrologers through a star.

Who were these Magi from the East? In the time of our Lord, they were a respected class: learned and religious. Later on, they became charlatans, like Simon Magus; hence the word "magician."



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SIMON

Sometimes they are referred to as "king," because of the richness of their gifts and because the Psalmist prophesied that "Kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts..." (72:10-11).

The country of the Magi was probably Persia. It is interesting that the only Christian basilica in the Holy Land that was not destroyed by the Persians in A.D. 614 was the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, because in it there is a great mosaic of the Magi dressed as Persians.

Generally we speak of three Magi, because they offered three gifts. Melchior, the oldest, gave gold, as to a king. Balthasar, middle-aged, gave myrrh as to one who would suffer. And Gaspar, the youngest, gave frankincense as to a god.

Legend has it that St. Thomas on his way to India found the Magi and told them the story of Jesus. They went to

Jerusalem, became bishops and died in Jerusalem.

It was St. Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great, who found the true cross and the relics of the Magi. She brought them both back to Milan.

In 1164 Frederick Barbarossa invaded Italy. He gave the relics of the three Magi to the Archbishop of Cologne, Reginald van Dassel.

In 1181 a reliquary was built by Nicholas of Verdun, the greatest goldsmith in the Middle Ages. People gave all the gold they had for this: Thus three caskets of solid gold, weighing 610 pounds, were made to house the relics of the Magi. It took 50 years to finish.

Finally, to house this reliquary, the Cathedral of Cologne was started in 1248 and finished in 1880.

The Magi used their heads. Following their own lights as best they knew how, they came to Jerusalem. There, they received God's revelation. So with us: The human mind alone is not enough to bring to Christ; we too need the revelation of God given us by the new Jerusalem, his church.

The Magi, too, were not afraid of the cost needed to find Christ. They left homeland and journeyed even at night with no guide but a star. They had a thousand reasons for not making their journey, but they went gaily in the dark.

And they brought gifts. How often we let little inconveniences deter us from going even to Sunday Mass. How often we come to the Lord empty-handed. All he asks of us is the gold of our charity; the myrrh of our sacrifices, and the frankincense of our prayers.

Finally, the fact God sent an angel to the shepherds and a star to the Magi tells us that God always takes the first step in seeking our salvation. He still seeks us through his guiding star, his church, and his angels, her priests.

Daily Readings

Monday, Jan. 8

Is 42:1-4, 6-7 or Acts 10:34-38;

Mt 3:13-17

Tuesday, Jan. 9

1 Sm 1:9-20; Mk 1:21-28

Wednesday, Jan. 10

1 Sm 3:1-10, 19-20; Mk 1:29-39

Thursday, Jan. 11

1 Sm 4:1-11; Mk 1:40-45

Friday, Jan. 12

1 Sm 8:4-7, 10-22; Mk 2:1-12

Saturday, Jan. 13

1 Sm 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1;

Mk 2:13-17



Placing a classified ad in the Courier is as easy as dialing
716-328-4340.

Just one call to our advertising department is all it takes. We'll put you in touch with more than 50,000 families in the diocese.

Call and say "hello" to
Courier Classifieds today!
All major credit cards accepted.

We go to the far corners of the world to find the finest oriental carpets. All you have to do is come to us.

THOS. R. PADDOCK
ORIENTAL RUG

EXCHANGE
Upstate New York's oriental rug Specialists!
Contemporary, traditional, new, used
and antique selections.

342 EAST AVE., ROCHESTER (716) 325-3110
BUY • SELL • TRADE • APPRAISAL

ARNDT
FUNERAL HOME
Family Owned & Operated



RONALD JOHN ARNDT
ROBERT J. ARNDT
SHARI L. ARNDT

Funeral Directors

225-6350

1118 Long Pond Road
(South of Maiden Lane)

HART
MONUMENT
COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)
(716) 865-6746