

## COLUMNISTS

## How to evaluate Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II believes that, when elected in 1978, he received a providential mission to lead the church into the Third Christian Millennium.

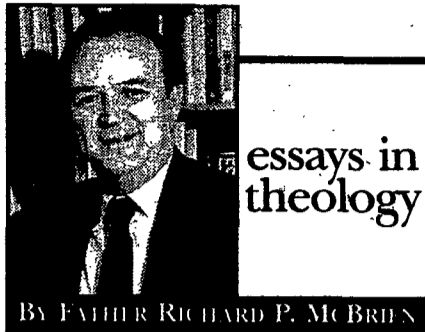
In his apostolic letter of November 1994, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* ("As the Third Millennium Draws Near"), he noted that "preparing for the year 2000 has become as it were a hermeneutical key of my pontificate." Everything that he says and does as pope should be interpreted, therefore, in the light of this commitment.

"The best preparation for the new millennium," he wrote, "can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole church. It was with the Second Vatican Council that, in the broadest sense of the term, the immediate preparations for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 were really begun."

According to the pope's own words, therefore, evaluations of his pontificate should take as their primary criterion of assessment its successes as well as its failures in implementing the council's teachings.

And what aspects of those teachings does the pope himself regard as central?

In the same apostolic letter he wrote: "No council has ever spoken so clearly



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

about Christian unity, about dialogue with non-Christian religions, about the specific meaning of the old covenant and of Israel, about the dignity of each person's conscience, about the principle of religious liberty, about the different cultural traditions within which the church carries out her missionary mandate and about the means of social communication."

Christian unity. The record is perhaps better with respect to the Orthodox East than the Protestant and Anglican West. As the first Slavic pope, John Paul II has made a special effort to acknowledge and celebrate the spiritual vitality of Eastern Christianity and he has taken particular pains to extend the hand of solidarity to its pastoral leaders. But there has been limited reciprocation to date.

On the other hand, in taking a strong stand in favor of an all-male, celibate priesthood and in expressing (through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) pointed criticisms of the recommendations of the Anglican-Roman Catholic international dialogues, the pope has tended to stall ecumenical progress among Catholics, Protestants, and Anglicans.

Nevertheless, his extraordinary encyclical of last May, *Ut Unum Sint* ("That All May be One"), actually invited separated Christians to enter a dialogue with him and other Catholic leaders regarding the way in which he and previous popes have actually exercised the papal office.

Non-Christians. The pope has been remarkably innovative here. He has made a special effort to reach out to world religions like Islam, and even exposed himself to criticism from his own right flank by participating in an important interfaith conference at Assisi in 1988.

Jews. John Paul II has been particularly energetic in his efforts to heal the wounds of division between Catholics and Jews. He was the first pope to visit the chief synagogue in Rome and in 1992 began a process that led eventually to the diplomatic recognition of Israel. He was also the prime mover in the Vatican's recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Holocaust.

Dignity of conscience. According to Mikhail Gorbachev himself, no single world figure contributed more to the challenging and subsequent collapse of the Communist world order than John Paul II. From the time of his youth in Nazi and then Communist Poland, the pope has been a stalwart and persistent opponent of governmental oppression. Religious liberty. Here again, the pope has been a forthright defender of religious liberty for all, not for Catholics alone.

Multiculturalism and social communication. The pope's numerous trips around the globe have highlighted in a very positive fashion the rich cultural diversity of the church, and no pope in history has exploited the media so effectively as he.

Each of these categories, however, pertain primarily to what one might call the pope's "foreign policy," his shaping of the church's relationships with forces and constituents beyond its borders.

How does one balance the one (foreign policy) against the other (domestic policy)? Indeed, how does one even begin to reconcile them?

That is the challenge that serious commentators will have when this pontificate comes inevitably to its end.

## Make the most of 'Ordinary Time'

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) John 1:29-34. (R1) Isaiah 49:3,5-6. (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

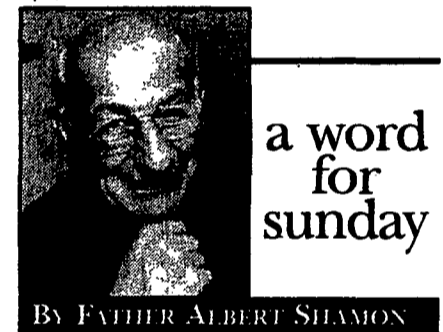
The church year, as you know, is simply the life of the church revolving around the life of Christ.

Unlike our calendar year, the church year begins with the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew (Nov. 30) — the First Sunday of Advent.

The church year is built upon the two great mysteries of Our Lord's life: the Incarnation and the redemption. The Incarnation, the mystery of the Son of God becoming man, is celebrated by the Christmas season. The redemption, the mystery of the Son of God reconciling all mankind to God the Father by his passion, death, resurrection and ascension, is celebrated by the Easter season. Both of these seasons have a period of preparation: The four Sundays of Advent prepare for the Christmas season; and the six Sundays of Lent prepare for the Easter season.

Both of these seasons are joined together by all the other Sundays of the year. These Sundays number 33 or 34, and they celebrate the various facets of Our Lord's earthly life.

These Sundays between the festive seasons are called "Sundays in Ordinary Time." The word "ordinary" does not mean commonplace, routine or customary. "Ordinary" here comes from the word "ordinal" — a number indicating



By FATHER ALBERT SILAMON

the place in a series, like first, second, third, and so on. Thus the Sundays in between the Christmas and Easter seasons are called Second Sunday of Ordinary Time, Third Sunday, Fourth Sunday, and so on. So "Ordinary Time" means simply ordered or numbered time.

This year the Sunday before Ash Wednesday will be the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. The numbering of these Sundays help us to locate readily the prayers and readings for those Sundays in the lectionary and the sacramentary.

Yet Ordinary Time is not so ordinary. For time itself is priceless. What the souls in hell would give for just one minute more on earth. Time is the precious coin God gives us with which to purchase eternity.

*I have only just a minute  
Just sixty seconds in it;*

*Forced upon me. Can't refuse it,  
Didn't seek it. Didn't choose it.*

*I must suffer if I lose it,  
Give account if I abuse it,  
Just a tiny little minute  
But ETERNITY is in it!*

—E.A. Briggs

You can have two suits of clothes; you can have two cars; you can have two bottles of beer, but you can never have two minutes or seconds at the same time. Time is so precious, it is doled out second by second and minute by minute; and once it's gone, it is gone forever — you can never call it back.

The Sundays in Ordinary Time should be times for family prayer and worship, relaxation and joy. Do not secularize the Sunday by shopping on Sunday. Make it different from every other day of the week. Make it a day to relax and enjoy each other's company, especially with a Sunday dinner. Go to Mass together, pray together, play together, eat together. Worship, relax and enjoy — thus you recoup your strength for the week ahead.

*A Sunday well spent  
Brings a week of content  
And health for the toils of tomorrow.*

*But a Sunday profaned  
Whatever may be gained  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.*

Jesus came to take away the sin of the world; that is, worldliness, a world without God, a secular world. A university student who was having a hard time getting his act together, decided to take his frustrations out on God. He went into the university chapel, sat in a pew, looked heavenward and said, "All we have on this earth are problems and a bunch of dummies who never figure out how to solve them. Even I could make a better world than this one."

Then somewhere deep inside himself the student heard God answer, "That's what you're supposed to do."

Are we changing the world? Or is the world changing us?

## Daily Readings

**Monday, Jan. 15**

1 Sm 15:16-23; Mk 2:18-22

**Tuesday, Jan. 16**

1 Sm 16:1-13; Mk 2:23-28

**Wednesday, Jan. 17**

1 Sm 17:32-33, 37, 40-51;  
Mk 3:1-6

**Thursday, Jan. 18**

1 Sm 18:6-9, 19:1-7; Mk 3:7-12

**Friday, Jan. 19**

1 Sm 24:3-21; Mk 3:13-19

**Saturday, Jan. 20**

2 Sm 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27;  
Mk 3:20-21

## Kids Answers

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1. T	4. T
2. F	5. T

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RULES: ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY MIDNIGHT, JANUARY 22ND. Random drawing of correct entries will be held Jan. 23rd by Catholic Courier Representatives. Entries must be returned to: Courier DJ Trivia, 1150 Buffalo Rd. Rochester, NY 14624-1899. Winner will be notified by mail. Prize is a certificate for two free hours of DJ service at the recipient's convenience and must be redeemed within one year of issue date. Subject to availability. Prize is not exchangeable for cash.

