

COLUMNISTS

Worldwide church celebrates diversity

Catholicism has adapted to thousands of different cultures in its history. As an incarnational faith, it has viewed every one of them as a potential carrier of the Gospel — in varying degrees, to be sure. Indeed, Catholicism was multicultural long before the term became part of the vocabulary of the 1990s.

One of the principal and most influential cultural forms of Catholic history is that of the Baroque. Encompassing a period from the late-16th to the 18th century (but for Catholicism extending well into the 20th century), the Baroque touched the church's liturgy, its art, its architecture, its music, its spirituality and devotions, its theology, its ministries, its religious orders, its monastic life, and its authority structures.

The Baroque emphasized the personal, the emotional, the visual, and the miraculous. Catholic thought and life during the Baroque period had a theatrical component. The liturgy became increasingly elaborate, and devotions increasingly dramatic.

There was, for example, an intensified development of the Tridentine solemn high Mass and Benediction, a new emphasis on the spiritual exploits and powers of ethnic saints and on their miraculous appearances, the introduction of formal methods of prayer, spiritual exercises, and a sharpened distinction between the natural and the supernatural.

My colleague Father Thomas F.



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

O'Meara, OP, has just published an article in the Feb. 3 edition of *America* magazine entitled, "Leaving the Baroque: The Fallacy of Restoration in the Postconciliar Era."

His thesis is that, when certain Catholics call for a restoration of traditional Catholicism, what they really seek to restore is a late 19th- and early 20th-century version of Baroque Catholicism.

Baroque Catholicism, he suggests, made the church "look like a pumping station at the center of an extensive waterworks of grace."

It is a kind of Catholicism that emphasizes systems — systems of meditation, of architecture, of sacraments, of theology and spirituality, of hierarchical authority.

It is also a kind of theater, reflected in its buildings, its piazzas and baldachinos, its spaces set off for human performance, its frescos, its palatial receptions, its statues, its music, its elaborate ceremonies.

"Reactionaries speak of tradition and antiquity," Father O'Meara writes, "when they mean religious forms that flourished in 1880"

He argues that the effort to restore the Baroque is doomed from the start because no cultural period can simply be reproduced and repackaged for a new age.

He also challenges the assumption that it was the council that disrupted the tranquil life of the church. Citing the opinion of the late French, Dominican theologian, Cardinal Yves Congar, O'Meara points out that "the upheavals of the postconciliar era had been set in motion not by the council but by the constrictions of the decades and centuries before Vatican II." Those were the constrictions of Baroque Catholicism.

He also corrects a commonly held view that Vatican II ended the Counter-Reformation (the church's institutional response to the Protestant Reformation). The Counter-Reformation, he argues, was a period of only a few decades around the Council of Trent and held little originality.

"The epochal period, the time of cultural renewal and religious expansion," he insists, "was the Baroque." It was the Baroque, not the Counter-Reformation, that was the real "anti-period to Protestantism."

"To understand Catholicism today," he continues, "it is crucial to grasp that the Baroque period of the church did not

cease in 1750. It went underground during the Enlightenment and then re-emerged with the arrival of Romanticism, thus lasting well into the 20th century, up to Vatican II.

"In the century-and-a-half prior to Vatican II, Catholic life focused on the active priest and nun, on multiple devotions and apostolates centered on the papacy, and experienced the supernatural in interior emotion and awe-inspiring sacramentality — all marks of the Baroque."

And so he contends that the call by some today for the restoration of traditional Catholicism is really an effort to rehabilitate the 19th- and early 20th-century version of the Baroque, which only older Catholics have ever actually experienced.

That effort comes at a time when worldwide Catholicism is "leaving the Baroque," although aspects of it will continue to enhance church life. Catholicism is moving away from an emphasis on externals and ecclesiastical style and structures in favor of personal commitment and collaborative ministry, away from a Eurocentric Catholicism in favor of an acceptance and celebration of the diversity and pluralism of the world-church.

Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the incarnational process continues. Salvation history moves forward — always forward — toward the final Reign of God.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Fight temptation with prayer, fasting, Scriptures

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 4:1-11. (R1) Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7. (R2) Romans 5:12-19.

One word that ties the Sunday readings together is the word "temptation."

The first reading narrates how the first Adam succumbed to the temptation of the devil; and, because he did, we all are vulnerable to temptation.

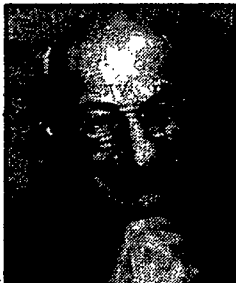
The Gospel proclaims that the second Adam (Christ) did not succumb to the temptations of the devil; and, because he did not, we all can win over temptation.

St. Paul in the second reading describes the effects on humans of the different responses made to temptation by the first Adam and by the second Adam.

The Lenten season deals with two themes: penance and baptism.

The temptations of Jesus were related to his baptism. When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved son." Satan, you can be sure, was snooping around, and so in his temptations of Jesus, he wanted to know who Jesus really was. Thus he asked twice, "If you are the Son of God ..."

Also, the same Holy Spirit who had descended upon Jesus at his baptism led him out into the desert to be tempted. He wanted Jesus, as man, to experience



a word for sunday

By FATHER AUBERT SHAMON

the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, and he wanted us, as followers of Jesus, to realize that that same power is given us at our baptism.

Jesus was able to repel the temptations of the devil because of three things that he did in the desert.

First, he prayed. Prayer is simply reaching out to God. Prayer is our outstretched hand to God for help. And he never refuses.

A man fell into a pit and he couldn't get out.

A realist said: "Well, you're in a pit."

An idealist said: "The world shouldn't have pits."

An optimist said: "Things could be worse."

A pessimist said: "Things will get

worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

A pit is an awful place, especially the pit of temptation. But there is one who is always ready to help us out of the pit — Jesus. Prayer invites him to reach down and lift us up.

Secondly, Jesus fasted. Prayer is the breath of the soul; fasting is the soul of prayer. Prayer and fasting are the two legs we need on the journey to heaven. We need not fast 40 days and 40 nights; why not just on Wednesdays and Fridays? And the fasting need not be arduous: To deny self is as effective as denying self food. When you fast to weaken the strength of passion and to achieve self-mastery, that is mortification. When you fast to atone for past sins, that's penance. When you fast to make up for the sins of others, that is reparation. Whatever may be the reason, do fast at least twice a week.

Finally, the third weapon Jesus used against the devil was Scripture. Jesus repelled every temptation by quoting Scripture. In fact, the devil saw how effective this was, so in the second temptation, he himself quoted Scripture. It is good to remember that the devil can quote Scripture; and that only the Spirit-guided

church is the true interpreter of the word of God. St. Jerome said that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

Temptations can be revealing. Both the assassin and the physician cut: one to kill, the other to cure. Satan tempts to destroy us; God permits temptation to strengthen us and to help to get to know ourselves and our need for prayer, fasting and daily Bible reading.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming, N.Y.

Daily Readings

Monday, Feb. 26

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18; Mt 25:31-46

Tuesday, Feb. 27

Is 55:10-11; Mt 6:7-15

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Jon 3:1-10; Lk 11:29-32

Thursday, Feb. 29

Es C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Mt 7:7-12

Friday, Mar. 1

Ez 18:21-28; Mt 5:20-26

Saturday, Mar. 2

Dt 26:16-19; Mt 5:43-48

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