

# COLUMNISTS

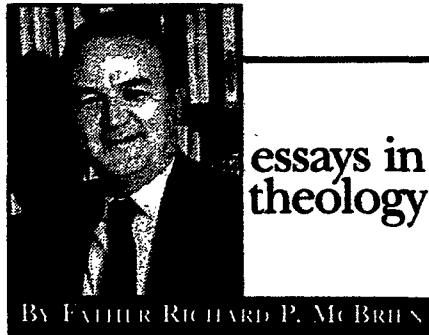
## Some reviewers laud book as catechetical tool

The U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine expressed a reservation about the new edition of my *Catholicism* book (HarperCollins, 1994), namely, that it could confuse and unsettle theological beginners (including college and university undergraduates) and even encourage some of them to dissent. No evidence is presented in their review, even though the original work has been in use as a text since 1980.

Other reviews of the new edition have reached the opposite conclusion. Some were quoted in last week's column. I continue the inventory of reviews this week.

Brother Brian Grenier, CFC, author of works of spirituality and a regular columnist for the Catholic press in Australia, has written: "User-friendly in so many ways, *Catholicism* would make an excellent textbook for class use." It is "a monumental work which, in its genre, remains unrivaled in English. It can be recommended to students of theology, parish priests, religious education coordinators, catechists, and to the general reader" (*Compass: a review of topical theology*, autumn 1995).

Sister Mary Milligan, RSHM, professor of theological studies and dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles, refers to the book as a "magisterial work" that "has served as an essential resource of college and university students and teachers of theology."



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

She commends its "ability to organize and communicate vast bodies of knowledge in an accessible way to a variety of readers" (*America*, 12/7/94).

Neil Ormerod, theology editor of *National Outlook* in Australia, points out that there has been a vast change in the ecclesiastical landscape since the first edition of *Catholicism* appeared in 1980. "With the large numbers of theologically literate laity passing through theological colleges," he observes, "*Catholicism* will not have the revolutionary impact of its predecessor, since its audience now possesses a greater sophistication than it did in the early eighties."

"I would recommend this book as a reference," he concludes, "to anyone interested in the phenomenon of Catholicism, whether as a believer struggling to find a place within the Catholic Church, or as an outsider wishing to get a feel for what in

fact is going on" (September 1994).

Father Donal Daly, SVD, writing in the Irish monthly, *The Word*, says that the book "presents clearly and fairly a complete summary of Catholic teaching and values" and "a masterly presentation of Catholic doctrines, Church history, the biblical origins of Catholicism, the development of Catholic theology and an account of recent changes. ... It provides a basic reference work which can be a useful resource for teachers, priests, students, and indeed anybody with an intelligent interest in Catholicism" (December 1994).

Msgr. George Higgins indicates that he is "even more enthusiastic about the new edition than he was about the original." He suggests that it is "one of the most important Catholic books published since Vatican II," and says that "there is simply nothing comparable to it on the market." "Given its format and style, the book is useful for university, college and study club courses in theology" (*Catholic Messenger*, 9/14/94).

Sister Nadine Foley, OP, former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and a professor of philosophy and religion at Siena Heights College in Michigan, calls the new edition "an improved text for classroom instruction, a most useful work for general reference and in a real sense a living document rooted in the past and pointing to

the future." (*National Catholic Reporter*, 9/9/94).

Although the review done by Father J.A. DiNoia, OP, on behalf of the five-member Committee on Doctrine pointed to concerns about the treatment of such doctrinal issues as the sinlessness and virginal conception of Jesus, both of which are affirmed in the book, the real issue, mentioned at the beginning and the end of the review, is the appropriateness of the book as a text for theological beginners, including undergraduate students in colleges and universities.

I consistently challenged the committee to offer evidence to support that concern, and to allow me a forum (technically known as "formal doctrinal dialogue," a due-process procedure established by the bishops themselves in 1989) in which to present contrary evidence. They did not grant me that opportunity.

One of the requirements of that process is that conclusions reached about the pastoral implications of a theologian's work "should be based on adequate information required for prudential judgments. This may necessitate gathering additional evidence" (*Origins*, 6/29/89, p. 108).

The problem is that the committee presented no evidence at all.

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

## The power of prayer is available to all

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 17:1-11. (R1) Acts 1:12-14. (R2) 1 Peter 4:13-16.

A man stopped by a computer store where he'd recently purchased a personal computer. "I have a question about a computer I bought here the other day," he said to a salesman.

"What kind did you buy?" the salesman asked.

"A Crimean Extravaganza 1900," the customer said.

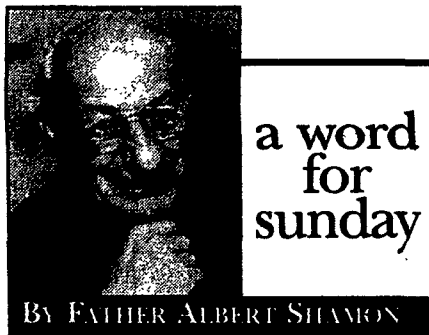
"Wow! That's a nice computer," the salesman exclaimed. "It has a 100-megahertz Pentium processor, 16 megabytes of RAM, a 256-kilobyte pipeline burst cache. It has 64-bit PCI video and a 1.2-gigabyte hard drive. What more could you want in a computer? Some add-ons? More memory?"

"Actually," the customer said, "I just want to know how to turn the thing on!"

Those of us who are not computer nerds can sympathize with the poor customer. But, on a different level, isn't that the critical question that confronts us as we try to make sense out of our lives?

Where do we turn the thing on? Where does the power come from to make our lives effective, fulfilling, worthwhile?

In the early church the power came from prayer. After our Lord's ascension, the disciples gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem and "devoted themselves to constant prayer." For nine days they prayed — making the first nove-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

na. And that prayer drew down upon them on Pentecost the Holy Spirit.

Wise people still draw their power from prayer. Eric Liddell, the Olympic champion runner, hero of the movie "Chariots of Fire," knew about the power of prayer. He was in Weinsen prison in North China during World War II. A woman in the camp at the time told of Liddell's extraordinary leadership power, his joy, and his integrity in the midst of enormous hardship. But she also revealed the secret of Liddell's power.

Every morning about 6 a.m., Liddell used to climb out of his top bunk, passing the sleeping forms of his dormitory mates. Then, at the small Chinese table, he and another prisoner would sit close together, read their Bibles and pray. And that was the strength of his leadership.

People who do great things invariably have their lives plugged into God's incredible power by prayer. Prayer, however, is not a substitute for hard work. Co-

median Sam Levenson observed long ago, that there will always be prayer in schools as long as there are exams. Don't we often try to use prayer as a bailout device?

Charles Sinclair, a lawyer in Coral Gables, Fla., was locked inside the trunk of a car by kidnapers. He escaped by breaking open the trunk latch with a tire iron. He said, "I knew my only chance was to get the trunk open. As I was praying I was prying like mad."

Praying and prying — that's the proper approach to trouble. Pray as if all depended on God; and work (pry) as if all depended on self.

Prayer places our needs in God's care and goes on living, trusting that God will supply our needs. We do our best and trust God to supply the rest. The servants at Cana gave all they had, filled the water pots; Jesus did the rest.

During the Depression of 1932, a small group of Christian businessmen in Charlotte, N.C., became greatly concerned about the moral decay in their city. They asked their ministers to launch an all-out evangelistic crusade. The ministers declined. But the laymen still felt God wanted them to do something big in their city. Not knowing what else to do, they called for a day of prayer. Twenty-nine people responded. They fasted and prayed that God would send a revival to their city, state and the world.

They held their meeting on the farm of W. Frank Graham, a dairyman and de-

vout churchman, burdened with one of his own children, William, a teenage boy who needed to come to grips with God. In 1933 a tent was set up for gospel services. A minister was invited to preach. In 1934, the Charlotte Crusade began. What happened is well-known. It was there that the young boy Billy Graham, along with many others, was converted.

The power of prayer! Have we discovered that power?

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

### Daily Readings

Monday, May 20

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

Tuesday, May 21

Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11

Wednesday, May 22

Acts 20:28-38; John 17:41-19

Thursday, May 23

Acts 22:30, 23:6-11; John 17:20-26

Friday, May 24

Acts 25:1-12; John 21:15-19

Saturday, May 25

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31; John 21:20-25

  
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