

COLUMNISTS

Cardinal's legacy enriches people of God

One of the great figures of the Second Vatican Council died on May 6 at age 91: Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, retired archbishop of Malines-Brussels in Belgium. Only Popes John XXIII and Paul VI played more significant roles at the council.

Several months before the opening of the council, Cardinal Suenens issued a pastoral letter for his archdiocese on the state of the church and the opportunities that lay before it.

The pope saw the letter and informed the cardinal that it represented his own views exactly. The letter clearly influenced the pope's celebrated speech on the first day of the council, Oct. 11, 1962.

In that speech Pope John XXIII dismissed the worries of curial officials, whom he described as "prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as if the end of the world were at hand." Divine Providence, he insisted, is "leading us to a new order of human relations," one founded on unity: the unity of the entire church and of all humankind. The focus of the council, he said, must not be exclusively on the church's inner life.

Less than two months later, Cardinal Suenens addressed the council just as its first session moved toward adjournment. The speech proved to be a major turning-point in the history of Vatican II.

We need to do more, he urged the bishops, than examine the mystery of the



essays in theology

church as it is in itself (Latin, *Ecclesia ad intra*). We must also attend to its relationship with the world at large (*Ecclesia ad extra*).

He proposed this distinction as the basis for restructuring the council's entire agenda.

From this speech came the two major documents of the council: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ("*Lumen gentium*"), which focuses on the internal life of the church, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ("*Gaudium et spes*"), which focuses on the relationships of the church with the world.

The cardinal had submitted an advance copy of his text to John XXIII, who was already gravely ill with cancer (he died the following June). In his memoirs, published in 1992, Suenens reports that he received a call from Archbishop Dell'Acqua, of the Secretariat of State's office, informing him that "Pope John fully ap-

proved the text. Indeed he had read it in bed and had added a few remarks of his own, writing them in the margin in Italian" (*Memories and Hopes*, p. 87).

Cardinal Suenens' speech received the unanimous endorsement of the council. In an address the next day, Cardinal Montini of Milan (who would, only a few months later, succeed John XXIII to the papacy, taking the name Paul VI) gave his own full support to Suenens' proposal.

And so an unprecedented kind of ecclesiastical document was produced: a pastoral constitution declaring that the church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel." Because of that duty, the church "must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics" (n. 4).

The cardinal's approach, like the pastoral constitution's, was distinctively and thoroughly Catholic: viewing the world as created by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and destined for eternal glory.

Such a vision is clearly at odds with the negative and un-Catholic notion that, because the world is essentially evil, dialogue or collaboration with it are inevitably corrupting. In this view, the world's richly diverse cultural expressions are to be constantly opposed (as in the sectarian, "counter-cultural" approach).

Following Cardinal Suenens' crucial speech, Pope John XXIII appointed him to a new coordinating committee that was given the task of reviewing all of the council's preparatory materials and of shaping its agenda along the lines of the cardinal's proposal.

Pope Paul VI subsequently named Suenens as one of the four moderators of the council who would preside over its remaining sessions.

In a book written less than three years after the council's adjournment in 1965, the cardinal identified Vatican II's "central idea" as "the rediscovery of the people of God as a whole, as a single reality; and then by way of consequence, the co-responsibility thus implied for every member of the Church" (*Co-responsibility in the Church*, p. 30).

For Cardinal Suenens, as for the New Testament, it is baptism, not holy orders, that is the church's fundamental sacrament. All else — the papacy, the episcopacy, the clergy, religious communities — is in the service of the baptismal mission that is given to everyone in the church.

Cardinal Suenens once said that the documents of Vatican II are like unopened buds awaiting the sun. If so, he was surely one of God's most proficient gardeners, carefully planting the seeds. The rich harvest of Vatican II is his legacy.

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

Pentecost sends us forth with full fuel tank

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:19-23. (R1) Acts 2:1-11. (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13.

On Feb. 2, 1985, the Daytona 500 Auto Race had just started when, on the beginning of the third lap, the \$250,000 machine driven by Donny Allison rolled to a stop on the infield side of the track. When it was checked, it was found that no one had filled it with gas.

What an embarrassment for one of the top drivers in auto racing, to be stalled because he had run out of gas! Such is the danger we too must guard against: trying to drive on an empty fuel tank.

Immediately after our Lord's ascension, the disciples with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the other women and the brothers of Jesus devoted themselves to prayer. On the day of Pentecost, their prayers were answered.

The Holy Spirit came upon them, with a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house. Tongues as of fire rested on each one of them. And, filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak with other tongues.

At this time, Jews had come to Jerusalem from every nation on earth. The mighty noise of wind drew a large multitude to the upper room, and they were bewildered because each one heard the disciples speak in his own language.

"Are not all of these men who are



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

speaking Galileans?" they asked. "How is it that we each of us hears them in his native tongue ... speaking about the marvels God has accomplished?"

On that first Pentecost, the church had its fuel tank full. Thousands were converted and the church was off.

One thing we can learn from the early church is that the source of the church's power is the Holy Spirit. If we are going to have their joy, energy, and evangelistic success we are going to have to pray for the Holy Spirit to fall afresh on us. Anytime we try to substitute any other kind of power for God's power, we are in trouble. It makes no difference what that power may be.

Political power is no substitute for spiritual power. Nor is celebrity power: musicians, athletes, orators; they are just people — and often people let us down. Nor is need-centered power. Focusing on people's needs is good and can be a vital part of the church's ministry, as

long as we do not lose sight of the central reason for the church's existence, as was the danger with liberation theology. The first bishop of Rochester's motto was, "*Salus animarum, suprema lex*" ("The salvation of souls, the highest law").

That is why nothing in the church can substitute for the Holy Spirit, the soul of the church.

A second thing we can learn from Pentecost is that where God's Spirit is there is unity. At Babel, when men tried to build a secular city, there was confusion of tongues; but at Pentecost, when the Spirit of God came down upon the church, there was unity. People of differing backgrounds, differing social classes, differing skin colors, differing national origins, all heard the Gospel in their own tongue.

How silly are the barriers we have erected between people. A cartoon showed two people staring at each other. One was a little man in a loincloth, looking like Mahatma Gandhi. The other was a stalwart Native American with a full-feathered headdress looking like Sitting Bull. Both are speaking at the same time, and the caption reads: "Funny, but you don't look Indian." Silly perhaps, but still thought-provoking.

God is love and love is unitive. The devil is hate and hate is divisive. The sacramental grace of the Mass is unity; and the bond of unity is love. So at Mass

we pray that "all of us who share in the Body and Blood of Christ may be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit" (Eucharistic Prayer II). At every Mass there is an outpouring of love from the sacrament of love, Holy Communion, and the God of love, the Holy Spirit.

And that love manifests itself when it reaches out to others. Thus the Mass ends with the commission: "Go, to love and serve the Lord" — to love the Lord by serving others; and to serve the Lord, by loving others.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 27

1 Peter 1:3-9, Mark 10:17-27

Tuesday, May 28

1 Peter 1:10-16, Mark 10:28-31

Wednesday, May 29

1 Peter 1:18-25, Mark 10:32-45

Thursday, May 30

1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-12, Mark 10:46-52

Friday, May 31

Zephaniah 3:14-18 or

Romans 12:9-16, Luke 1:39-56

Saturday, June 1

Jude 17, 20-25, Mark 11:27-33

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