

## COLUMNISTS

## Confirmation has had a varied past

Eastern Christianity's understanding of original sin differs from the West's, which derives mainly from St. Augustine. For the East, sin first comes into our personal lives only when we freely imitate the sin of Adam and Eve. For the West, we are born in the sin of Adam and Eve.

Because of Augustine's view, the church in the West began to develop a sense of urgency about the baptism of infants.

As it intensified its efforts to baptize the very young, the church in the West also gradually separated off the post-baptismal anointing rites because they had been traditionally reserved to the bishop. Since the bishop couldn't be present at every baptism, the anointing rite developed into a distinct sacrament, known as confirmation.

In the East, however, baptism and confirmation (chrismation) were never separated. The East views them as essentially one sacrament normally administered by a priest rather than a bishop.

It is important to note that the prerogatives of the bishops as ministers of the anointing rites in the West did not presuppose two independent sacraments, but in fact created them.

At first, the separation of the two rites was regarded as abnormal and less than ideal. Therefore, efforts were made early on to administer the anointing rites as soon as possible after baptism, even the



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

## essays in theology

baptism of infants, as in the East.

It was not until the 13th century that opposition to the separation of the two rites began to relax. For example, in 1280 a provincial council in Cologne, Germany, postponed confirmation until at least the age of 7.

Adults continued to follow the older tradition and received the anointing rites immediately after baptism. It was only in the high Middle Ages that a specific theology of confirmation was developed in order to justify, after the fact, the now separate rite performed only by the bishop.

The notion developed that confirmation provides a special strengthening grace, like a soldier's armor. In baptism we are freed of the "stain" of original sin. In confirmation, we become "soldiers of Christ."

The False Decretals of Gratian, which in spite of their forged character formed the basis of all medieval canon law, treat-

ed confirmation as an even greater sacrament than baptism.

Baptism, the medieval theologians noted, was for "for forgiveness." Confirmation was "for strengthening." Even though this distinction had no basis in sacred Scripture, the liturgy, or the fathers of the church, it was retained in the theology textbooks until the present time.

The practice of receiving confirmation before the reception of first holy Communion ended in 1910 when Pope Pius X decreed that first confession should precede first holy Communion, both to be received at the age of reason (approximately 7).

Confirmation was delayed for a later age, setting the stage for a catechesis that stressed confirmation as the sacrament of maturity and militancy, making one a "soldier of Christ," and so forth.

At the pastoral level, the sacrament of confirmation unfortunately assumed the character of a graduation exercise from formal religious instruction. From that point on, Catholics would no longer study their faith — unless they entered the seminary or convent, or attended a Catholic college or university.

Many Catholics have been led to believe that this "theology" of confirmation is deeply imbedded in the 20-centuries-old tradition of the church, but it is not. And it is nowhere to be found in the East.

When the Second Vatican Council called for a revision of the sacraments of initiation, it also called specifically for a revision of the rite of confirmation itself.

Today that rite is often administered, even in the West, by priests rather than bishops, since the ideal time for the celebration of the full rite of initiation is at the Easter Vigil. It is presumed that the bishop will preside on that occasion at his cathedral church.

According to today's theology, confirmation is a continuation and ratification of the Christian's baptismal commitment and expresses the essentially missionary character of the church and its nature as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In the words of the rite itself, the church is a community called to manifest "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence ... the spirit of wonder and awe in God's presence."

We are reminded by Vatican II, however, that the gifts of the Spirit are not given to the church's leaders alone. They are given to "the faithful of every rank" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 12).

Little wonder that several council fathers balked at that language. But they lost.

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

## Spiritual treasures await those who pay the price

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Matthew 13:44-52. (R1) 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12. (R2) Romans 8:28-30.

In 1905, an unsuspecting man literally stumbled upon the world's largest diamond near Pretoria, South Africa. This stone was sent to England in a cardboard box. One hundred and five stones were cut from this diamond, known as the Cullinan diamond. Two of the largest stones which it produced, the 530-carat Star of Africa and the 317-carat Cullinan II, are part of the British crown jewels.

Nowadays, people dream of winning the lottery. But in our Lord's time people dreamed of finding treasure buried in a field or at least discovering a precious stone lying in the road. Commerce and banks were not so sophisticated as they are today. So people who wanted to secure their wealth buried it in the ground. It gained no interest, but at least it was secure. Unfortunately, some of these people died before reclaiming their wealth. So there it lay just waiting for someone to discover it.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like that. It is like a treasure hidden in a field that someone stumbled upon. In order to secure his new found wealth, the lucky finder hid the treasure all over again in that same field and then joyfully sold all he had to buy that field. Then the treasure was his. And to emphasize



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

## a word for sunday

his point, Jesus added that the kingdom is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. Finding one of unsurpassed value, he, too, sold all he had to purchase that pearl. This is what the kingdom of God is like: a buried treasure or a pearl of great price.

First, the kingdom of God is just waiting to be discovered. Many people live impoverished lives, not knowing that the kingdom is ours if we want it.

On a raft off the coast of Brazil some people were dying from thirst, for they felt that the ocean water was undrinkable. What they didn't know was that a nearby river flowed out into the sea with such force that it produced fresh water for a couple of miles out into the sea. Fresh water was right around the raft, but they had no idea.

Likewise, what spiritual treasures are all around us and so many people do not

realize this. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the sacraments as "powers issuing from the body of Christ." How tragic is the neglect of holy Mass and of the sacrament of reconciliation. So many people cannot cope with the problems of life when all the while help is all around them.

Secondly, when this treasure is found it brings great joy. For the kingdom is a package. It is a life of trust — believing that the Creator of this world loves each of us individually. Believing that this Creator has given us a pattern for living that leads to harmony with one another and with the One who is the source of life. Believing that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have access to God here and now. If we believe this, then we have a joy that the world cannot take away. The treasure of the kingdom is available here and now; appropriating that treasure brings us great joy.

Finally, the kingdom can be ours if we are willing to pay the purchase price. In both parables the men sold all they had to get all they found. The faith demands sacrifice. The disciple must be willing to take up the cross daily.

A convert of mine said to me, "Father, ever since I've become a Catholic, I've had one problem after another."

I read from the Book of Sirach, "My Son, when you come to serve the Lord,

prepare yourself for trials" (2:1).

"What did you expect? The heart of Christianity is the cross," I explained. "Before you became a Catholic, God spared you, because you would not know what to do with a cross. You would have wasted the suffering. Now you know the value of the cross. Also Satan wants to discourage you, so he literally raises hell with you. You need only persevere and the treasure of joy and the pearl of eternal happiness will be yours forever."

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

## Daily Readings

**Monday, July 29**

Jeremiah 13:1-11; John 11:19-27  
or Luke 10:38-42

**Tuesday, July 30**

Jeremiah 14:17-22; Matthew 13:36-43

**Wednesday, July 31**

Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21;  
Matthew 13:44-46

**Thursday, August 1**

Jeremiah 18:1-6; Matthew 13:47-53

**Friday, August 2**

Jeremiah 26:1-9; Matthew 13:54-58

**Saturday, August 3**

Jeremiah 26:11-16; Matthew 14:1-12

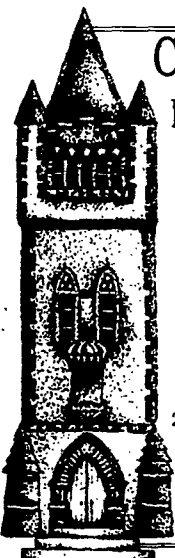
## NYS Woodsmen's Field Days

AUG. 16-18, 1996

Boonville Oneida County Fairgrounds  
Boonville, NY

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL  
(315) 942-4593

HELP SUPPORT THE FOREST  
INDUSTRY OF NYS



## CALL A HISTORIC LANDMARK HOME

Now leasing for August  
1st Occupancy!

Spacious Studios, One  
and Two Bedroom  
Apartments from \$374

ST. BERNARD'S PARK  
For Adults 55+

2260 Lake Ave. • Rochester

Call Sherry for  
details today  
(716) 458-9000

## HART MONUMENT COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers  
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue  
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746

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