

COLUMNISTS

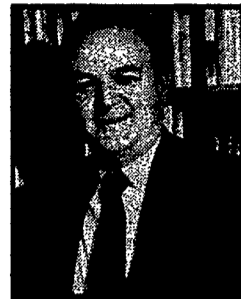
'Called to be Catholic' begs questions

Last month Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, issued an appeal for dialogue in the Catholic Church. His formal statement, "Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril," outlined a set of principles to help "reconstitute the conditions for addressing our differences constructively."

The statement is to provide the basis for the cardinal's Catholic Common Ground Project, which will sponsor conferences and publications "intended to demonstrate how the church ... can engage in open discussion of sensitive issues" that is frank and yet faithful to the living Catholic tradition.

The project's advisory committee includes eight bishops, almost all of whom are conservative or moderately conservative, and 17 clergy, sisters and lay people, almost all of whom, again, are conservative or moderately conservative.

In spite of the generally conservative make-up of the project committee, Cardinal Bernardin's initiative was almost immediately criticized by at least three U.S. cardinals and a few lesser lights because of the project's underlying assumption that there is room for dialogue in the Catholic Church on such issues as the changing roles of women, the church's official teachings on human sexuality, the morale of priests and the vocations crisis, the manner of decision-making and consultation in church governance, the relations between the-



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ologians and the magisterium, and the relations between the U.S. hierarchy and the Vatican.

I, too, have a few reservations about the project — not about its laudable intentions, to be sure, nor about its wise and saintly originator, Cardinal Bernardin, but about the manner in which the "Called to be Catholic" statement analyzes the problems facing the church as well as the way in which it has at least partly structured its response, that is, through a committee with too few members who can accurately and forcefully give voice to the views of the church's more liberal and moderately progressive constituencies.

The statement asserts, for example, that many of the church's leaders, both clerical and lay, "feel under siege and increasingly polarized." Younger Catholics, it says, "feel disenfranchised, confused about their beliefs, and increasingly adrift."

But do lay and clerical leaders "feel un-

der siege" or are they demoralized, embarrassed, and fatigued by the constant need to fend off attacks and to absorb disparaging comments about the quality of their service to the church?

Do younger Catholics feel "disenfranchised," "confused," and "adrift," or are they simply indifferent to official and institutional church personalities and policies?

The thousands of young people who flocked to Denver in 1993 to see the pope are massively outnumbered by the many more thousands who aren't involved at all. On a given Sunday morning, one has only to scan the congregation to see how few college-age and young adults are present in comparison with young children and middle-aged and senior adults.

The statement offers a list of "urgent questions" that the church can no longer afford to "evade or, at best, address obliquely" without placing the future of American Catholic life "at risk."

"Yet in almost every case," it points out, "the necessary conversation runs up against polarized positions that have so magnified fears and so strained sensitivities that even the simplest lines of inquiry are often fiercely resisted."

Unfortunately, the analysis begs the question: Why is there such polarization in the first place? How did we get into this state, given the high promise of Vatican II and the new spirit of energy and

hope it released?

There is an elephant in the living room that the statement pretends isn't there. Not once in "Called to be Catholic" is the pope mentioned nor the manner in which authority is exercised in this pontificate.

And yet the pope himself acknowledged in his remarkable encyclical of last year, *Ut Unum Sint*, that the way in which papal authority is exercised needs to be discussed. Indeed, he invited such discussion.

The "necessary conversation," I submit, isn't precluded by polarization, but by factors that have generated the polarization, especially the use of ecclesiastical power to prevent such conversation and even to punish those who would presume to initiate or engage in it.

This process began early on with the censuring of theologians like Hans Kung, Charles Curran and Leonardo Boff, and the disciplining of bishops like Seattle's Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen. Indeed, the history of this weekly column is a small part of that pattern.

Liberal or progressive Catholics would surely welcome the "necessary conversation" about which the Bernardin statement speaks, but many of them have had to pay a price for trying to get such a conversation underway. Others hold back because they feel they can't afford the price.

There is an elephant in the living room.

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

'Little demon envy' works against us

Sunday's readings: (R3) Matthew 20:1-16. (R1) Isaiah 55:6-9. (R2) Philippians 1:20-24, 27.

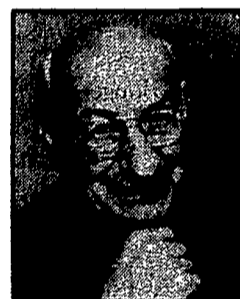
One of the most basic elements in the make-up of human beings, and the fallen angels, is envy. St. Thomas defined envy as "sadness about the good-fortune of another."

As someone said, "After a person makes his mark in the world, a lot of people begin showing up with erasers."

Envy appears in the first pages of the Bible. Cain, a farmer, brought his first fruits to the Lord as an offering. Abel, a shepherd, brought the firstlings of his flock to the Lord. The Lord had regard for Abel's offering, but no regard for Cain's. So Cain's countenance fell. He envied his brother and killed him. Few emotions are as deadly as envy.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard not only illustrates the great generosity of God and that grace is not earned but freely given, but it also illustrates the ugliness of envy. Instead of rejoicing at the good fortune of those who got a full day's pay for one hour's work, those who had worked all day were furious. It wasn't fair.

The elder brother of the prodigal son displayed the same envy. "It isn't fair that my younger brother should receive a welcome like this, when I, who have stayed home all these years, never received a



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

party like this."

Why does it bother us when someone else gets what we don't get? Why did it bother the workers in the vineyard what the others received? They got what was coming to them.

Basically, envy always springs from a feeling of insecurity about our own self-worth. If we felt good about ourselves, would we worry about other people's gifts, accomplishments, position, or whatever? God asked Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Cain had no answer.

Even successful people will often hurt their own career rather than share the glory with someone else. When Henry Ford started his car company in 1903, he took as a partner, James Couzens. Couzens contributed as much to the success of the Ford Motor company as did Ford himself. So effective did Couzens

become that Ford grew more and more jealous of him. When Couzens wanted to scuttle the Model T Ford as obsolete, Ford disagreed. He forced Couzens out in 1917, and kept making Model Ts until he had nearly bankrupted the company.

This little demon envy says, "See, you're really not such hot stuff, after all. Look at his success. He's got it and you don't. No matter what other people think, you and I know that you are a loser, a nothing." And thus the success of others becomes threatening, not because of what it says about them, but because of what it might be saying about us.

Envy springs from a basic insecurity about our own self-worth. Once an eagle envied a fellow eagle because it could fly better and higher. Spotting a sportsman with bow and arrows the first eagle said to him, "I wish you would bring down that eagle up there." The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow.

The jealous eagle pulled out one from his own wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The jealous eagle pulled out another feather, than another, until finally he had lost so many feathers that he himself couldn't fly. The archer took advantage, turned around and killed the helpless bird. Envy recoils on the envious.

Is there any hope for us in dealing with

the demon of envy? Yes. There is a Man hanging on a cross who says to us, "You are worth all the world to me. You're not a failure, you're not a loser, you are a child of the living God, worth more than the entire physical universe. You weren't produced on an assembly line. Each one of you is unique, handcrafted by God himself. You are loved with an everlasting love. Therefore rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, not the other way around."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, September 23

Proverbs 3:27-34; Luke 8:16-18

Tuesday, September 24

Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13;

Luke 8:19-21

Wednesday, September 25

Proverbs 30:5-9; Luke 9:1-6

Thursday, September 26

Ecclesiastes 1:2-11; Luke 9:7-9

Friday, September 27

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Luke 9:18-22

Saturday, September 28

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8;

Luke 9:43-45

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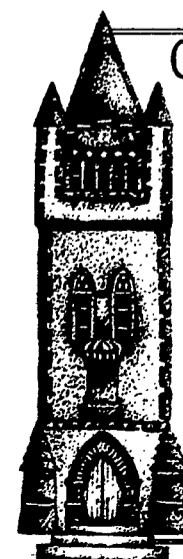
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