

COLUMNISTS

Columnist remains on track with mission

I have been writing this column for more than 30 years. Immediately after the first one appeared in my archdiocesan weekly, *The Catholic Transcript* in Hartford, on July 8, 1966, other papers asked to carry it. *The Transcript* published and syndicated the column each week since then, but that relationship has now ended. Beginning this week, the column is self-syndicated. *The Transcript* is changing to a monthly cycle of publication in November. The column, the executive editor said, wouldn't fit in the new format, even though there are a few monthly papers already carrying it, selecting one column of four each month.

At the same time, a conservative columnist (a fellow priest of the archdiocese) will continue to appear in the paper's pages. I'm not exactly sure what he'll write about, since most of his efforts for many months have been by way of instant rebuttals of my column — same week, same page. Friends in the newspaper business had expressed amazement at this practice since it involved the use of advance copies of my column before their embargoed publication date.

I've been asked, if the new monthly format was the only reason for the column's being dropped and if *The Transcript's* weekly cycle was to continue until the end of October, why was the column discontinued in mid-September.

The decision may have had something to do with the column I had written for



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the upcoming week (published in the *Catholic Courier* Sept. 19).

It was a column I was not happy to write because it involved some criticism of an initiative with which I was, and am, in total sympathy, namely, Cardinal Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Project. Furthermore, there is no church leader for whom I have greater respect or personal admiration than the archbishop of Chicago.

However, I felt that the cardinal and his immediate associates had not put together a sufficiently balanced project committee. I judged the non-episcopal segment of the group (laity, clergy, and religious) too strongly tilted toward the conservative and moderately conservative side.

Knowing Cardinal Bernardin's wonderfully conciliatory spirit, I understood that he was bending over backwards to forestall opposition from the right. But a good rule of thumb is that people with strongly held views and strong-willed per-

sonalities to match are rarely appeased by conciliatory gestures.

And that seems to have happened in this case. Cardinal Bernardin's laudable efforts to go more than halfway did not exempt the project from immediate criticism, even from four of his fellow cardinals.

Those who follow U.S. Catholic events closely know how unprecedented that display of criticism is. Until now, our bishops have almost never differed with one another publicly. An unwritten rule has apparently been abrogated, although that isn't necessarily a bad thing.

But I'm wandering a bit from my story. That column also pointed out the great gap in the statement that accompanied the announcement of the Catholic Common Ground Project. The statement, "Called to Be Catholic," provides a long list of controversial items that need to be discussed openly in the church, and in a spirit of mutual respect.

There was one major item missing, which I referred to as "the elephant in the living room," an expression taken from literature about dysfunctional families. A friend suggested a different expression, taken from Sherlock Holmes: "The dog didn't bark."

Whatever the appropriate metaphor, the project statement makes no explicit mention of the manner in which central authority is exercised in this pontificate nor of the personal style of the current pope, in spite of the pope's own invita-

tion to reflect on these issues in last year's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

I pointed out in that column that the reason dialogue is not widely or effectively practiced in the church isn't because liberals and conservatives refuse to talk with one another. It is because ecclesiastical power is too often exercised, and from the center, to discourage and even to prohibit such dialogue from taking place, and then to punish those who presume to raise and address controversial issues.

The stated purpose of this column is to stimulate an increasingly well-educated readership to think about often controverted questions of importance to the faith, life, and work of the church. Better to reflect on these issues openly than to force the discussion underground or to the margins, where they can fester, become distorted, and do unnecessary harm to the Body of Christ.

This week, as the column begins a new phase in its history, I welcome the opportunity to recommit myself to this 30-year-long effort — an effort which I have always believed to be essentially pastoral and ministerial in character.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. He will speak from 10 a.m. to noon Friday, Oct. 18, at Strong Auditorium, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester, in a talk sponsored by St. Bernard's Institute. Father McBrien will not be speaking that night, as announced in last week's *Courier*.

Letter from England reveals power of rosary

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 21:33-43, (R1) Isaiah 5:1-7, (R) Philippians 4:6-9.

October is the month of the Holy Rosary. Oct. 7 is the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary. In the greatest Marian apparitions in the 19th and 20th centuries — at Lourdes and at Fatima — Our Lady appeared with the rosary and pleaded with us to pray the rosary.

Last month I received a letter from a Brian Hill in England. I don't know the man, but he read my booklet "The Power of the Rosary." I was deeply touched by his letter, which showed the great power and love of the Mother of God for us. I am sure Brian would not mind if I shared part of his letter with you.

"As a small child," he wrote, "I suffered abuse at the hands of (a relative) and in many ways it left me with an inability to let people get close to me. Some 15 years ago I became a Catholic but found it hard to accept Mary. Six years ago I lost my faith in the church so I left.

"About four months ago I was on the verge of taking my own life. I went out with the intention of just doing that. I cannot remember just how long I had been walking. I lost all sense of time. I found myself by the Catholic church so I went inside and sat down by the statue of Our



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Lady. So I began to tell her just how I felt and that I was going to kill myself. I then said if you are able to, forgive me for what I am about to do.

"Suddenly I felt this warm feeling coming over me. I had this feeling that I was not on my own. I looked around the church but could see no one. I heard this voice inside me say 'Stay close to me! Stay close to me!'

"On the way home I began to think, 'No way. It was just all in your imagination.' But as time went by I have found that I have got a love for Mary and I have started to go back to church. Now I believe that Our Lady did speak to me even if it was just inside my head. Also I believe that Our Lady saved me from killing myself that day. I am staying close to Mary as she has asked me to and am finding that

I can now accept Mary as I have never been able to before."

Then Brian asked me to send him a rosary and went on to say, "I believe that is what Our Lady meant when she said to me to stay close to her. I feel that I am being called to pray the rosary."

Of course, I sent him a rosary and other things and I wrote this letter.

"Dear Brian,
"Thank you so much for sharing your spiritual experiences with me. How happy I am that you went to Mary.

"Remember God promised the victory over Satan to the Woman and her seed: to Mary and her children — they shall crush the serpent's head.

"You received a great grace when Mary spoke to you, telling you to stay close to her. It was Mary. Do just as she asked. And you will if you pray the rosary daily. The rosary is the hand of Mary. Its five decades are her five fingers. When you pray the rosary, you clasp the hand of Mary. Holding on to her hand you cannot fall.

"Persevere, Brian, in the grace Mary has given you. She is our Mother — yours and mine. She loves us dearly. She will never let us be harmed eternally if only we keep close to her.

"She is our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope!

"God bless you Brian,
"Sincerely in Jesus and Mary,
"Father Shamon"

Please, I beg you, teach your children the rosary. St. Bernadette was 12, Lucy, Jacinta, and Francesco were 9, 8 and 7 respectively — and they all knew the rosary and said it.

And the best way to teach them is to pray the rosary daily as a family. The family rosary: What a blessing it will bring to the family, to parents, to children, to society.

Brian's conversion is just one of countless examples of the power of the rosary. Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, October 7

Galatians 1:6-12; Luke 10:25-37

Tuesday, October 8

Galatians 1:13-24; Luke 10:38-42

Wednesday, October 9

Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14; Luke 11:1-4

Thursday, October 10

Galatians 3:1-5; Luke 11:5-13

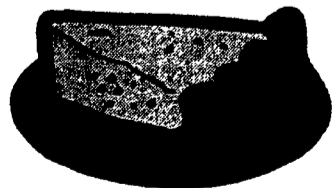
Friday, October 11

Galatians 3:7-14; Luke 11:15-26

Saturday, October 12

Galatians 3:22-29; Luke 11:27-28

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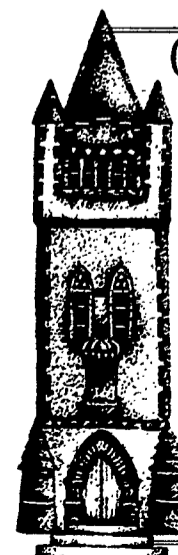
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