

COLUMNISTS

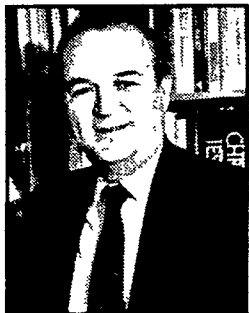
Advice to liberals seems half-baked

David Carlin, a frequent contributor to Catholic periodicals, has published a challenging piece in the Jan. 18 Jesuit weekly *America*. "Why Catholic Liberals Should Settle for Half a Loaf."

With the hope that I am not oversimplifying, I would summarize his thesis as follows: The Catholic Church is, and has always been, essentially conservative, albeit with a relatively small liberal contingent whose leaders play the role of gadflies rather than commanders. All the important decisions are made by popes and bishops, and to a lesser extent the lower clergy, to whom the faithful, conservatives and liberals alike, always defer in the end.

Professor Carlin argues that Catholic liberals today make a big mistake if they push their own agenda too hard. They will only provoke an even greater reaction from the conservatives. What liberals have to do — "moderate" liberals — is distance themselves from the extreme left (who undermine the moderates' credibility) and work toward small, incremental reforms.

Specifically, he counsels moderate liberals (1) against trying to change the celibate, all-male nature of the clergy, even linking its celibate maleness with "the indispensability of the clerical order" itself;



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

(2) against any serious attempt to encourage the laity to accept responsibility for the mission and ministries of the church, while downplaying Vatican II's concepts of the church as the people of God and the priesthood of all believers; and (3) against trying to remake the Catholic Church into a "resemblance" of the Anglican communion: with its spiritual head as a "first among equals" rather than a kind of absolute monarch, with "high levels of national and diocesan autonomy," with the popular election of bishops, with a married and a female priesthood, and with a "broad range of liturgical styles and theological opinions" and some "flexibility on moral teachings having to do with sexual matters."

Carlin confidently predicts that an "Anglicized" Catholic Church would do a tail-

spin into ecclesiastical insignificance.

To re-state the thesis in a different way: The Catholic Church is, and has always been, inherently renewal-resistant, but that's not a defect; it's the secret of its success in the face of such historic challenges as Protestantism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, nationalism, anticlericalism, communism, fascism, the sexual revolution, and so on. It is an interesting thesis, but one not substantiated by history.

What Professor Carlin dismisses as an "Anglicized" Catholic Church is, for the most part, the Catholic Church of the First Millennium.

Popes and all other bishops were elected by the clergy and the laity. Indeed, Pope Leo the Great (d. 461) insisted that it could not be otherwise.

National and diocesan churches had "high levels" of autonomy. Rome did not control the appointment of their bishops nor dictate what they could do.

Needless to say, the clergy were married, and so, too, were popes — and not just Peter! Innocent I (401-17) succeeded his father, Anastasius I (399-401), as pope. Hormisdas (514-23) also had a son who eventually became pope, Silverius (536-37). The church recognizes all four as saints. And there is strong evidence that women were ordained to the diaconate

during the first several centuries of the church.

There was also a "broad range of liturgical styles and theological opinions." Indeed, so broad was the range of theological opinions that two popes (Vigilius and Honorius I) were even excommunicated for theirs.

If the Catholic Church is inherently renewal-resistant, how explain the Second Vatican Council — or the Council of Trent, for that matter?

And if Pope John XXIII wasn't a liberal (as the author insists he was not), was he a conservative, then, in the mold of John Paul II?

Returning to Professor Carlin's loaf metaphor: He seems to suggest that the hierarchy and their conservative allies own the whole loaf by divine right and that moderate liberals ought to be grateful for their "small but nourishing" piece. ("Non-moderate" liberals apparently deserve not even a crumb.)

One wonders how consistent this is with St. Paul's use of the metaphor in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

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

It's time we outgrew the aquarium

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 9:2-10. (R1) Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18. (R2) Romans 8:31-34.

Did you know that sharks grow only as large as their environment permits? If you catch a small shark and put it in an aquarium, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium. Sharks can be 6 inches long and fully mature. But turn them loose in the ocean and they grow to their normal size.

It seems the followers of Jesus are like that. Challenge them to live heroic lives and they will. Leave them unchallenged and they'll wallow in the mire of mediocrity.

One day Jesus took his three most trusted disciples — Peter, James and John — to the top of a mountain. During prayer, Jesus was transfigured; that is, the sun of his divinity shone through the cloud of his humanity. His clothes became a dazzling white — whiter, said Mark, than any bleach on earth could get them. Then Moses, who had given the Law to God's people, and Elijah, the first and greatest of the prophets, appeared. These highest representatives of the Law and the prophets talked to Jesus about his coming death.

Then the disciples heard a voice: "This



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him!" They were terrified, overcome with awe.

I suppose we would have been terrified, too, if we had been there, dealing with an extra-terrestrial experience. Here they saw the glorified Christ. They were sinners in the presence of one who was sinless. No wonder they were afraid!

Eventually, the disciples were transformed through their experiences with Jesus. Not at once. Transformation rarely happens all at once. The Transfiguration was just one more step in the training of the disciples. They would share many more experiences with Christ. And all the while they would be changing, becoming more and more like him. They would move from being terrified to becoming terrific; from being easily intimidated to

being almost invincible.

The same thing can happen to us. Our failings, our inadequacies, might make us fearful in the presence of Christ. But Christ loves us; and because he does, change is possible. As the Transfiguration led to the transformation of the disciples, so should our response be to Christ transfigured on our altars. He calls us to be perfect. He means it. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird; but it is much harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. At present we are like eggs. We just can't go on being good eggs. We must be hatched or go bad.

So the disciples were terrified, then transformed, and finally turned loose upon the world. Jesus came to teach all nations, that is why he transforms us so that we might be transformers. Peter, James and John wanted to stay on the mountaintop. But that wasn't Jesus' nor their mission. Theirs was a ministry of love to the people in the valley below. And that is our ministry as well.

After the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John were no longer content to live in a tiny aquarium. Jesus had called them to bigger and better things. It was time for them to reach their full potential as his followers. So it is time for us to escape the

aquarium. Does the call to holiness terrify us? Will it transform us? In turn, will we transform the world? Do not be terrified but be transformed. Reach your full potential in Christ.

"This is the will of God your sanctification" in order to transform the world.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 24
Daniel 9:4-10; Luke 6:36-38

Tuesday, February 25
Isaiah 1:10,16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday, February 26
Jeremiah 18:18-20;
Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday, February 27
Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

Friday, February 28
Genesis 37:3-4,12-13,17-28;
Matthew 21:33-43,45-46

Saturday, March 1
Micah 7:14-15,18-20;
Luke 15:1-3,11-32

—Bakeries/Cakes—

Cheesecakes & Ol' Smoothe
Uniquely Designed & Decorated Wedding Cakes
They won't know it's cheesecake 'till you cut it!
—Non-Dairy, Kosher, Pareve Available—
900 Jefferson Rd. • Rochester • (716) 272-0080

—Bookstore—

The Catholic Shop
Unity Candles • Program Covers
Christian Invitations
696 South Ave. Rochester 473-6410

—Favors—

DAN'S CRAFTS & THINGS
352 EMPIRE BLVD., ROCHESTER, NY 14609
716-654-8388 • SAVE • DO IT YOURSELF!

- Wedding Accessories
- Ribbons
- Headpieces
- Instruction Books
- Cake Tops
- Silk Flowers
- Bridal Bouquets
- Favor Supplies
- Veiling

Wedding Guide



—Florists—

Fioravanti Florist
For that one special occasion you'll want perfection.
2279 Clifford Ave. (near Culver) (716) 482-1001

—Jewelers—

Boeckmann Jewelers
Wedding Bands • Anniversary Bands • Wedding Pearls • Attendant's Gifts
Large Assortment • Personalized Service • Reasonable Prices
1600 Ridge Rd. West
Street of Shoppes
Rochester, NY 14615 621-1730

—Honeymoons—

your HONEYMOON EXPERTS
Judy Graper Travel (716) 385-3820
The Barn Bazaar • Clover St.
at Jefferson Rd. Pittsford

—Receptions—

For the elegant wedding reception
The Spring House Since 1822
1001 Niagara Ave. Rochester • (716) 596-2300

ZAMIARA'S
Party House and Restaurant
Unique Wedding Packages Available
Accommodations to 250
Located in the beautifully renovated Historic Dowd Post, est. 1939
898 Buffalo Road • Rochester • (716) 235-3775