

COLUMNISTS

New archbishop faces potential conflicts

One wishes the new archbishop of Chicago, Francis George, a full measure of pastoral success. What follows is in no way intended to diminish the force of that sentiment.

First, a word about the media. Conservative Catholics generally complain about media coverage of the church, but if it weren't for the media, few people outside of Chicago would know or care about the appointment of this "conservative intellectual," as *The New York Times* headline described him.

The conservatives are right, however, about the media's often getting the story wrong. The opening paragraph in the *Times*' report yields an insight supposedly lost on everyone else; namely, that the appointment of Archbishop George offers "an important indication of the type of leadership (the Vatican) is seeking for America's Roman Catholics."

The Vatican, and specifically Pope John Paul II, has long since given a series of "important indication(s) of the



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

type of leadership it is seeking for America's Roman Catholics" — in its appointments over the past 18 years. How many "important indications" do we need before we get the point?

Priests of the stature of Joseph Bernardin (late of Chicago), Rembert Weakland (Milwaukee), Francis Hurley (Anchorage), John Roach (retired, St. Paul-Minneapolis), William Borders (retired, Baltimore), John Dearden (late of Detroit), Thomas Kelly (Louisville), John May (late of St. Louis), and Ray-

mond Hunthausen (retired, Seattle) have been excluded for some time from consideration for appointment in this pontificate.

Second, a word about a comment the newly named archbishop made in his first news conference in Chicago. "The faith," he said, "isn't liberal or conservative. The faith is true. And I will preach the faith."

As a man who has studied theology and philosophy, he surely knows that faith and theology are not one and the same and that it is impossible to make a statement of faith that is also not theological.

Of course, the faith is true. But that begs two theological questions: What is truly a matter of faith? And what does it mean?

Does he intend to suggest that our belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist are on the same level, for example, with belief that the use of artificial contraception is always mortally sinful or that

only men can be ordained priests?

Because if that is what he means, he trivializes the beliefs that are truly matters of faith.

Moreover, even on matters of faith, one still has to interpret them.

It is a matter of faith, for example, that the contrite are offered forgiveness of their sins in the sacrament of reconciliation.

But does that sacrament have to be celebrated between the priest and the penitent alone? For the first six centuries or more of the church's history, there was no private confession of sins.

The media describe the new archbishop of Chicago as an intellectual. That is a good thing, because intellectuals are always open to new ideas and to the intellectual conflicts that generate them.

He will find more than his share of them in Chicago.

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

May is a time to honor workers

I have a friend from Nebraska who, as a little girl, prepared May baskets and delivered them to friends' front doors, ringing the doorbell and running away. Most of us at least collected backyard flowers for Mary's altar when we were small and in the eighth grade the girls longed to be elected May queen and to crown the Blessed Virgin with flowers.

May is the month of Our Lady. It is also Joseph's month, Joseph the Worker. The church blessed the union movement that claims May for working people by giving us the feast of Joseph the Worker.

In the 19th century, May 1 was the day the building trade unions traditionally negotiated their seasonal pay with the contractors. If they signed a contract, they joined their families in a picnic celebration. Or else they went on strike.

In 1886, a general strike was called on May 1 to demand the eight-hour day. The strike took a strong hold in Chicago and paralyzed the city. The building industry and metal foundries were silent. The railroad yards were already shut down by the Pullman workers. On May 2, 65,000 to



ordinary time

BY MARY ANN MCGIVERN, SI

80,000 workers were walking picket lines.

Trouble came on May 3 at the McCormick Harvester works, where there was yet more ongoing labor strife. Fourteen-hundred workers had been locked out since February, and when eight-hour strikers came on the scene to help the locked-out workers heckle and attack the scabs, 200 police shot into the crowd and killed at least four workmen.

The next night, May 4, there was a rally at Haymarket Square with a crowd of 3,000. But it was cold and rainy and by 10:30 p.m. the chief organizers and 2,000 attendees had gone home. It was then

180 police marched in and almost immediately a bomb was thrown into their midst. Seven policemen died; 67 were injured. The police fired wildly and clubbed everyone in sight — 200 protesters were injured. There's no count how many were killed.

The bomb-thrower was never found. Police blamed the Chicago labor-anarchists who led the Chicago strike. Labor blamed an agent provocateur. In 1893, when he pardoned the three surviving convicted men, Illinois Gov. John P. Altgeld suggested that personal revenge was the motive behind the bombing.

"For a number of years prior to the Haymarket affair there had been labor troubles and, in several cases, a number of laboring people, guilty of no offense, had been shot down in cold blood by Pinkerton men, and none of the murderers were brought to justice," Gov. Altgeld said.

He further asserted that much of the evidence given at the trial was pure fabrication.

That was after the fact. Four men were

hung on Nov. 11, 1887. One killed himself. May Day became an international symbol of the working poor.

But it is a story we rarely tell here in the United States. That's too bad. Haymarket is a truer expression of our American experience than the gunfight at OK Corral; and the horror of the event for both the police and the strikers is an invocation to Joseph and to Mary to guide us on a path that is strewn with the flowers of justice.

Police, carpenters, nurses, orderlies — we are all working people. When we honor Joseph and Mary, we honor ourselves and one another. And when we dishonor ourselves, we dishonor our patron saints.

This month, along with the Maypoles and baskets and queens, tell your children about the work your grandparents did. Thank the checkout clerk at the grocery. And recommit yourself to economic justice for the working poor.

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Sister McGivern is executive director of the St. Louis Economic Conversion Project based in St. Louis, Mo.

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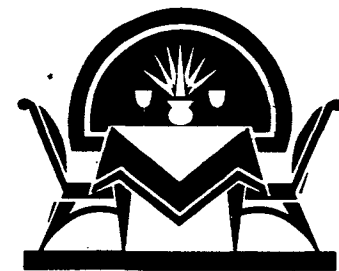
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