

COLUMNISTS

The church is a community of hope

Of the three theological virtues, hope always had a tertiary place, after faith and charity. It received little attention from the classical theologians, and even St. Thomas Aquinas devoted only a few sections to it in his *Summa*. Wherever the virtue of hope was discussed, however, it was always in relation to an individual's hope for salvation.

That situation changed in the mid 1960s, especially with the work of two German theologians, one Protestant and one Catholic: Jurgen Moltmann and Father Johannes Metz.

The English language edition of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* made a profound impact on the theological community when it first appeared in 1967. Many saw it as the decisive antidote to the death of God theology that had been enjoying much attention in the media during the preceding two years.

The following spring a major symposium on Moltmann's book was held at Duke University. Many of America's leading theologians participated, and many more of us who were just beginning our theological careers. I recall vividly the announcement, in the middle of the conference, that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated.

Jurgen Moltmann and Johannes Metz together redirected our attention to the future, but not simply as our own per-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

sonal future or as the end of history, which God alone would control. The future, they insisted, is something for which we all have responsibility, in collaboration with God. It is the future of the world itself.

The virtue of hope became associated thereafter with the coming of the kingdom, or reign, of God, understood not as heaven alone but as the renewal and recreation of the whole world when there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Theologians began speaking of God as ahead of us rather than above us. God is ahead of us in the yet-to-be realized future, summoning us to co-create that future.

Eschatology (the study of the last things, or the final reign of God) became the central issue in all of theology. Whereas theology had been defined for

centuries as "faith seeking understanding," theologians were now saying that theology is also "hope seeking understanding."

Revelation, therefore, is not simply information about another world where God dwells, but it is also a word of promise about this world where we dwell.

It was said that Christian existence is to be lived within "the horizon of expectation." In other words, everything is determined by and related to our hope in the coming of the kingdom of God. And it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that is the basis of that hope.

Christ's resurrection is the "first fruits" of the final kingdom. It is God's "down payment," so to speak, on the promise of that kingdom. Our future, therefore, is the same future as that of the risen Christ.

It was Johannes Metz in particular who brought these themes into Catholic theology in the late '60s and early '70s. Our understanding of the world, he argued, is oriented toward the future. Accordingly, religion is not so much a matter of contemplation as of action. We are called, Metz wrote, to build a new world, and not only to interpret it. (His formulation was a direct response to the Marxist criticism of religion, namely, that religion is only interested in interpreting the world, not in changing it.)

Metz coined the term "political theology." It is a theology that measures life in the "city" (Greek, "polis") against the standards of the kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, love and peace as well as of holiness and grace, as the Second Vatican Council had put it (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 39).

Renunciation of the world, therefore, isn't an escape from our earthly responsibilities. It is simply the refusal to regard anything in the world as absolute and final. Nothing in this world can be identified with the kingdom. Everything is subject to criticism and reform, even the church.

The church itself is a community of hope, a community that lives by the power of the Spirit of the risen Christ, with its sights set always on the coming kingdom of God.

The church cannot simply preach and teach the truth; it must live it. And it is only by giving witness to the truth that "people all over the world will awaken to a lively hope, the gift of the Holy Spirit, that they will one day be admitted to the haven of surpassing peace and happiness in their homeland radiant with the glory of the Lord" (Pastoral Constitution, n. 93).

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

Jesus provides us with true bread of life

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:41-51. (R1) 1 Kings 19:4-8. (R2) Ephesians 4:30-5:2.

Two of the biggest sellers in any bookstore are the cookbooks and the diet books. The cookbooks tell you how to prepare the food and the diet books tell you how not to eat any of it.

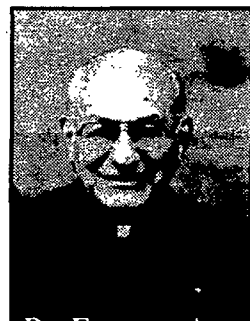
Orson Welles once said, "My doctor has advised me to give up those intimate little dinners for four, unless, of course, there are three other people eating with me."

A scientist computed that the average human being eats 16 times his or her own weight in an average year, while a horse eats only eight times its weight. This all seems to prove that if you want to lose weight, you should eat like a horse.

A member of Weight Watchers, at one of their meetings, near Easter, said proudly that this was the first year her children realized that chocolate Easter bunnies came with ears.

In one way or another, many of us are obsessed with food — earthly food. Think what a difference it would make in our lives if we were equally obsessed with heavenly food — the bread of life.

Jesus said to his followers, "I am the bread of life ... for a man to eat and never die If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world."



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Poet George Herbert once described an imaginary dialogue between himself and Christ.

Christ welcomes him at his own home. But Herbert hangs back, aware of how sinful he is. Christ notices his reluctance and gently asks him what is the matter. Herbert answers, "O Lord I am not worthy to enter your house."

"But you are my guest. I welcome you," Christ says.

"Me, with all my sins of unkindness and ingratitude? I can't even look you in the face," Herbert replies.

"But I gave you those eyes," Christ says.

"I know but I have misused them. I'm ashamed."

"But that is why I want you to come in — to help you use them and all your senses properly."

Herbert agrees, but on the condition that he serves at the table. Christ does

not even permit this. "I am in the midst of you as one who serves. Come, take and eat, and you'll become as a dragon breathing fire so terrible will you become to the demons of hell."

As ordinary food nourishes the body and enables it to do its work, so the bread of life enables one to live the life of God and do the work that will merit life eternal.

Of course, we are not worthy. That is why it is well to go to confession before Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is not our reaching out to God, but God reaching out to us. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me."

The "Eu" in the word Eucharist means "good" and "charis" is the root of our English word "caress." Holy Communion is a "good caress." God comes to us really and truly and touches us and says, "I love you and I caress you and I hold you in my arms and no harm can come to you as long as you come to me, for in Holy Communion you are in my good caress, in my strong arms."

Truly Jesus is the bread of life. He alone touches and satisfies our deepest needs. He alone empowers us against all the wiles of the world, the flesh and

the devil.

In a world obsessed with food, he gives us the bread that is eternal. Take it, eat it worthily and live eternally.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, August 11

Deuteronomy 10:12-22;
Matthew 17:22-27

Tuesday, August 12

Deuteronomy 31:1-8;
Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

Wednesday, August 13

Deuteronomy 34:1-12;
Matthew 18:15-20

Thursday, August 14

Joshua 3:7-10, 11, 13-17;
Matthew 18:21-19:1

Vigil of Assumption

1 Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16;
16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57;
Luke 11:27-28

Friday, August 15

Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a,
10ab; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27;
Luke 1:39-56

Saturday, August 16

Joshua 24:14-29;
Matthew 19:13-15

BUYING AND SELLING

Coins • Stamps • Gold & Silver
Jewelry • Antiques & Collectibles •
Perfume Bottles and lots more!

Open Monday through Saturday 10-6
Thurs. and Fri. 11-8, closed Wed. during summer

1434 Buffalo Road, Rochester
(716) 235-5441
(800) 213-2542



"IF YOU'VE MADE A WILL, THERE'S ONE MORE THING TO DO..."

To learn more about prearranged funerals,
please call us. Our counsel is always available
free of charge and at no obligation.

David P. Crawford • Mark D. Wakeman
495 N. Winton Rd. • Rochester • (716) 482-0400

Crawford
FUNERAL HOME INC.

DiPonzio Funeral Home Inc.

Across from St. Theodore's Church
Dominic A. DiPonzio - Lic. Mgr.
Christopher B. DiPonzio - L. F. D.
Joseph D. DiPonzio - L. F. D.

219 Spencerport Rd. • Rochester
429-6700

Michael R. Yackiw Funeral Home



1270 Norton Street
544-5000

Look for our education supplement next week.