

A reassessment of influential theologians

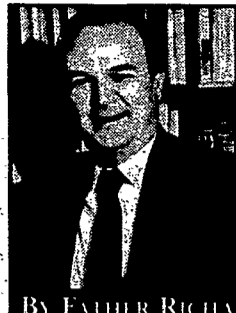
Twenty years ago I did a column on eight well-known scholars, all of whom were celebrating their 50th birthdays in 1978. I described them as "the Church's golden eight." This year all but one are celebrating their 70th birthdays.

The "golden eight" included Raymond Brown, a Sulpician priest, whom I characterized as "one of the foremost New Testament exegetes and biblical theologians on the entire international scene." Brown has since retired from his professorship at Union Theological Seminary in New York, but has remained extraordinarily productive.

His most recent achievement is *An Introduction to the New Testament*, published last fall by Doubleday. It is vintage Brown: clear, substantial, thorough, and evenly balanced, with a characteristic sensitivity to ecclesial and pastoral concerns.

I referred to Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian diocesan priest, as "the leading proponent and theorist of Latin American liberation theology." His stature has continued to grow, even in the face of misunderstandings and unjust criticisms on the part of militant forces on the right.

Since 1978 Gutierrez has provided liberation theology with a deeper spiritual grounding through such books as *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual*



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Journey of a People (1984), *The God of Life* (1991), and *Mysticism and the Institutional Crisis* (1994) (all Orbis Books).

Andrew Greeley, I wrote, "is by any fair account perhaps the most productive and penetrating critic of religious attitudes and behavior in the United States today." I am not aware of anyone who has surpassed him. He continues to produce books, articles and columns at an astonishing rate. He has his own Web page (www.agreeley.com), on which one can access, among other things, his most recent homilies and a "Mailbox Parish News Letter." A priest of the archdiocese of Chicago, his work is marked by an abiding concern for pastoral ministry.

Hans Kung, I wrote in 1978, is "the Church's best known ecclesologist, consistently in the vanguard of discussion on

a whole range of important and controversial issues." I balked as I re-read the words, "the Church's best known ecclesologist." By every informed standard of measurement, the late Dominican Yves Congar, named a cardinal in 1994 at age 90, just before his death, is clearly the outstanding ecclesologist of this century, if not of all time. But "best known" was, and is, probably accurate in Kung's case because of his unusually high public profile. Although censured by the Vatican in 1979, his work has continued unabated, but now with a global and interreligious dimension. There are persistent rumors that there will be a healing of the breach with the Vatican. It is long overdue.

Martin Marty, professor at the University of Chicago (but soon to retire) and an ordained Lutheran, I described as "the best known and most influential church historian in the United States and ... one of society's and the Church's most astute and incisive critics." I would call him now the "most astute and incisive" observer of the religious scene. In his case, too, there has been no let-up whatever in his productivity since 1978.

Johannes Metz, a German diocesan priest, retired in 1993 from his professorship at the University of Muenster. Since 1978, through personal contacts with

church leaders in Latin America, his theology turned sharply in a liberationist direction. He became a tireless advocate of the poor and the powerless.

Schubert Ogden was at the time, like Martin Marty, a professor in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, but he moved from there to a chair at Southern Methodist University. He has since retired, although not from theology. I acknowledged in 1978 that Professor Ogden, a Methodist, was for U.S. Catholics "the least recognizable name on this list," but I pointed out that he was one of the principal shapers of the discussion on some of the most fundamental theological issues, such as revelation, faith, and the nature of theological language.

I have left George MacRae, a New Testament scholar, for last. Although he published relatively little during his scholarly career, he was a good and generous friend and mentor to so many of his students and professional colleagues. In a development that would have made John Harvard turn over in his grave, George MacRae, a Jesuit priest, was named acting dean of the Harvard Divinity School, and he was still in that post at the time of his death in 1985.

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

Bless mothers for all they do and give

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 13:31-35. (R1) Acts 14:21-27. (R2) Revelation 21:1-5.

Next Sunday is Mother's Day.

There is a story of one mom whose two children ordered her to stay in bed on her birthday. She lay there looking forward to being brought breakfast, as the smell of bacon floated up from the kitchen. At last the children called her downstairs. She found them sitting at the table, each with a large plate of bacon and eggs.

"As a birthday surprise," one explained, "we've cooked our own breakfast."

That says bundles, doesn't it? Who in this world does more for us than our mom? And who is taken for granted more than our mom? It is only right that we devote a day each year in honor of those women who have devoted their lives to their family, to their church and most importantly to their children.

Perhaps no one exerts greater influence upon a child than its mother.

Read the heroic story of the martyrdom of the seven sons of the mother of the Maccabees (2 Maccabees 7). She stood like steel before the murderous tyrant, bravely exhorting every one of them to bear torture and death rather than break God's laws. Her boys took their cue from



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

her as they went down one by one in torture and death — to immortality.

Lincoln said that he owed everything — all his goodness and success — to his "angel mother."

Edison acknowledged that, "My mother was the making of me. She was so true and so sure of me. I felt that I had someone to live for — someone I must not disappoint. The memory of my mother will always be a blessing to me."

Benjamin West, whose paintings hang in art museums all over the world, once remarked that it was a kiss from his mother that encouraged him as a scrawling child to become a painter.

Blessed Brother Andre recalls how his tired mother sat down every day to say the rosary. He later wrote how he used to love to sit at her feet "and hold on to mother's

large rosary."

The immortal Enrico Caruso attributed his success to his mother, a poor peasant woman. His first music teacher told him, "You can't sing. Your voice sounds like the wind in the shutters."

But Caruso's unlettered mother saw and heard more keenly. "My mother went without shoes in order to pay for my music lessons," he recalled.

She never heard the magic of one of the great singers of all time, for she died when he was 15. Caruso always carried her portrait with him and wept when he looked at it and thought of her hardships and sorrows.

The late Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty described mother as "The most important person on earth. She cannot claim the honor of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral — a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby's body."

The mother is the linchpin of any family. She who rocks the cradle rocks the world. The level of a civilization depends on her. For she is the object of man's love; and men become what they love.

But mothers are human. They need our love, our prayers, our appreciation. If they are deceased, pray for them. If they

are living, honor, love and obey them. As Coleridge put it: "A mother is a mother still, the holiest thing alive."

Love them, for no one can ever repay the years and years of unselfish love mothers give to their children. And obey them, for obedience is the foundation of moral character.

Say this prayer for your mother this day: We beg you, Mary, blessed among women, bless my mother always, alive or dead.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 11

Acts 14:5-18; John 14:21-26

Tuesday, May 12

Acts 14:19-28; John 14:27-31

Wednesday, May 13

Acts 15:1-6; John 15:1-8

Thursday, May 14

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; John 15:9-17

Friday, May 15

Acts 15:22-31; John 15:12-17

Saturday, May 16

Acts 16:1-10; John 15:18-21

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