

Those enamored of hierarchy court error

I begin this week's column in an uncharacteristically autobiographical fashion, for a reason I shall make clear in a moment.

I am a product of the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church. I remember first Communion in 1943, was educated in a Catholic junior high and then a seminary-high school before beginning college-seminary and major seminary, and was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn., more than 36 years ago, in February, 1962, just over nine months before the opening of the Second Vatican Council the following October. A substantial portion of my spiritual and theological formation as a Catholic, therefore, was already completed before the council even began.

I remain indebted to all those, living and dead, who contributed to that formation: my parents, both lifelong Catholics, the diocesan priests and Sisters of Mercy at my home parish in Hartford, the Sisters of Mercy at the cathedral junior high, the faculty of St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Conn., all priests of the Archdiocese of Hartford, and the faculty of St. John Seminary in Brighton, Mass., priests of the Archdiocese of Boston.

I concede to no one younger than my-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

self, and particularly anyone under the age of 45 or even 50, an experiential knowledge and love of the pre-Vatican II church greater than my own. Indeed, I note the practical impossibility of anyone under the age of 45 having any meaningful experiential knowledge of the pre-Vatican church and, therefore, any capacity for loving it then or pining for its restoration now.

Accordingly, when I make inevitable comparisons in this series of columns between the pre-Vatican II church and the post-Vatican II church, and when I point out, as one must, how much the council has improved and enriched the self-understanding and practices of the Catholic Church, I am not impressed by occasional complaints from those younger than I, and especially those un-

der 45 or 50, who act as if I have done some kind of rhetorical violence to a reality near and dear to their own heart.

Such critics cannot have it both ways. They cannot profess that they know, love, and obey the church, on the one hand, and then oppose — never directly and openly, of course — the church's own official program for renewal and reform. That program was fashioned at the Second Vatican Council, each of whose constitutions, declarations, and decrees were formally approved and implemented by Pope Paul VI.

The council called for renewal and reform of the church because it had concluded that some forms of thinking and practice in the pre-Vatican II church had either outlived their usefulness or were inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel. That included the pre-conciliar understanding of the nature of the church.

Before Vatican II, the church was understood primarily as a hierarchical institution. Even the biblically-rooted expression "Mystical Body of Christ" was generally interpreted in organizational and hierarchical terms. Although we all belonged to the same body, the head always controlled the other, lesser parts.

The church was something to which we belonged, from which we received

spiritual benefits, and to which we were always to be loyal and obedient. For all practical purposes, the church was identified with the hierarchy.

The council changed that thinking. For Vatican II (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 1), the church is foremost a mystery or sacrament, what Pope Paul VI defined as "a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God."

Sacraments are visible signs of an invisible reality. In the case of the church, the invisible reality is God; the visible is all the baptized. The whole People of God, not just the hierarchy, are the church. The meaning of loyalty and obedience to the church depends, therefore, on how one understands "church." For a tiny, but vocal and determined, minority "church" still means the hierarchy, and the pope in particular.

Such a point of view is not conservative; it is theologically and doctrinally erroneous. Indeed, "loyalty" to the church may sometimes require us to stand against those who hold office in it, not out of willfulness but out of a sense of responsibility for the wider church that Vatican II opened up to us.

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

Use earthly time to prepare for eternity

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 12:32-48. (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9. (R2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-9.

Our Lord was concerned about how we manage our time. He told about a landlord who left his servant in charge of his estate. Now the servant had a choice to make. He could have said, "While the cat's away, I'll play." Or he could have carried out his responsibilities. Either way, he had to decide how to allot his time.

Are we good stewards of our time? It is hard to escape the influence of television. By the age of 20 you will have been exposed to at least 20,000 hours of television. You can add 10,000 hours for each decade you live after the age of 20. Imagine what could be done with even a part of those hours. Five thousand hours are what a typical college undergraduate spends working on a bachelor's degree. In 10,000 hours you could learn enough to become an astronomer or an engineer or a master of several languages. Did you know that the average reader can read the Bible through in a year if he or she will read it for only 12 minutes a day?

Patrick Morley's test for time stewardship was, "Why not prioritize everything we do on the basis of who will be crying



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

at our funeral?" Isn't it true that often we neglect the important things and people in our lives for baubles?

In the "Odyssey," Odysseus neglected his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus to satisfy his wanderlust. When he had reached the edge of the world and descended into Hades, he learned from the spirits there how important family and friends were. After Hades, Odysseus set sail for home, for the wife and son who always loved him. Are we investing our time in those who will cry at our funeral?

Are we letting frantic schedules crowd out the really important things in life? Worse still, are we neglecting to train our children to include God in their lives?

How important it is to take time out

for family prayer, especially the family rosary, and even for Bible reading. How often family devotion keeps a child on the straight and narrow in later life.

When the Master returns, will he find us prepared? A king had a fool who proved to be a genius at making merriment for his whole court. So the king decided to crown him "King of Fools." At the crowning ceremony, the king gave the fool a scepter and told him to keep it until he met a fool greater than himself. Many years passed and the king was sick unto death. He asked that his jester be brought to him that he might thank him for the years of laughter he had given him and his courtiers.

The fool came to the king. The king said, "I must shortly leave you."

"And whither are you going," the fool said.

"Into another world," the king answered.

"And when will you return?" the fool asked.

"Never!" the king said.

"Never?" the fool said. "What preparations have you made that you will be treated as a king where you are going?"

"None at all."

"No? None at all?" The fool ex-

claimed. "Here, take my scepter; for you told me to keep it till I met a fool greater than myself. You are going on a journey from which you will never return and you have made no preparations. I would never be guilty of such folly."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, August 10
2 Corinthians 9:6-10; John 12:24-26

Tuesday, August 11
Ezekiel 2:8-3:4; Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

Wednesday, August 12
Ezekiel 9:1-7, 10:18-22; Matthew 18:15-20

Thursday, August 13
Ezekiel 12:1-12; Matthew 18:21-19:1

Friday, August 14
Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63 or 16:59-63; Matthew 19:3-12

Saturday, August 15
Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10, 1
Corinthians 15:20-27

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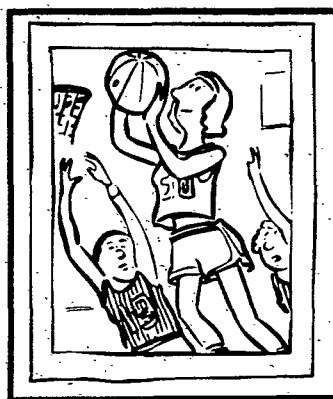
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Kids' Answers from page 12

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