

COLUMNISTS

Pope dreams of united religious future

Although the new century and the new millennium do not actually begin until Jan. 1, 2001, common consent seems to have anointed Jan. 1, 2000, as the day of transition. Assuming that God grants John Paul II at least one more year of life on this earth, the pope will get his most fervent wish of leading the church into the Third Christian Millennium.

It is one of the most human of traits to invest great importance in certain temporal milestones. Thus, while no one makes very much of a 38th or a 63rd birthday, a 40th or a 65th mobilizes relatives and friends into feverish preparations for an elaborate surprise party. Similarly, no one will look upon the turn of the coming new year as a particularly momentous event, but the slow descent of the apple over Times Square in New York City a minute before midnight on Dec. 31, 1999, will bring us to the peak of special excitement.

We will not simply be marking the end of one year and the beginning of another, but the end and the beginning of a century and of a millennium. Such an experience has been denied the majority of humans over the course of history.

But, as in most cases, the anticipation will more likely be greater than the reality. As we arise from our beds on New Year's morning, 2000, we shall probably



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

not do things any differently from other holiday mornings. And most of us will be back to work on Monday, Jan. 3, falling all too quickly into our usual routines.

Moreover, there is no guarantee that the year 2000 will be markedly different from any other. It will bring good fortune to some and disappointment and sorrow to others. The three zeroes after the "2" are of little significance in themselves.

But the Holy Father has his own ideas about the matter. For the past several years, he has been striving assiduously to prepare the church for the onset of the Third Christian Millennium, beginning especially with his apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* ("On the approaching third millennium"), published in 1994.

This pope has believed from the start that his election to the papacy in 1978 had

a special providential character to it. He is convinced that God has destined him to be in the Chair of Peter as the church enters the new millennium, and that it will be a millennium in which the walls dividing the various religious faiths of the world will fall and a united religious front will emerge, under his initial leadership, against the forces of atheism, materialism and individualism.

During John Paul II's 20-year-long pontificate, he has given several dramatic signals of his concern for interreligious unity and, in particular, for improved relations with the various non-Christian religions. One of the first of his trips to foreign countries was to Turkey in November 1979, as a pastoral outreach to Islam.

His most notable initiative was taken at an international, interreligious assembly for world peace that he convened in Assisi on Oct. 27, 1986. The participants included the chief rabbi of Rome, the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Orthodox metropolitan of Kiev, a representative of the patriarch of Constantinople, and various emissaries of the Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Shintoists, and traditional African and Native American religions.

It should not be forgotten, however, that some members of the Curia were critical

of the pope for organizing and leading the event so much so that the pope felt obliged in his Christmas speech to the Curia and papal household to deny that the prayers at Assisi had either "concealed or watered down" the differences between religions. (This is the same Curia that continues to investigate theologians like Jacques Dupuis, SJ, of the Gregorian University in Rome, for allegedly blurring the differences between Christianity and other religions.)

By contrast, the pope stressed, in words that drew upon the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, that the Holy Spirit grants all people access to truth and salvation. Assisi, he insisted, had seen the manifestation of the "radiant mystery" of the unity of the entire human race.

The only other pope to have reigned during the transition from one millennium to another was Sylvester II, the first French pope. Ironically, it was Sylvester who reorganized the churches of Poland and who named its first archbishop in the year 1000. Otherwise, he left no large footprints in the sands of papal history.

John Paul II is likely to have a different legacy.

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

Children learn faith from parents

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23. (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14. (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

Right after Christmas the church celebrates the feast of the Holy Family, because right after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary became a family. A family is a community of people: father, mother, children. The greatest natural healing power for any crisis in society is the family.

God gives children to parents as so much clay in their hands to fashion and to mold. He has a crown in heaven for every child born and he wills that the child will one day win that crown. Sometimes children are sent to school when it is too late to have them taught. The real training begins in the home.

Children are more apt to learn through the eye than through the ear; more from example than from the tongue; more from the love of God in the hearts of parents than from their commands.

If a child lives with Criticism,

He learns to condemn.

If a child lives with Hostility,

He learns to fight.

If a child lives with Tolerance,

He learns to be Patient.

If a child lives with Encouragement,

He learns Confidence.



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

If a child lives with Praise,

He learns to Appreciate.

If a child lives with Fairness,

He learns Justice.

If a child lives with Security,

He learns to have Faith.

If a child lives with Love,

He learns to find Love in the world.

Parents must be in their own hearts what they want their children to be in real life. As the Bible tells us: "Instruct a child in the way he should go, and when he grows old, he will not leave it" (Prv 22:6).

Parents need give their children only two things if they wish them to grow in wisdom, age and grace: love and security.

Children need love more than food. Love means caring for physical needs:

home, food, rest, medical care; for emotional needs: a hug, a kiss, acceptance, sensitivity to effort; for intellectual needs: listening, answering questions, taking to interesting places; for spiritual needs: gathering together each evening to pray together, to read some verses from one of the Gospels, allowing a few minutes for silence, meditation, questions.

Besides love, children need security. They need economic security. Joseph was a carpenter. Work was not beneath him. He provided so good a home for Jesus and his mother that the church has named Joseph patron of the universal church to provide for and to protect her. He taught Jesus to be a carpenter.

Mary and Joseph held the reins over Jesus quite loosely — he got lost, didn't he? Even God his Father did not put him in a controlled environment. He exposed him to the worst possible spot in the Holy Land, Nazareth. Did not Nathanael say, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazarenes were notorious for their impiety and rebelliousness.

God did not isolate his Son. He insulated him by giving him a home and a family that gave him both love and security.

Finally, a family is meant to teach children to live with others. Charity begins at

home. Parents must teach their children to get along with each other. They are meant to teach their children to love the unlovable. Lee Iacocca used to say if a man can't get along with people, he is useless in the business world, because in any company there are not dogs or apes, but just people. A family is people working together.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, December 28

1 John 1:5-2:2; Matthew 2:13-18

Tuesday, December 29

1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35

Wednesday, December 30

1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40

Thursday, December 31

1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18

Friday, January 1

Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7;

Luke 2:16-21

Holy Day of Obligation

Saturday, January 2

1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28

P E A C E O N E A R T H



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