

COLUMNISTS

Time travel shows how church changes

A thousand years ago who could have foreseen even one or two of the momentous events and changes — political, economic, social, scientific, and especially religious — that would occur during the Second Christian Millennium?

To illustrate the point, let's return to the year 999 and listen in on an imaginary interview with a diocesan priest of Rome regarding the contemporary state of the Catholic Church. Let's imagine further that the interviewer from our own new year of 1999, like many people in the media today, has only a limited knowledge of Catholicism.

Here's how the conversation might have gone. Pertinent historical explanations are enclosed within brackets.

Q. I notice that the reigning pope today, Sylvester II, is French. In fact, he's the first Frenchman ever elected as Vicar of Christ, is he not?

A. I assume you mean our bishop here in Rome. Many bishops other than the Bishop of Rome are referred to as popes, and in the East even ordinary priests like me have that title. After all, it means "father." And by the way, all bishops are vicars of Christ.

(The title "pope" was not reserved exclusively to the Bishop of Rome until 1073, by Gregory VII. The title Vicar of



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Christ was not reserved to the pope until the mid-12th century, by Eugenius III.)

Q. But wasn't the election of a Frenchman a big surprise? There must have been a significant number of French cardinals and French sympathizers at the conclave. Is that how he managed to receive the necessary two-thirds vote?

A. Cardinals? Conclave? Two-thirds vote? Sylvester was elected by the clergy and laity of Rome. Well, at least that's the official line, but he was really hand-picked by his friend, the German emperor, Otto III.

(It was not until the pontificate of Nicholas II, 1058-61, that the right of election was taken from the clergy and laity of Rome. At first cardinal-bishops were designated as papal electors. Then, in 1179, Pope Alexander III added car-

dinal-priests and cardinal-deacons as papal electors and decreed that a two-thirds majority would be necessary for election. The conclave itself, that is, the system of separating the electors from the outside world until after they had elected a new pope did not begin until 1271.)

Q. Do you expect that the new French pope will add appreciably to the number of French bishops in the hierarchy?

A. How? The Bishop of Rome can only nominate bishops for the small neighboring dioceses of Rome, the seven suburbicarian sees. He also influences the appointment of bishops in some other parts of the Italian peninsula, particularly those in the Papal States.

Q. You mean the pope doesn't appoint all the bishops of the world?

A. How and why would he do that? Bishops are elected by their own clergy and laity. That's the way it has been from the earliest centuries of the church. Besides, the pope is the Bishop of Rome, not the bishop of the whole church.

(Throughout most church history, including most of the Second Christian Millennium, bishops have been selected in a great variety of ways. Direct papal appointment of all bishops, however, did not begin until the 19th century.)

Q. Well, couldn't the pope at least

stack the Roman Curia with French bishops and priests and thereby exercise greater personal control over the universal Church?

A. Roman Curia? What's that? (The Roman Curia was not established until 1588, by Pope Sixtus V.)

Q. Let me try again. At the least, couldn't this French pope put a distinctly French face on Catholicism by canonizing huge numbers of French saints?

A. You're still confusing me. You make it sound as if the Bishop of Rome were the one who names all the saints. The late Pope John XV canonized a saint just six years ago, but that was the very first time a pope canonized anyone.

(Canonization was not reserved to the pope until 1234, by Gregory IX. Before that, saints were generally "proclaimed" by the Catholic people themselves.)

Q. French or not, at least the pope is infallible, is he not?

A. That's the first I've ever heard of such a thing. "Infallible," you said?

(Papal infallibility was not defined until 1870, at the First Vatican Council.)

Imagine now a similar interview today by a reporter from the year 2999.

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

Lamb of God empowers us to change world

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 1:29-34. (R1) Isaiah 49:3, 5-6. 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

The church year is simply the life of the church revolving around the life of Christ.

The church year begins with the First Sunday of Advent, the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew (Nov. 30).

The church year is built upon the twin mysteries of our Lord's life: the incarnation and the redemption — Christmas and Easter. The Christmas and Easter seasons are joined together by 33 or 34 other Sundays of the year, called "Sundays in Ordinary Time."

The word "ordinary" here doesn't mean "commonplace." It comes from the word "ordinal." An ordinal is a number like first, second, third, etc. For instance, next Sunday is called the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. In other words, "ordinary" is numbered or ordered time to help us locate the prayers and readings for those Sundays in the lectionary and sacramentary.

These Sundays should be days of worship, relaxation and joy — days to enjoy each other's company and to recoup one's strength for the coming week. Don't secularize Sunday, especially by



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

unnecessary shopping.

"A Sunday well spent / brings a week of content / and health for the toils of tomorrow. / But a Sunday profaned / Whate'er may be gained / Is a certain forerunner of sorrow."

Long ago, in 545 B.C., a prophet called Second Isaiah wrote four Servant Songs (Isaiah 42, 49, 52, 53). In these songs the prophet foretells that God will choose a servant who will glorify him and be a light to the nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth (R1).

The New Testament writers applied these songs to Jesus Christ. John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to Andrew and John as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

John calls him "Lamb" not so much

because of his meekness, but his victimhood. As the blood of a lamb redeemed the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery so the blood of the Lamb of God redeems the whole world from the slavery of sin.

John spoke of "sin," not sins. The plural refers to acts; the singular refers to a state or condition of sin. Personal sins establish "structures of sin," social attitudes, that make sinning acceptable. When our Pope John Paul II spoke at St. Joseph's Seminary, New York, Oct. 6, 1995, he remarked that people often criticized him for speaking too much about the "culture of death." In answer, he said that the church cannot ignore what is happening today; namely, "choices once considered by everyone as criminal and once rejected by the common moral sense of everyone are gradually becoming socially acceptable."

The Lamb of God has given us power to break the grip of sin surrounding us and becoming socially acceptable. God commanded the Israelites when they conquered Canaan to drive out all the inhabitants lest they be corrupted.

However, after the Lamb of God had come, Jesus would have his disciples destroy the wicked by converting them.

A university student having a hard

time decided to take his frustrations out on God. Once in the chapel he said, "All we have on this earth are problems and a bunch of dummies who will never figure out how to solve them. Even I could have made a better world than this one."

Then deep inside himself the student heard God answer, "That's what you're supposed to do."

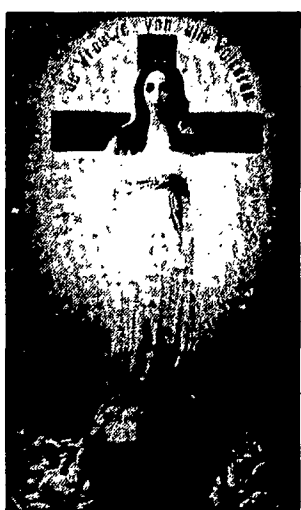
Is the world changing us or are we changing the world?

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, January 18**
Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 2:18-22
- Tuesday, January 19**
Hebrews 6:10-20; Mark 2:23-28
- Wednesday, January 20**
Hebrews 7:1-3, 15-17; Mark 3:1-6
- Thursday, January 21**
Hebrews 7:25-8:6; Mark 3:7-12
- Friday, January 22**
Hebrews 8:6-13; Mark 3:13-19
- Saturday, January 23**
Hebrews 9:2-3, 11-14; Mark 3:20-21

I your Mother, am coming to visit you as
THE MOTHER AND LADY OF ALL NATIONS



Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send NOW Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of ALL nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disaster, and war. May The Lady Of All Nations, who once was Mary, be our advocate. Amen

For an appointment to see her please call
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