

COLUMNISTS

Politics play a role in the church

Many Catholics continue to be uneasy about the application of political categories to the pastoral activities and leadership of the church. Their uneasiness is understandable. The church is first and foremost a mystery, or sacrament. It is "a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God," to use the words of the late Pope Paul VI. Sacraments are visible signs of the invisible presence of God. The whole People of God as well as the institutional apparatus that shapes their life and work as Christians constitute the visible side of the mystery of the church.

It is precisely because the church is a mystery, or sacrament, that it also has a political dimension. Where you have human beings and institutions that are governed and directed by human beings, you have politics in one form or another.

The concept of politics includes but also transcends partisan politics, such as one finds in the work of legislative bodies and in election campaigns. Politics consists of the use of power to achieve certain ends within society at large or within particular institutions and communities. How power is defined and limited, how it is conferred and transferred, how it is exercised — all of these are political questions.

Given that broad definition of poli-



essays in
theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

tics, there is little that goes on even in the church that is not political to one degree or another. The process involved in the appointment and installation of a bishop is but one example. When Vatican officials (and ultimately the pope) decide, with the advice of certain key bishops in a given country, who should be selected to head a particular diocese, they are performing a political as well as a pastoral act.

Thus, in addition to concerns about the candidate's faith and spirituality, there are also concerns about his institutional loyalty, where he stands on key controversial issues, whether he will be a team-player or independent. His "cause" is promoted by certain influential bishops (or perhaps a single high-ranking archbishop or cardinal) who know him well. Their own influence in the church

is enhanced when they move the appointment successfully through the system. And the new bishop himself feels an indebtedness to his patrons.

Politics is also very much at work in official assemblies of church leaders: episcopal conferences, synods and even ecumenical councils, like Vatican II. At these gatherings there are inevitable, and often sharp, differences of opinions about the most effective way to shape and direct the mission of the church at a particular time in history. Some argue for more innovative approaches; others, only slight modifications of current policies; still others oppose any change at all, unless it is to reinforce traditional policies and practices.

The interplay and conflict between and among these various schools of thought are the stuff of politics. The existence of conflict, however, doesn't necessarily mean that spiritual considerations have gone out the window, replaced entirely by political considerations. Like the sacramental church itself, which is at once divine and human, the interplay is both spiritual and political.

Nowhere is the evidence for this reality more dramatic than in the history of papal elections. Contrary to the conventional beliefs of many Catholics (and some non-Catholics, too), the earthly head of the Catholic Church is not se-

lected by divine inspiration. The finger of God does not visibly come to rest over one cardinal, as the others look on in pious amazement and then hasten to cast their ballots for God's choice. If that were the case, no papal election would require more than one ballot, and the vote would always be unanimous. The election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 required eight ballots and even then it wasn't unanimous. A number of supporters of the late Cardinal Siri of Genoa stubbornly voted for their candidate to the end.

Sometimes the politics of papal elections has been so intense, in fact, that those on the losing side moved to another site, elected their own candidate, and then had him consecrated as Bishop of Rome. Those elected and consecrated in this fashion were called antipopes, of whom there have been as many as 39 in the history of the church. One of them, Hippolytus, is even recognized as a saint.

There's an old saying, "It's not what you know that counts, but whom you know." By way of one more example, that saying also applies to who gets invited to dinner in the papal apartment. Politics has a long reach, even in the church.

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

College program opens students' eyes — and hearts

The moment Sue Cunningham, director of the Summer Service Project at the University of Notre Dame, described this project to me, I knew I had a great story. The project is an excellent example of one man's dream, and a team of alumni, parishes and university students working together to serve the needs of the poor in cities.

The story begins with James F. Andrews, a man who made Notre Dame his second home. Early on in life, Andrews was a success, but unfortunately he was not able to enjoy it for long. He died at the age of 44.

All through his life, Andrews had a dream for the church in its role of service and for the poor. Those dreams lived on after his death. His wife, Kathleen, her sons and Andrews' partners in business established the James F. Andrews Scholarship Fund to serve the poor.

The fund is unique in that it gives a partial scholarship of \$1,700 to students in The Summer Service Project. Students receive financial credit rather than



the
human
side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

cash toward their next year's tuition.

The project doesn't depend solely on the Andrews fund. Notre Dame alumni who live where the students work are asked to finance the project. When they can do this, the scholarship funds are freed up to help where funding is unavailable. This is equitable planning at its best.

What most captured my imagination was the large number of different constituencies the project involves and their interaction as a team.

The Andrews Foundation provides

major funding and is the principal inspiration for the project. But it does not do all the work.

Notre Dame's Center for Social Concerns recruits and trains the students, and out in the field its alumni act as their support system. But it does not stop there.

Cunningham recalled one pastor who cleared out his suite so students of the project would have a place to stay. Similar stories of the sacrifices people have made reflect the kind of community involvement this project creates.

Another part of the project involves alumni-student discussions on social concerns. Students often serve in foreign environments. Thanks to nearby alumni, they are not left to fend for themselves. Rather, they come together with alumni to reflect on their experiences. Those experiences are the great story I found.

Kerry Zahn L'Arche of Spokane, Wash., recalls: "This project has given me new insights into a world I never knew before. Now I am less inclined to

judge by appearance and less likely to stare and wonder what is wrong when I see a person with a disability. Instead, I will wonder: Who is that person? What is their name? What are their likes and dislikes?"

"As I got ready to go on that last day, I found myself on the verge of tears. It was amazing to me that I felt so differently that day than the day I arrived."

Many of the participants in the project echo those sentiments. As one student put it: "Once you live with the poor, you are ruined for life. You never again see life as you were seeing it."

As I read other experiences, I could hear students saying between the lines, "Working with the poor not only makes me appreciate how fortunate I am, but how I need to spread my fortune to others less fortunate."

I hope that great stories like this will inspire others to follow Jim Andrews' dream of making the world better.

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Father Hemrick is director of diocesan relations at the Catholic University of America.

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