

COLUMNISTS

Pope's supporters prone to hypocrisy

Pope John Paul II's recent visits to Mexico and St. Louis were a great personal and pastoral triumph. Indeed, one looks on in amazement at the deeply emotional reaction this frail and aging pope continues to elicit from so many millions of people. Although slow of step, slurred of speech and stooped in shape, John Paul II excites young and old alike.

One may wonder nonetheless how much of what he actually says is understood and assimilated. And make no mistake about it: What he has to say in his homilies and other public addresses are matters of great moral, social, economic and political consequence.

In St. Louis he spoke out against the "culture of death," in which he includes not only abortion and euthanasia (about which he wouldn't get much of an argument from the great majority of Catholics), but also contraception and capital punishment (papal teachings that would elicit considerable dissent from opposite ends of the spectrum).

Many of John Paul II's most devoted and enthusiastic admirers have views on issues of public policy that are at direct variance with the pope's own teachings.

He levels scathing attacks on the widening gap between rich and poor in



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the world, but many of those who wildly cheer him would probably vote against any politician who would raise their taxes to support governmental subsidies to people at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Neither would many partisans of this pope be sympathetic with his persistent calls for the forgiveness of Third World debts, which would require the United States to write off its own substantial loans to economically struggling nations.

John Paul II has a similarly strong message about immigration and the responsibility of more prosperous countries like the United States opening their arms and their doors to those fleeing poverty or persecution. But a thick vein of anti-immigrant bias has surfaced in our national politics in recent years, and his

strongest supporters are not exempt from its influence.

The pope is also a hard-edged critic of certain aspects of U.S.-style capitalism, specifically those that put profits ahead of the needs of people, especially the poorest and the least powerful. And he has become, in more recent years, a committed environmentalist as well.

In matters of foreign policy, the pope has expressed serious reservations about the recent bombings of Iraq as well as the sanctions that were imposed several years ago. He was a critic of the Persian Gulf War waged by the Bush Administration, and he now favors a more cooperative relationship between the United States and Cuba.

If John Paul II were a member of Congress, his voting record, apart from the issue of abortion, would be practically indistinguishable from that of a liberal Democrat.

Although that comment will deeply irritate some of my readers, it is based on a legitimate inference drawn from the social teachings and public addresses he has given over the course of his more than 20 years as pope. Those who have not read the bulk (or perhaps any) of those addresses nor his four major social encyclicals — *Redemptor Hominis* (1979),

Laborem Exercens (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) might consider withholding judgment until they have examined these texts.

There is a major anomaly, however, in the manner in which the pope actually implements his social teachings. He is, in fact, like a president who would lay out a wide range of programs and policies in his election campaign and State of the Union addresses, but then appoint people to his cabinet who are opposed or indifferent to those policies.

In his public pronouncements the pope is a staunch, even prophetic advocate of social justice and human rights, but he has at the same time suppressed the work of countless bishops, priests, religious and laity in Latin America who are committed to the service of the poor and the powerless. And he has appointed and promoted bishops — in Mexico, Brazil, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and elsewhere — who have, in effect, restored the church "of the rich, for the rich, by the rich."

But that could never be explained to the crowds in Mexico and St. Louis.

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

Jesus set example for resisting temptation

First Sunday of Lent (Feb. 21): (R3) Matthew 4:1-11. (R1) Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7. (R2) Romans 5:12-19.

The theme of Sunday's readings is temptation. Each of us at one time or another has been tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. "Jesus was led by the Spirit ... to be tempted by the devil."

The devil knew that Jesus was famished after fasting for 40 days. So, his temptation was the challenge to change stones into loaves of bread. In the desert where Jesus was tempted, small rocks covered the ground. To someone who had not eaten for 40 days they might look like bread.

Jesus could have turned stones into bread, but he knew who was tempting him and why. So Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. "It is written 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'" Jesus was saying that there is more to life than having a full stomach.

One of the great temptations we often face is the desire always to have more. Satan says happiness is just around the corner if you have more things or more wealth. Thus, he can get people to focus on material things, crowding out the spiritual. Jesus overcame his first tempta-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

tion to teach us not to be concerned about "having it all." Rather he'd have us put our trust in God just as he did.

As soon as Jesus refused the devil's first temptation, the devil tried again. This time he took him to the parapet of the temple and said, "If you are the Son of God ..." See, the devil doesn't know everything. He was trying to find out who Jesus really was. The devil wanted Jesus to throw himself down from the temple top. To make his temptation more appealing, the devil — learning from Jesus — also quoted Scripture: "It is written, he will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

Again Jesus quoted Scripture. Jesus

answered, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"

Of course Jesus could have leaped down from the temple top and the angels would have rescued him. But what good would that have done? Sure, it would have attracted attention. But faith cannot be built upon sensationalism. William Barclay said, "A gospel found on sensation-mongering is foredoomed to failure." God is not to be found in the sensational, but in his fidelity to us and his love for us.

Even though Jesus resisted the devil's second temptation, the devil never gives up. He confronted Jesus with a third temptation. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promised, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." What a temptation that was. The devil was offering Jesus the whole world if he would worship him. What a shortcut for his mission and ministry — no suffering, no death. Yet Jesus would not compromise. Again he quoted Scripture, "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Three times and out; the devil left him for a time. He would come back later. Oh, the persistence of the evil one! Good opportuni-

ties knock only once, but the tempter knocks unceasingly.

Jesus' three temptations — foreshadowed ours. Do we use our gifts for our own satisfaction? Or do we seek to win people by sensationalism, like reducing religious services to a sideshow? Finally, are we compromisers — to get along, do we go along? Jesus resisted those temptations and so can we.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, February 22
1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19
- Tuesday, February 23
Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15
- Wednesday, February 24
Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32
- Thursday, February 25
Esther C:12,14-16,23-25;
Matthew 7:7-12
- Friday, February 26
Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26
- Saturday, February 27
Deuteronomy 26:16-19;
Matthew 5:43-48

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