

COLUMNISTS

The church of the year 1000

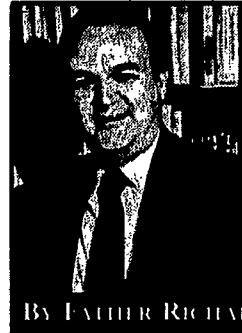
A few weeks ago I did a column on the church of the year 999 using an imaginary interview with a contemporary Roman priest to dramatize the contrast between the papacy of the first and second Christian millennia. Since then a similar exercise in the December issue of *Chicago Studies* has come to my attention.

Chicago Studies is a theological and pastoral journal edited by priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago and members of the faculty of Our Lady of the Lake Seminary. The December issue looks back, as my recent column did, to the turn of the millennia, focusing especially on the parish in the year 1000.

In addition to the lead article on the parish (the remainder of this week's column and all of next week's will focus on it), there are informative essays on the sacramental life of the church at the time, as well as the relationship between Christianity and other religions, popular religion, morality and liturgy.

(The issue also happens to be the last one edited by Father George Dyer, the founder of the journal some 37 years ago. It provides a fitting climax to his distinguished multifaceted career.)

The author of the keynote article is Kevin Madigan who, like George Dyer, is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Father Madigan teaches church history at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His article provides a fascinating and, for many perhaps, a startling glimpse of parish life in the year 1000.

He points out, for example, that the gesture of the folded hands at prayer that some Catholics may assume was prescribed by the Lord himself or the Apostles, is a product of the new order of feudal institutions (complete with lords and vassals) that emerged after the disintegration of the Carolingian empire.

The folded hands were originally a sign of homage to a feudal lord, and then were adopted as an appropriate posture for prayer as well. But, as the author insists, there were other, even more significant changes in European religious life at the time, and none was more signifi-

cant than the emergence of the so-called proprietary church. Some background:

About nine-tenths of the population in the year 1000 lived in rural areas. Large cities had fewer than 10,000 people. The so-called "baptismal" churches founded by a bishop and endowed with a baptismal font actually constituted a minority of parishes at the time. These churches had the right to dispense ministerial and sacramental services, and also to collect tithes and fees.

Alongside the "baptismal" church and the thousands of other religious sites for worship (some no more than simple stone crosses or a small wooden chapel in the woods), the most common type of parish in 1000 was one founded and governed by a local lay lord. They were especially common in parts of Europe where the Germanic peoples had settled, e.g., Spain, northern Italy, England, Scandinavia, Frankland.

Most churches, therefore, were erected on a feudal lord's estates for the benefit of his family and laborers. The local bishop had rights of visitation, but only the property owner could appoint and remove the priest. He also charged fees for religious services — an especially lucrative source of income when he compelled his subjects to attend.

The normal church was humble in form, often built of wood with dirt floors. It would have had at least one crucifix, but few if any other images.

Such parishes embraced no more than a village or two, with about 200-300 congregants. People would gather and trade in front of the churches as a kind of social and market center.

The parochial system that eventually developed in Europe and the British Isles was a direct outgrowth of these proprietary churches. Indeed, some of the later parish boundaries virtually coincided with those of the old lay estates.

Because the bishop was too busy with his other religious and secular duties, including management of his own estates, the priest emerged by the year 1000 as the real leader of the local church.

He was appointed by the local lay lord, and in most cases was himself a freed serf (a bishop would not have ordained him otherwise), who continued to till on parish land after ordination.

Other important matters, such as the state of clerical celibacy and the education of the clergy at the time, will be taken up next week.

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

Jesus' news too important not to share

Third Sunday of Lent: (R3) John 4:5-42. (R1) Exodus 17:3-7. (R2) Romans 5:1-2, 5-8.

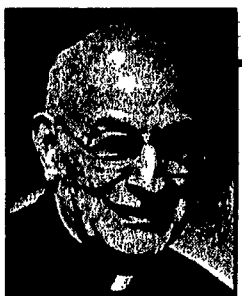
A Mercedes-Benz TV commercial shows one of their cars colliding with a concrete wall during a safety test. Someone then asks a Mercedes engineer why the company does not enforce their patent on their car's energy-absorbing car body. The Mercedes' design has been copied by almost every other car maker in the world in spite of the fact that Mercedes has an exclusive patent.

The engineer replies in a clipped German accent, "Because in life, some things are just too important not to share."

What a statement! Some things are just too important not to share. One of those things is the good news of Jesus Christ. It must be shared with friends, neighbors, the world. We call the work of sharing the good news evangelism. The good news has been spread through people willing to be evangelists.

In Sunday's Gospel we meet a most unlikely evangelist, a Samaritan woman.

First of all she is a woman. In Jesus' day, women were definitely second-class citizens. It is still so in some parts of the Muslim world today. Imagine, Queen



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Noor could not attend the funeral of her husband, King Hussein, Feb. 8, because she was a woman. Likewise, in Jesus' day, Jews did not talk to strange women, especially Samaritan women. But Jesus did and this woman became an evangelist.

But even more surprising, she wasn't a very nice woman. She had married many times and when she met Jesus she was living with a man not her husband. She was a scarlet woman.

In Jesus' time things were a bit different. An adulteress could be stoned to death. So you can imagine how surprised this Samaritan woman was when a man of Jesus' piety and stature talked to her.

She had come to the well in the heat of the day to avoid the other women. She was an outcast. Yet Jesus saw possibilities

in her. He not only spoke to her, but he used a term of endearment. He called her "woman." The Greek word used was "gune." It meant "special lady" — the very term Jesus used to his mother at Cana and from the cross.

Jesus treated this outcast as a special lady. He listened to her, to her opinions, treated her with dignity, as a child of God. In fact, he revealed his identity to her, "I who speak to you am the Messiah."

His impact on her was enormous. Never did a man treat her with such respect. She needed a man, it seemed; but men only used and abused her. They never gave her what she really hungered for. But Jesus did. He let her know that her life mattered, that in spite of her failures, weaknesses, sin, she was a person of worth. He gave her "living water."

When the disciples returned, she left "leaving her water jar." This would give her a pretext to return.

But what is striking is that this woman, not so nice, became an evangelist. She urged everyone in the village to go to the well and see a man who had told her everything she had ever done. They went and found the Messiah. In fact they begged him and his disciples (a band of Jews) to come and stay with them (a

band of Samaritans).

There you have it — an unlikely evangelist, a woman with a reputation. Yet she found Jesus; and he told her that she was a "special lady." Her find was so great that she went and told everybody else.

Jesus has done much for us too that we might share him with others — something too important not to share.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, March 8

2 Kings 5:1-15; Luke 4:24-30

Tuesday, March 9

Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35

Wednesday, March 10

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9;

Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday, March 11

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Friday, March 12

Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday, March 13

Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

Holy Spirit Church Lenten Retreat March 12-14, 1999 (Friday - Sunday)



We are happy to welcome special guest

Fr. John Corapi, Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity

A late vocation, Fr. Corapi's life experiences prior to ordination are simply astounding and truly show the great work of God through our Blessed Mother. Filled with the desire to "be somebody", he embraced the promises of the world. From athletics to soldiering to millionaire businessman, his life became a string of successes that always left him flat and empty. After a series of trials, he

soon felt the unmistakable call to become a priest. Called to the contemplative life, his superiors have also discerned that he has the gift of "Apostolic Preaching" (teaching the truths of the Faith with such authority and clarity that even the hardest hearts might be brought closer to God). He gives his powerful witness of hope and mercy at conference and parishes across the country.

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