

COLUMNISTS

'Saints' shouldn't read reviews

On Easter the *New York Times* devoted a cover story in its *Sunday Magazine* to the profiling of a new crop of Catholic seminarians (April 4), and later published a report on the decline in seminary enrollments (April 17).

The magazine piece focused on a group of seminarians at Mount St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, Md., considered for years as one of the more conservative Catholic seminaries in the United States.

In a recent syndicated column Eugene Kennedy, emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University, Chicago, author, and keen observer of the Catholic scene, provides an incisive analysis of the profile.

Kennedy observes that these idealistic, "countercultural" seminarians view themselves as the shock troops and first citizens of a restoration of the well-ordered hierarchical church of the pre-Vatican II era. Their spiritual mantra: the words of Pope John Paul II, "Be not afraid."

In Kennedy's judgment, however, they are destined for frustration when they discover, as William D'Antonio, research professor at Catholic University, points out, that "Vatican II has succeeded. The real documents of Vatican II are freedom of conscience and the responsibility of individuals not to blithely follow the leader."

Eugene Kennedy reminds us that the



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

council was only endorsing a traditional Catholic teaching "with which these seminarians apparently have only a passing knowledge," namely, that Catholics, in every moral decision, are bound to form and follow their own consciences.

Although some of today's seminarians are convinced that they represent a new era in the church, according to Kennedy "they may, in fact, be the last brief blush of one that is passing away."

He is struck, "beyond all else, by the sense of self-concern" they exhibit. "They enter a diner, consumed with how the other patrons will react to their presence. They detail their temptations with themselves ever at center stage, as if they were desert fathers doing battle with Satan."

While apparently eager to dispel the notion that they are gay, they "are blind ... to

their self-absorption in their previous ambivalent relationships with women. ... They cast themselves in cinematic, look-at-me terms. ... They clip the equivalent of good reviews. Many keep folders in which one places 'any cards or letters he receives describing the impact he has on other people's lives.'"

Kennedy draws upon his many years of experience not only as a psychologist and counselor, but also as a Maryknoll priest.

"Theirs will be a painful discovery," he writes, "that self-forgetfulness remains at the very heart of the traditional ideal of holiness. Saints never care how they look or, for that matter, who is looking ... They can't remember their good deeds because they weren't thinking of themselves."

"Nor are holy people put off by the world but embrace it, sinful or not," Kennedy concludes. "The seminarians speak of practicing 'custody of the eyes' to avoid the world's temptations.... Their pastoral success depends on keeping their eyes open while seeing less of themselves and more of the world around them."

The second *Times* article cites the usual optimistic predictions that the vocational situation is changing for the better. But the same assurances were voiced in the mid-1970s when enrollments rose temporarily, in the early 1980s, and in the early 1990s.

The facts are that the median age of still-active priests in the U.S. continues to rise, while the total number has declined from more than 60,000 to under 50,000 during the past three decades. In the same period, the Catholic population has increased to more than 61 million. As for replacements on the horizon, there were more than five times the number of seminarians in the late 1960s than today.

Even at that, the present numbers are partially inflated by the larger number of older candidates (who will serve fewer years as priests) and of seminarians from foreign countries (many of whom will encounter certain cultural problems).

Because the Catholic Church is a sacramental church, the priesthood plays a crucial and essential role in its life. Its priests are indispensable.

The same cannot be said of the rules that determine who can and cannot be ordained. They have changed in the past, and can and will change in the future.

As always, it is a matter of priorities. The priesthood is more important than the rules that govern it, and the church is more important than the priests who serve it.

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

Never forget that our goal is eternal life

The Body and Blood of Christ (June 6): (R3) John 6:51-58. (R1) Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16. (R2) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

When the Puritans led him to his execution Jan. 30, 1649, King Charles I uttered one last word: "Remember."

An appeal to remember was the last message of Moses. The entire book of Deuteronomy is simply Moses' appeal to God's people to remember. The last message of Christ to his apostles was, "Do this in memory of me."

Aristotle said that memory is the scribe of the soul. It is a gallery lined with pictures of past events and scenes on which we have gazed. It is a filing cabinet into which all our past experiences are stored. And recollection is simply ourselves going to memory, like a librarian, in search for some past event we need to recall.

How important is memory! When people don't remember they make the same old mistakes. When enemies seek to destroy a nation, they strive to make its citizens forget its past.

How powerful is memory! It has often carried a nation through the horrors of war to victory. "Remember the Alamo." "Remember the Maine." "Remember Pearl Harbor." The power of memory gave birth to Memorial Day. Memory has caused monuments to be erected, like the



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

stone shaft "by the rude bridge that arched the flood" at Concord. It was the guns of farmers on Concord Bridge that began the fight for American independence. Sixty years later, Ralph Waldo Emerson penned a poem in memory of the brave who fell in battle on April 19, 1775.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deeds redeem,
When, like ourselves, our sons are gone."

A teacher offered for \$500 to teach a philosopher the art of remembering. The philosopher replied, "I'll give you \$1,000 if you can teach me the art of forgetting."

Between earth and the Elysium Fields, which was heaven for the classical Greeks, the River Lethe flowed. Whoever drank the waters of the River Lethe would forget

all his past. Heathens knew that heaven could not be heaven until memory let go of its past sins.

Sleep heals, it is nature's balm, "it knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care" precisely because sleep helps us to forget for a while.

What do we remember? So often we remember the wrong things. Past disappointments, injuries, insults. Or we tend to remember past sinful pleasures. Or sometimes we tend to remember only past joys, sorrows and successes.

Very often we forget what we ought to remember and we remember what we ought to forget. How often so many forget God! They forget that God directs all their journeying in the desert of this world. Very often even we forget the bread on which we live — the living bread come down from heaven — "the memorial of our Lord's own dying." Have we forgotten his words: "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"? Have we forgotten the incredible promise of the Lord: "He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day"? Note the word Jesus used: "feeds." Life eternal is given to him who eats the bread and drinks the blood of Christ again and again!

People have dreamt of a fountain of

youth, of never-never lands beyond the lost horizon. Remember that that dream can become true. "The man who feeds on this bread, shall live forever." Fantastic? No, just don't forget it is for real, for Corpus Christi is the Body of Christ, the eternal Son of God.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, June 7

2 Corinthians 1:1-7;
Matthew 5:1-12

Tuesday, June 8

2 Corinthians 1:18-22;
Matthew 5:13-16

Wednesday, June 9

2 Corinthians 3:4-11;
Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday, June 10

2 Corinthians 3:15-4:1, 3-6;
Matthew 5:20-26

Friday, June 11

Deuteronomy 7:6-11; 1
John 4:7-16; Matthew 11:25-30

Saturday, June 12

2 Corinthians 5:14-21;
Gospel 573: Luke 2:41-51

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