

COLUMNISTS

Church's renewal and mission go hand-in-hand

Just before his death in June, Cardinal Basil Hume, archbishop of Westminster in England, warned against the "danger of concentrating too much on life within the church, of being too inward-looking. I suspect it is a trick of the devil," he wrote, "to divert good people from the task of evangelization by embroiling them in endless controversial issues to the neglect of the church's essential role, which is mission."

The comment appeared in the closing portion of an address he had prepared for a meeting of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative in Washington, D.C. The paper was delivered for him on the very day of his funeral.

One of the two respondents to the paper, Mary Ann Glendon, a Catholic laywoman on the Harvard Law School faculty, proposed that the cardinal's comment was "key to everything he is saying about the church and women."

"He is not only raising the question of whether discussion about women in the church has focused too narrowly on the institutional church. He is also lifting up — for lay and religious alike — our missionary vocation," she asserted.

It would seem that for Professor Glendon that Cardinal Hume's thrust is that the laity's distinctive role is in the world,



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

while, by implication at least, the internal business of the church belongs to the clergy, and to the hierarchy in particular.

Professor Glendon also referred to a "vision of partnership in evangelization," but it is not clear whether it is a partnership between Catholic men and women in general, or between laity — women and men alike — and the hierarchy, or some third possibility.

The ambiguity deepened when she warned that the implementation of this "vision of partnership" is "too important to permit it to be overwhelmed by a quarrel between opposing camps." Who are in the "opposing camps"? Women on one side; men on the other? Laity versus hierarchy? And what would these "camps" be quarreling about?

Professor Glendon added yet another

cautionary note. She said we should also be "wary of the idea, prevalent in secular circles, that the liberal democratic political model should be imposed on all the leading institutions of civil society. That is not good for democracy and it is not good for the mediating structures."

One wonders how her audience in Washington interpreted that remark. Even with the advantage of a text in hand, the meaning is difficult to fathom. Was yet a third warning being implied, namely, that we should not allow "the liberal democratic political model" to be "imposed" on the church?

However one answers these questions, it does seem clear that for Cardinal Hume and perhaps for Professor Glendon as well there is an intrinsic opposition between concern for the internal life of the church and concern for mission, equated here with "evangelization."

According to this view, if correctly stated, concern for the renewal and reform of the church inevitably distracts from the work of evangelization in the world, which is the laity's territory.

In the end, this is a false dichotomy. The renewal and reform of the church are not at cross-purposes with its mission to evangelize. On the contrary, the former is an integral part of the latter.

The church is a sacrament, which means that it is a sign as well as an instrument of Christ's presence in the world. Because of its sacramental nature, it is not enough that the church be the Body of Christ; it must also appear to be the Body of Christ.

Neither is it enough for the church to preach justice to the political and corporate world. It must also practice what it preaches. Pope Paul VI reminded us that, if the world "does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."

The third World Synod of Bishops in 1971 made the very same point in its document, "Justice in the World"; Paul VI repeated it in 1975 in his apostolic exhortation, "On Evangelization in the Modern World"; and the U.S. Catholic bishops did the same in their 1986 pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy."

To be concerned about church renewal and reform is to care about mission as well. Paul VI stated the principle as pointedly as one can: "It is therefore primarily by its conduct and by its life that the Church will evangelize the world."

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

Maximize your God-given talents

33rd Sunday of the Year (Nov. 14): (R3) Matthew 25:14-30. (R1) Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31. (R2) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

The theme of next Sunday's readings is "talents."

Talents are God-given abilities.

Our Lord's parable of the talents tells us four things. First, God gives everybody talents. We are richly-endowed people. Everybody has talents.

Secondly, God doesn't give everyone the same talents. Everybody is different. No two fingerprints are alike. No two persons are alike. We are not mass-produced on an assembly line. We all have different talents.

Thirdly, God expects us to use our talents even though different. The conductor of an orchestra expects everyone to play, no matter what instrument he or she plays. Each is important and necessary for the symphony.

Fourthly, if we don't use our talents, we lose them.

To use our talents we must follow the three Don'ts.

First, don't look at others. Don't be making comparisons. So often we do nothing because we say, "If I only had his or her talents ..." Edward R. Sill wrote



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the poem "Opportunity." In that poem a coward hanging at the battle's edge does not recognize Opportunity. "If" is the big word to him — "if" he only had a sword of keener steel what might he not do! Instead of doing his best with the little he had, he flung that aside and crept away. It was for the courageous king's son, though wounded and weaponless, to seize the broken sword, poor though it was and turn defeat into victory. So our opportunity lies not so much in what we have, as what we do with what we have. It's not the role in the play that counts, but how well we play the role.

Even though you may not have the talents another has, using what you have will give success over those who have more but who do not use what they have.

Secondly, don't be afraid of failure. Of Thomas Edison it was said, "To him nothing succeeded like failure, because every failure taught him something he didn't know before."

Edison would test and test and test until his assistants were ready to drop from sheer exhaustion. He failed over 5,000 times before discovering how to make an electric light bulb.

He spent five days and nights in his laboratory before discovering the phonograph. He'd say that people called him the "Wizard of Menlo Park," but "genius," he said, "is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration."

Lincoln lost practically every election save the last one: for the presidency of the United States.

Better to try and fail than to fail to try! Thirdly, don't just be concerned about not being bad; be concerned about being good! The woman in the first reading is praised, not for being a wife, but because she used her wifely talents fully.

Two talents God has given us all in addition to our natural abilities: our faith and his love. What are we doing to increase them? Do we preach the Gospel by the love we have for God and others? Be the best in whatever you do!

Plan for more than you can do — then do it!

Bite off more than you can chew — then chew it!

Hitch your wagon to a star: Keep your seat and there you are!

What you are is God's gift to you; what you become is your gift to God.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, November 15

1 Maccabees 1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-64; Luke 18:35-43

Tuesday, November 16

2 Maccabees 6:18-31; Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday, November 17

2 Maccabees 7:1, 20-31;

Luke 19:11-28

Thursday, November 18

1 Maccabees 2:15-29;

Luke 19:41-44

Friday, November 19

1 Maccabees 4:36-37, 52-59;

Luke 19:45-48

Saturday, November 20

1 Maccabees 6:1-13; Luke 20:27-40

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Table of Plenty

Worship Songs on CD
Sung by John Michael Talbot

Table of Plenty; Be Not Afraid;
The Cry of the Poor; Holy Darkness;
We Are One Body; Here I Am, Lord;
No Longer I; One Bread, One Body;
On Eagle's Wings;
Glory and Praise to Our God

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