

COLUMNISTS

Labeling differences of opinion in the church

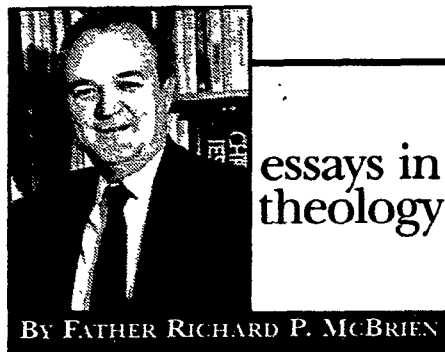
Some Catholics (dare one say, "on the right") resist the use of political labels like "liberal" and "conservative" to differentiate viewpoints in the church. The church is not a political organization, they insist. It is a mystery.

To the extent that any differences do exist, they are between "loyal" and "disloyal" Catholics. There is only one legitimate Catholic opinion, namely, the teaching of the church (as interpreted by the loyalists).

Other Catholics ("on the left") object to the political labels on different grounds. They say that the term "conservative" concedes too much to its designees. Conservatism, they insist, is a well thought-out position, based on a thorough knowledge of, and respect for, the entire history of the church. By contrast, "conservative" Catholics equate a thin slice of that history, e.g., the first half of the 20th century, with the very essence of Catholic tradition.

I acknowledged in a previous column that I have been trying in recent months to avoid using "liberal" or "conservative" in reference to conflicting viewpoints within the church. That effort has been in response to a friendly exhortation and challenge from the widely published author, Paul Wilkes, a visiting professor here at the University of Notre Dame last spring.

This column — really only a trial balloon



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

— continues that effort. It proposes we substitute the terms "reformer" and "restorationist" for "liberal" and "conservative."

The proposal rests on the undeniable fact that there are, and always have been, sharp differences of opinion within the church regarding theology (including the interpretation of doctrine), pastoral practices (including the liturgy), spirituality, discipline, episcopal appointments, the role of the pope and the Roman Curia in the governance of the universal church (collegiality), eucharistic sharing between Catholics and other Christians, the involvement of the church in the temporal order, and so forth.

There is no realistic hope that "reformer" versus "restorationist" is going to catch on with the media or the general public. But it might possibly catch on with

an important constituency inside the church, namely, those clergy, religious and laity who are directly involved in its day-to-day institutional life — in parishes, dioceses, schools, organizations, colleges and universities, publications, and the like.

This constituency is the group within which most of the discourse about the present and future state of the church occurs. It is also the group that is most influential in fashioning and shaping opinion in the church.

There is historical precedent for distinguishing individuals, groups, and movements within the church by such labels as "reformer" and "restorationist." Indeed, there have been at least three major, papally-directed reform movements in the history of the church in whose aftermath large numbers of Catholics, of high and middling ecclesiastical station, found themselves in prolonged opposition to one another in terms of their attitudes and activities for and against reform.

Gregory the Great (590-604) reformed the methods for electing bishops in Italy and the conduct of bishops while in office. He was also a vigorous promoter of monasticism and of the liturgy. So strong was his support of the former, and of monks generally, that sharp divisions arose within the ranks of the Roman cler-

gy that would last for decades, affecting several subsequent papal elections.

The reforms of Gregory VII (1073-85) included attacks on nepotism, simony, clerical corruption, and the interference of lay rulers in the internal governance of the church (the lay investiture issue). Subsequent pontificates see-sawed between those on one side or the other of the Gregorian reform movement.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65), convened by John XXIII (1958-63), exposed a division within the worldwide episcopate between a majority who favored the Johannine reform of ecumenism, collegiality, lay initiatives and the active engagement of the church with the world, and a minority, largely but not exclusively in the Curia, who were strongly opposed to change.

That division has persisted into our own day: the "reformers" support and strive to promote the work of the conciliar majority, and the "restorationists" stand in the line of the conciliar minority, seeking to return, as far as possible, to the Catholicism of the 1950s.

Or does "liberal" versus "conservative" say it better?

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

Give Sunday back to God

Third Sunday of Easter (May 7): (R3) Luke 24:35-48; (R1) Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; (R2) 1 John 2:1-5.

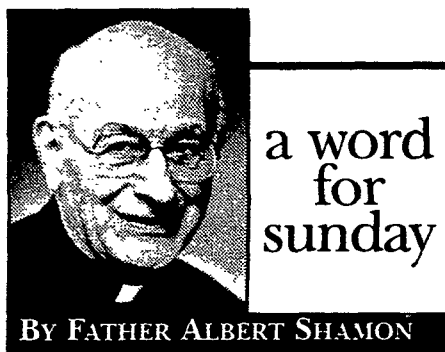
Before commenting on the Sunday readings, I would like to call attention to a movement that is being launched by the religious leaders in Oswego. It is a plan to "Save Our Sunday."

The campaign plans to ask organizers of sporting events and school or youth group activities to schedule events after noon on Sundays. The petition mailed to all the churches in the area reads: "We, the undersigned, express our support for family spiritual growth and faith by encouraging our community and athletic leaders to preserve the integrity of Sunday mornings for family worship.

"We want to suggest to the community that we want to try to maintain Sunday morning as a time for family and church."

"Everybody is busy, busy, busy," said Father Joseph Champlin of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Syracuse. "Time to rest, time to pray and time to be with your family is hard to find."

When youth sports like hockey are scheduled on Sundays, it takes away from the two most important things that people should do on Sunday: spend time with the family and thank the Lord with worship.



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

"To have some prohibition on Sundays," a father said, "is sensible, healthy and beneficial to our kids."

"It would be great to have events after Mass on Sunday," a parent said, "because then we could go to Mass as a family."

I suggest we all read one of the shortest books in the Old Testament and ponder what it says. It is the book of Haggai, just three small chapters. The book explains why the returned exiles are economically depressed. Haggai says in effect: "You sow much, but you reap little. You eat, but you are not filled. You drink, but you are not exhilarated. You put on clothes, but you are not warmed. You earn wages, but for a bag with holes in it." Then the prophet explains why. "Because my house lies in ruins." The exiles built up their own

homes and businesses, but neglected to build the temple of the Lord. So they labored in vain, much as we do today.

Give God back the Sunday — at least the Sunday morn. Then God will bless America! "Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will be given us besides."

Union leader Patrick E. Gorman wrote: "There is absolutely no excuse for Sunday operation in any food market. The whole idea is irreligious, un-Christian, and has a tendency to wean away from God workers who cannot attend Sunday services. To re-establish seven-day operation in the food field is not only unnecessary but archaic. It belongs to the cracker barrel era. ... Labor unions and the public should not permit our one day of worship to be sacrificed on altars of cellophane. ... Nobody gains; everybody loses."

In Sunday's Gospel Jesus says: "Penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all the nations." The repentance our Lord talked about was a change of life.

We might ask ourselves in what direction our life is headed. God has given so many wonderful bodies. Are we abusing them with alcohol or drugs or impurity or gluttony or neglect? Then turn around. Turn around while you still can.

Is one drawn into a relationship that is

destructive to his happy home, a path that will certainly mean heartache for himself, for his wife and children, even for his partner in sin? Then, for God's sake, turn around! Before it is too late, turn around.

People begin surrounding themselves with things at the expense of living a life of service to God and man. We say to them, "Turn around. You are serving things rather than allowing things to serve you."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 8
Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29
Tuesday, May 9
Acts 7:51-8:1; John 6:30-35
Wednesday, May 10
Acts 8:1-8; John 6:35-40
Thursday, May 11
Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-51
Friday, May 12
Acts 9:1-20; John 6:52-59
Saturday, May 13
Acts 9:31-42; John 6:60-69

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