

COLUMNISTS

Importing priests won't solve shortage

One of the most sensitive issues in the U.S. Catholic Church today is the importation of priests from foreign countries to serve in various parishes and dioceses throughout the United States. Any criticisms of the policy, however restrained, are interpreted by some as an attack upon, or a denial of, the multicultural nature of the church, or as a slur upon certain ethnic groups, or even as a form of racism.

The multicultural nature of the universal church is self-evident. So, too, is the increasingly multicultural character of the church in the United States. To take but one example, there are now more than 30 million Hispanic Catholics in the United States. And large numbers of Catholics have been entering the country from Asia and Africa as well as Latin America.

Because the church, globally and in the United States, is multicultural, everything that it does pastorally and ministerially must reflect and promote that reality.

Indeed, history reminds us of the terribly tragic effects that have followed upon the church's efforts, either by mandate of Rome or through the activities of missionaries, to impose a particular European culture upon those of indigenous peoples. The attempts at the forcible Latinization of the East are responsible in large part for the continuation of the East-West Schism,



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

some 1,000 years after its original eruption in 1054.

To be sure, where there is a significant presence of cultural minorities in a given country, a sufficient number of pastorally competent priests (as well as of other Catholics, lay and religious alike) are required to serve the spiritual needs of these minorities. They must speak the language and understand the culture. In many, if not most, cases, the best source of such priests is the home country itself.

Such priests should not be imported (for example, from India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nigeria or Poland) just to supplement the local diocesan clergy, nor as a stop-gap solution to the serious, growing shortage of priests in the United States.

Nor should their importation divert the church from addressing the deeper rea-

sons for the shortage, including the negative impact of obligatory celibacy.

Of course, the Catholic Church in the United States, or in any other country with large numbers of immigrants, should welcome priests from foreign countries who can speak the language and who can understand and appreciate the secular as well as religious culture of its minorities.

As true missionaries, however, they must be prepared to return to their own countries once their work is done, or to go wherever else they may be needed, after the minority communities have outgrown the need for outside pastoral support. The priests will see their role as contributing to the establishment of a self-sustaining community of faith. Once that happens, they must move on.

From as early as the first century, the church has warned against the missionary who stays longer than necessary. If he does, the *Didache* ("The Teaching") insisted, "he is no genuine missionary."

Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, these priests should not be given regular assignments in parishes where there are few or no cultural minorities.

When many (though not all) modern-day missionaries from Asia, Africa, Latin America and some parts of Europe come to the United States, they encounter a sit-

uation that missionaries of past centuries never had to face, namely, the opportunity to work in an environment that is politically, economically and socially superior to the one they left behind at home.

Rarely, if ever, has it happened in the history of the church that missionaries have actually improved their standard of living in the lands to which they have been sent. Not to recognize this new situation is to make it impossible to deal objectively and realistically with the issue at hand.

Undoubtedly, the controversy regarding foreign priests will continue unabated for a long while — certainly for as long as there are pastoral needs for certain minority communities, but also, unfortunately, for as long as there is a priest shortage in parishes and dioceses where cultural minorities do not exist.

Charges of ethnic bias and even racism will continue to be hurled at those who raise such concerns. Others will wrap themselves in the flag of multiculturalism, as if critics were denying or attacking it.

But the issue will not disappear until the church's leadership finally acknowledges and addresses the deeper causes of the priest shortage.

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

Miracles provide basis for belief in Eucharist

17th Sunday of the Year (July 30): (R3) John 6:1-15; (R1) 2 Kings 4:42-44; (R2) Ephesians 4:1-6.

Because the Gospel of St. Mark is the shortest of the synoptic Gospels, only 16 chapters, the liturgy turns to the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, his treatise on the Eucharist, for five weeks starting July 30.

This chapter is divided into two parts, one depicting two miracles: the multiplying of loaves and fish, and Jesus walking on water; the other describing two discourses: one on faith, one about a promise of the Eucharist.

John prefaced the two discourses on the Eucharist with two miracles, because the Eucharist is a mystery of faith. The miracles prove it is reasonable to have faith in Jesus. By the miracle of the loaves and fish, Jesus proved he was a prophet far greater than the renowned prophet Elisha. Elisha fed a 100 people with 20 loaves; Jesus with one-fourth of the resources, five loaves, fed 50 times as many people, 5,000 men, not counting the women and children (which would no doubt have brought the number to about 15,000 in all).

Jesus did not create the loaves; he multiplied them to show he had power over substances. The miracle of the Eucharist



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

is made possible by the miracle of transubstantiation: a changing of substances. Jesus then walked on water to show that his body could defy the laws of nature.

The logical conclusion: such a one ought to be believed when he promised to give his flesh to eat, his blood to drink. These miracles were the groundwork for faith. The Eucharist is truly "the mystery of faith."

St. Thomas, in his great Eucharistic hymn, "Adoro Te Devote," wrote:

Sight, touch, and taste, in Thee are each deceived.

The ear alone most safely is believed. I believe all the Son of God has spoken Than truth's own word, there is no truer token.

In the second reading St. Paul tells the

Ephesians, "Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin." The sacramental grace of the Eucharist is precisely this: unity! The bond of unity is love. The source of love is the sacrament of love, holy Communion, and the God of Love, the Holy Spirit. Thus right after the sacrifice of the Mass ("we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread, this saving cup"), the priest prays for the sacramental grace of the Mass: unity.

At this point I generally hold my hands over the assembly and pray. "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit." As many grapes make the one wine and many grains of wheat the one bread, so we being many become one through the love given us by holy Communion and the Holy Spirit. The church makes the Eucharist, but the Eucharist makes the church.

One final point. Those who ate the loaves and the fish were fully satisfied. They wanted no more. So holy Communion satisfies all the desires of the human heart. "For Thyself Thou hast created us, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

It is a wonderful preparation for holy Communion to go to confession first. Our

Lady asked that we go to confession monthly.

After holy Communion, we ought to do three things, recalling them by a mnemonic device: T W A.

T for Thanks: thanking God the Father for giving us his Son in holy Communion.

W for Welcome: welcoming God the Son for coming to us in holy Communion.

A for Ask: asking God the Holy Spirit for all the graces we desire for ourselves and for those we love.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, July 31

Jeremiah 13:1-11; Matthew 13:31-35

Tuesday, August 1

Jeremiah 14:17-22; Matthew 13:36-43

Wednesday, August 2

Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21; Matthew 13:44-46

Thursday, August 3

Jeremiah 18:1-6; Matthew 13:47-53

Friday, August 4

Jeremiah 26:1-9; Matthew 13:54-58

Saturday, August 5

Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24; Matthew 14:1-12

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