

COLUMNISTS

'New breed' lacks interest in social justice

There was a front-page story last month in *The New York Times* regarding a generation gap within the Roman Catholic clergy (9/10/00). Priests ordained in the 1950s and early 1960s, who were inspired and energized by the Second Vatican Council, have become increasingly concerned that their legacy will not be carried forward by today's seminarians and younger clergy.

In addition to reforming the liturgy and encouraging lay participation, the council promoted a greater involvement of the church in the social, political and economic orders. As the *Times* pointed out, the Vatican II generation of priests fought for integration, marched for civil rights, engaged in community organizing for everything from subsidized housing for the poor to street lights, and spoke out against the nuclear arms race and the Vietnam War.

The new "new breed" of seminarians and priests is not interested in a social activism that challenges institutions, but only in ministries to individuals — in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, convalescent homes and hospitals.

This new "new breed" (my expression, not the *Times*) is also more comfortable with the insignia of clerical identity: the black suit and Roman collar, the cassock



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

and the clearly defined rungs on the ecclesiastical ladder — from seminarian to deacon to priest to monsignor (alas!) to bishop to archbishop to cardinal to pope. Loyalty and obedience are among their favorite virtues.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee described the situation accurately last March when he suggested that the "younger generation needs more structures, clarity and guidance." They want to be told what to do and then to bask in the approval of their "superiors."

The *Times* prominently published three letters in response to the article. Two rose to the defense of the younger generation of seminarians and priests: the first from a seminarian, the second from a consulting psychologist at a residence for seminarians.

Both missed the point of the story and unwittingly illuminated the underlying problem that Vatican II Catholics have with this new "new breed."

The seminarian labeled as a "myth" and a "stereotype" the complaint that his peers neglect the Second Vatican Council with its emphasis on social justice and the need to serve the poor. He noted that he had worked last summer in the South Bronx with a community of Franciscans. The psychologist made a similar point. Today's seminarians, he insisted, "show a tremendous spirit of generosity, as seen in their weekly visits to homeless shelters, soup kitchens and facilities for the emotionally ill, elderly and infirm."

To be sure, these are important and integral aspects of the ministry of every baptized Christian. But what concerns the Vatican II generation of priests is the new "new breed's" apparent lack of interest in the deeper institutional and systemic causes of social injustice.

More serious than their simply missing the point, however, is the vein of arrogance and even calumny that runs through the letters.

Four times in his short letter, the seminarian referred to his generation's fidelity to church teachings, implying that the Vatican II generation of priests is less

faithful or perhaps even wholly unfaithful. Indeed, he dismissed the concerns of such priests about the younger clerical generation as a sign of "frustration that we have not accepted an ideology that sacrifices fidelity to the Gospel for 'relevance' and popular approval."

There we have it. A whole generation of priests (not to say religious and laity as well) who have committed their lives to the service of the church, the defense of human dignity, and the causes of peace and social justice — all in the name of the Gospel and as a function of their baptismal and priestly ministries — are to be written off as un-Christian ideologues, driven by the personal need for "relevance" and popularity.

In the second letter, the charge is clear: Unlike the priests who have toiled in the vineyard for 40 years or more, today's seminarians and younger clergy respect the "sacredness" of the liturgy, and regard the church as "not merely a place to congregate, but a place of worship."

No wonder the Vatican II generation of priests now nearing retirement are worried about their legacy. So should we all.

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

Jesus painted a vision for followers

29th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 22): (R3) Mark 10:35-45. (R1) Isaiah 53:10-11. (R2) Hebrews 4:14-16.

An important theme in society today is leadership. Every corporation seeks strong effective leaders. I am sure you remember when Chrysler Corporation was on the economic ropes, nearly bankrupt. Then Lee Iacocca was hired to save this troubled company. Within five years Chrysler experienced a profit of \$925 million! That's leadership! We wonder sometimes how anyone can ever justify the large salaries that are paid to corporate CEOs. The answer is that leadership makes or breaks any organization.

Jesus was a strong leader — so strong that the church he founded is still prospering 2,000 years after his death. How did Jesus do it? It was his leadership.

For one thing, Jesus painted a vision. No company succeeds today if its leader does not have a vision. Jesus painted for his disciples a vision which was that of the kingdom of God. The disciples at first had a difficult time grasping that vision. They didn't appreciate it until after his death. The strength of his church today is evidence that they finally did grasp it. The vision Jesus painted of the kingdom was that it was to be a kingdom



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

of service: "Any among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest."

There was a Broadway production a few years ago titled "1776." It centers around John Adams, as he attempts to get the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to act decisively and declare independence from England.

On the night of July 3, 1776, the hall is empty save for John Adams. He sees that South Carolina and Pennsylvania are opposed to independence. Delaware is undecided. New York's representatives are awaiting further instructions. It looks hopeless. Wrestling with a vision shared by only a few, Adams paces back and forth in the hall. We can feel his stress as we watch. Suddenly he looks up and cries out dramatically into the void: Is

anybody there! Does anybody care! Does anybody see what I see!

Jesus could see what his disciples could not: the kingdom of God. So he painted a picture. That is the first requisite for leadership: Have a vision.

In the second place, Jesus led his disciples with love, not fear. How patient Jesus was with his disciples. They were ordinary men — sometimes quarrelsome, sometimes fearful, sometimes infantile. In Sunday's Gospel two of his disciples jockey for power.

"See to it," they said to Jesus, "that we sit, one at your right and the other at your left, when you come into your glory." Jesus shook his head. "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I shall drink?"

Their question showed that they had no understanding of the kingdom. But Jesus kept his cool. He led through love, not fear.

There is a third thing we need to note about Jesus' leadership style. Jesus led through example. "Can you," Jesus asked, "drink the cup I shall drink or be baptized in the same bath of pain as I?" "We can," they told him. But it was evident they had no idea what Jesus was talking about.

Florence Nightingale could have lived a pampered, shallow life. But one day in her travels, she spent some times at the Institute of Protestant Deaconesses, a group of humble women who devoted themselves to charitable works. When Florence returned to England, she gave her life to nursing the poor. She transformed the face of nursing. She taught by example.

Jesus painted a vision of a kingdom of love and service by example.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, October 23
Ephesians 2:1-10; Luke 12:13-21
Tuesday, October 24
Ephesians 2:12-22; Luke 12:35-38
Wednesday, October 25
Ephesians 3:2-12; Luke 12:39-48
Thursday, October 26
Ephesians 3:14-21; Luke 12:49-53
Friday, October 27
Ephesians 4:1-6; Luke 12:54-59
Saturday, October 28
Ephesians 2:19-22; Luke 6:12-16



In our community, the Image Centre of the World, we greatly appreciate the value of memories. Pictures capture special moments, family events, and once-in-a-lifetime happenings. Our life, as with a picture, becomes a memory to family and friends. When you consider how you would like to be remembered and memorialized, think of us, we are the CRAWFORD FUNERAL HOME, where helping families share memories has been our focus since 1957.



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