

# COLUMNISTS

## History, the great teacher, sometimes ignored

Pope John XXIII (now Blessed John XXIII) was a historian, diplomat and bishop before he was elected to the papacy in 1958. He was fond of reminding people that history is the great teacher of life.

Too often, public figures in the church embrace points of view that are not only ignorant of history, but that fly in its face. The unsuspecting refer to those opinions as "conservative" or "traditional," when, in fact, they are neither.

Many assume, for example, that the pope alone can appoint bishops, but popes did not claim that right until the 19th century.

Through much of the First Millennium, bishops were elected by the laity and clergy of their diocese. Later, temporal rulers became directly involved in the process. During the Second Millennium, bishops were also elected by the cathedral chapter, that is, the community of diocesan priests or canons attached to the local cathedral.

Taking John XXIII's principle to heart, this column identifies a few of the major developments in church history and some of the lessons we should learn from them.

The persecutions of the church during the first three centuries strengthened the faith-commitment of the early Christians, but they also generated a sectarian mentality — a tendency to regard the church



### essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

as a beleaguered minority in a hostile world with a mission to challenge but not to engage that world.

The conversion of Constantine in 312 and his granting of civil protection and privileges to the church made it possible for the church to carry out its mission more effectively, but in becoming a part of the political establishment, the church also lost some of its prophetic edge.

The growth of monasticism was a major factor in the preservation and enrichment of Christian culture, but it also represented a withdrawal of the church from the business and concerns of the world and presented monastic spirituality as the norm for all Christians.

The so-called "barbarian invasions" (in reality, migrations of various tribes throughout Europe) enriched the church

through the assimilation of a wider, cultural diversity, but also introduced militaristic and feudal elements (as represented in some episcopal regalia — crozier, miter and ring — and in misleading references to Christians as "soldiers of Christ").

The papal reaction to lay investiture (the interference of temporal rulers in the appointment and installation of bishops and abbots) in the 11th century liberated the church from political domination, but laid the foundation for the canonically inflated papacy of the Second Millennium.

The establishment of universities in the 13th century reinforced the critical and scientific aspect of theology and helped to produce a learned clergy and eventually a learned laity, but also tended to make theology more theoretical and less pastoral.

The purist movements of the same period (Albigensians, Spiritual Franciscans) courageously denounced the worldliness of the church but introduced an element of fanaticism and pastoral unrealism.

Protestantism brought reform to the church, but also disunity and division which continue today. The Catholic Counter-Reformation also brought reform, however belatedly, but reinforced the rule of the hierarchy at the expense of the laity and produced an exaggerated emphasis on law in moral theology and

church life.

The missionary expansion of the church, following the Reformation and into the 19th century, brought the Gospel to a wider circle of peoples and cultures, but also carried colonialism, economic exploitation, and cultural oppression.

The French Revolution liberated the church from many of its feudal and medieval accretions, but it also destroyed some of the church's best assets: monasteries, churches, art, and religious orders devoted to the service of the poor.

The democratic movements of the 19th century encouraged rule by the people, due process, freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, and liberated the church from temporal entanglements in the Papal States, but provoked extreme reaction from Pius IX in his Syllabus of Errors and his insistence on papal infallibility.

Late 19th and early 20th century modernism challenged an uncritical and un-historical orthodoxy, but also fostered subjectivism, relativism and a deeply rooted skepticism toward anything supernatural.

Are there comparable developments in today's church? If so, are we prepared to learn from them?

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

## Use each day well — invest time in family and God

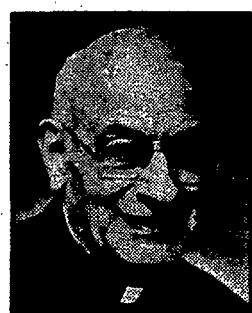
33rd Sunday of the Year (Nov. 19): (R3) Mark 13:24-32; (R1) Daniel 12:1-3; (R2) Hebrews 10:11-14,18.

One of man's most futile efforts is to try to determine when the world will end. Solomon Eccles was jailed in London for striding through Smithfield Market stark naked, carrying a pan of blazing sulfur on his head, and prophesying doom and destruction, the end of the world. Nothing happened except the Great Fire of London in 1666.

In 1874 Charles Tazé Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, declared that the end of the world would come in 1914. Later he modified the date to "very soon after 1914."

In 1967 Anders Jensen appeared on the "David Frost Show" and announced to millions of television viewers that the world was going to end in a nuclear holocaust on Christmas Day.

In the 1987 NCAA Regional Finals, Louisiana State University was leading Indiana by eight points with only a few minutes left in the game. As often happens with a team in the lead, LSU began playing a different ball game. Its players were beginning to watch the clock rather than wholeheartedly play the game. As a result Indiana closed the gap, won the game by



### a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

one point, and eventually went on to become NCAA champions. God doesn't want us to be clock-watchers. He wants us to be doers.

First of all, we can't know the future. Jesus' disciples expected his return in their lifetime. They were wrong. Just a few years ago, who could have predicted how the computer would change our lives — or the fax, or the cellular telephone or cable TV? Would we have predicted AIDS or the fall of the Berlin Wall? Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

Only God does. God knows. This is our chief source of comfort. He knows.

There is a haunting story of a man who was the lone survivor of a shipwreck. He was washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and

every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none came. Eventually he built a small hut and put his few possessions in it. Then one day, he arrived home to find his hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. He was angry and grief-stricken. Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him. "How did you know I was here?" he asked the crew. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

We don't know the future. But God does. God will not forsake us. We are in his care. But in the meantime, God expects us to make the most of the present. He expects us to "Carpe diem," that is, seize the day.

Do we make the most of the days God has given us? The average American spends 15.2 hours a week watching television. If the same time were invested in walking, during one year you could walk across America from coast to coast. If the same time were invested in education, you could earn a MBA degree in two years. If the same time were invested in a part-time job that pays \$20 per hour, you could earn \$47,424 in three years. Carpe diem — seize the day!

Of course, there are two investments of time that pay the highest dividends. The first is the time we invest in our family and

friends. It's a cold, cruel world out there. We need one another. The second is the time we spend with God. God is our primary resource for coping with an unknown future. As we prepare for the unknowable future, do not ignore our most precious resource — the presence of God in our lives. Trust God and seize the day.

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

### Daily Readings

Monday, November 20

Revelation 1:1-4, 2:1-5;

Luke 18:35-43

Tuesday, November 21

Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22;

Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday, November 22

Revelation 4:1-11; Luke 19:11-28

Thursday, November 23

Revelation 5:1-10; Luke 19:41-44

Friday, November 24

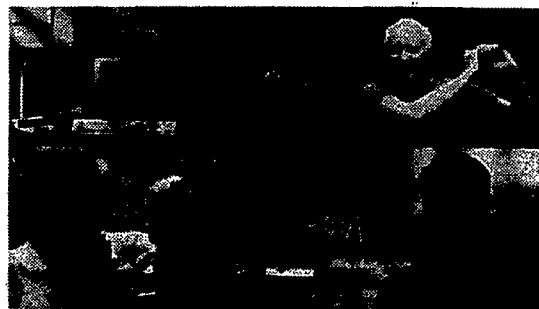
Revelation 10:8-11;

Luke 19:45-48

Saturday, November 25

Revelation 11:4-12;

Luke 20:27-40



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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