

COLUMNISTS

Theologians critique exercise of papal power

In his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II made the point that, while the papacy is essential to the structure of the church, its mode of operation is subject to improvement. Thus, he invited pastoral leaders and theologians of the various Christian churches to enter into dialogue with him regarding the manner in which the papal office is exercised.

John Quinn, retired archbishop of San Francisco, responded with *The Reform of the Papacy* (Herder and Herder, 1999), a book highly critical of the Roman Curia.

Articles in *America* magazine by three Jesuits, a church historian, a theologian and a canonist, have helped to sharpen the discussion: John O'Malley's "The Millennium and the Papalization of Catholicism" (4/9/00), Avery Dulles' "The Papacy for a Global Church" (7/15/00), and, most recently, Ladislav Orsy's "The Papacy for an Ecumenical Age: A Response to Avery Dulles" (10/21/00).

Orsy challenges Dulles' view that no significant improvements in the exercise of the papal office are called for. He argues that, even if the church were "strong and energetic" at its center, as Dulles claims, it still suffers from serious weaknesses in its outer regions. The gravest one, Orsy contends, is the lack of priests and the deprivation of the Eucharist suf-



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ferred by vast numbers of the faithful.

The sacrament of reconciliation is in precipitous decline, the ecumenical movement is in a state of drift, the church's educational ministry is "rapidly diminishing" as religious orders decrease in size, and some of the most capable, dedicated ministers — mostly women — are "frustrated since they are virtually excluded from all decision making processes."

Orsy insists that "all is not as well as Father Dulles presents it." For example, he does not acknowledge the immense, unused energies of the Holy Spirit available in bishops' conferences. Nor does he mention the equally neglected instinct of faith present in the broad cross-section of the baptized. If we are to respond to the invitation to find new ways of exercising the Petrine ministry, that quest must in-

volve the whole church, not just the hierarchy and their favorite theologians.

Orsy calls for strengthening all of the world's local churches. We must recognize, he writes, that the universal church consists of a communion of local churches, each of which is the Body of Christ in a particular place (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 26).

The local churches are not simply administrative sub-divisions of the one universal church, governed in monarchical fashion by the pope. They are churches in their own right, and their bishops are pastors in their own right, not merely subordinates or instruments of the pope.

Orsy points out that, in its teaching on collegiality, the Second Vatican Council meant more than "mere consultation." The bishops are to make pastoral decisions, as in the early centuries, that touch the ordinary, day-to-day life of the church.

Orsy is particularly critical of Avery Dulles for confusing collegiality with consultation — of the sort that takes place in the worldwide synods held in Rome and in the pope's meetings with groups of bishops from various nations.

The principle of collegiality is especially violated in the appointment of bishops, a highly centralized process that tends to "favor unity over diversity, [and]

to reward unquestioning loyalty and to distrust creativity." But "if the pope is the principle of unity, the local bishops, each one of them, are principles of diversity."

Unfortunately, recent regulations imposed by the Vatican on national episcopal conferences leave the bishops "little freedom" to uphold and enhance the rich diversity of the church. Under those new rules, episcopal conferences can do nothing of pastoral significance without prior review and approval from on high.

While it is surely the case that the pope needs a staff of intelligent and prudent persons to assist him in the governance of the universal church, "such a staff," Orsy notes, "must never encroach on the legitimate freedom of the local episcopate and the people." But the Roman Curia does so almost as a matter of course.

In the end, Father Orsy proposes a "thought experiment" as a more effective way of responding to the pope's invitation. Imagine a church, he suggests, that is already ecumenically united by the power of God's grace. Could the pope govern such a church in the same way that he governs the Catholic Church today?

If not, what changes would be needed?

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

Prepare for quittin' time during Advent

First Sunday of Advent (Dec. 3): (R3) Luke 21:25-28, 34-36; (R1) Jeremiah 33:14-16; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2.

Advent is a time of getting ready for quitting time. Blessed is the person who stays ready to keep from getting ready. Advent comes from the Latin word meaning "coming to." Advent is a time for preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord. There are three comings of the Lord: in the past, in history; in the present, in mystery; and in the end, in glory.

At the first coming of Our Lord, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest." He came to redeem the world. We recall that coming with joy at Christmas.

The second coming of Our Lord is in the celebration of the mystery of the sacraments, especially baptism and Holy Eucharist. The second comings are to prepare for the final coming.

First of all, there will be a quittin' time. Our time is finite. Everything we have is temporary. We have not here a lasting city, we look for one that is to come. We are on a journey toward eternity. It is wisdom to make preparations during the journey. A teacher once told her students that if they wanted to gain eternity, "live the last day of your life for God." But the students answered, "We don't know when



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the last day of our life is." The teacher said, "Then live each day as if it were to be your last, for one day it will be."

Life will end, but no one knows when. It may be today or tomorrow. So live each day as if it were to be your last.

Therefore, the second thing to do is be ready. Since we do not know when our end will come, we ought to be ready always. We simply do not know the day nor the hour.

We don't know what opportunities may come our way or what tragedies. We don't know when quittin' time may be for ourselves, for someone we love, or for the world as a whole. It's best we live each day prepared. Let's live each day fully, abundantly. Let us go to confession at least monthly, pray the rosary daily, and receive Communion weekly. Let's tell people we

love them. Let's not do anything or omit anything for which we would be sorry if today were our last.

Finally, remember who holds the future. So often prophecies about the end of the world engender terror in those who believe them, as if the return of our Lord is something that his children ought to dread. Look at his first coming. What joy he engendered as the Babe in a manger. See how the adult Jesus healed and taught and gathered little children in his arms. Consider how he died: forgiving those who placed him on the cross, giving up his life for his friends. Is this the man whose coming we are to dread? No, his coming is one which we can look forward to with great expectancy. The future is in the hands of a loving God and we shall not be disappointed.

A young woman had been seeing a young man. One beautiful spring day he called to say he had something special on his mind. He picked her up in his car, an antique jalopy. They drove to the country for a picnic. On the way back, he said that something great was about to happen.

As they drove through Central Park, the young woman's expectations soared. "The great moment is here," said the young man breathlessly. And he watched

with great excitement as the odometer on his car slowly passed the 100,000 mile mark. "There," he said with rapturous joy, "Everything is back to zero."

"Yes," thought the young woman, "Everything is back to zero."

Christ's return will not be so anticlimactic. When it will occur, nobody knows. Just stay ready.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, December 4

Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 8:5-11

Tuesday, December 5

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 10:21-24

Wednesday, December 6

Isaiah 25:6-10; Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday, December 7

Isaiah 26:1-6; Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Friday, December 8

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

Saturday, December 9

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26;

Matthew 9:35-10:1.

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Joy to the World and the Diocese

If you were to create a card reflecting your feelings about this Christmas season, what would it say? What would it look like? You can send your card to the entire diocesan community, through the Catholic Courier's special Dec. 21 Christmas issue. Design a card with your own message and send it to the Courier by Friday, Dec. 1. Photographs, drawings, paintings and other forms of art are welcome; the wording, as well, is entirely up to you.

The Courier staff will choose one submission for the cover of the Christmas issue.

Several others will be published inside the issue. Entries will not be returned.

Send your cards to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624.

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