

# COLUMNISTS

## Church challenged to modify stance on sexuality

Eugene Kennedy is a psychologist by profession, a prolific author, and an insightful, experienced commentator on things Catholic. He has just written a new book, *The Unhealed Wound: The Church and Human Sexuality* (St. Martin's Press), that is without doubt one of the most important books on the Catholic Church to appear over the past several decades. I do not exaggerate.

The book's title is derived from the world of mythology. The Western Knight, symbol of the Spirit, who would become the mythical Grail King, encounters and kills the Heathen Knight, symbol of Nature, only to sustain on his own body a severe sexual wound that would not heal. His suffering becomes even more acute because members of his court remain silent out of fear of displeasing him.

Kennedy argues that the institutional church has also slain Nature, and wounded itself sexually in the process. Similarly, its own court members keep silent for fear of offending their master.

In the myth, Parzival cures the king, not by magic or by legislation, but by asking an honest human question, "What is it that ails you?"

If the institutional church's own sexual wound is to be healed, Kennedy writes, the denials, the cover-ups, and the rationalizations of sexual abuse inside the church must be put aside. The silence of



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the fearful courtiers must be broken.

At the same time, the institutional church must yield its place of dominance to the Church as Mystery. That church is the people of God as understood by the Second Vatican Council.

Unlike the institutional church, which speaks to its members in the language of laws and regulations that, for example, identify the technicalities of how, where, and by whom marriages may be witnessed, the Church as Mystery speaks to believers in symbols and sacraments that transcend law and identify and celebrate the spiritual core and human reality of marriage.

According to Kennedy, the authority of the institutional church, as distinguished from the Church as Mystery, has been foundering badly because of its self-inflicted sexual crisis.

Conscientious Catholics, whether considered liberal or conservative, may still

love the church but they no longer accept the divided model of human personality on which its laws are based. They do not believe that God has made of them an unstable amalgam: a "good" soul ever betrayed by a "bad" body, an undying "spirit" locked in solitary confinement with unclean "flesh."

Ordinary Catholics no longer feel guilty about being human and having sexual feelings. They do not readily accept official arguments on such issues as birth control, the superiority of celibacy over marriage, or the refusal to allow married people or women to be priests.

Eugene Kennedy insists that the loss of institutional credibility about human intimacy has now been made almost complete by a generation of institutional scandals, denials, failed cover-ups, botched follow-ups, and little, if any, curiosity about the underlying causes of sexual abuse committed by clergy and other church personnel (the latest having been disclosed in Africa).

This crisis, he says, is a clear function of a church whose model is not that of a keeper of the keys of a spiritual kingdom but of a holder of the keys to a powerful institution. The Catholic Church, however, cannot permit these grave wounds to go unintended, remembered only in the suffering they have caused.

The loss of institutional authority has occurred not because of theological dis-

sent in the church but as the result of leaders acting on a divided image of the human person that contradicts the traditional Catholic understanding of holiness as wholeness.

What is now required is a redemptive honesty in place of a public relations approach, dictated by lawyers and insurers, about the nature and causes of sexual conflicts, symptoms of a pervasive but reformable institutional disorder.

Eugene Kennedy calls upon the institutional church to subordinate itself to the Church as Mystery and to heal its sexual wound by asking that honest human question, "What is it that ails you?"

*The Unhealed Wound* celebrates the reality of Church as Mystery while exposing and examining the pain caused to so many by the Church as Institution. This book is certain to challenge and even anger some, but it will even more surely liberate thousands of others from confusion, misunderstanding, and especially the burden of false guilt.

Even as it exposes the syndrome of denial at the church's official levels, *The Unhealed Wound* strikes a powerfully affirming chord for so many others.

The more widely it is read and discussed, the greater its impact for good. Just watch!

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

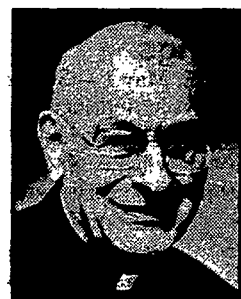
## John's final chapter reveals Peter's love of Christ

3rd Sunday of Easter (April 29): (R3) John 21:1-19; (R1) Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; (R2) Revelation 5:11-14.

Sunday's Gospel is the final chapter (21) to John's Gospel. It was an addition to the original Gospel which had concluded with the magnificent statement of 20:31: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name."

This chapter is tied to the previous chapters by a host of literary and theological links. The term "Sea of Tiberias" is Johannine; so is the way that the disciples are named: Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael from Cana; the night-day contrast; verse 4's lack of recognition; the image of Jesus as servant and giver of bread; the reference to previous appearances; Peter's triple profession to counterbalance the triple denial and to reintroduce the shepherd theme.

The author of this chapter certainly knew about fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Night-time was the best time for fishing. Yet the seven disciples fishing all night had caught nothing. After daybreak, Jesus stands on the shore and tells them to cast their net off to the starboard or right side. It happens very often that a man on shore can see a shoal of fish invisible to men in a boat. Still, without Jesus, one



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

night and one catches nothing. With Jesus, the catch of fish is tremendous.

One of the great reasons this chapter was added was to demonstrate once and for all the reality of the Resurrection. Many still would not admit the reality; they branded the Resurrection as a vision or hallucination. A vision or a spirit would not be likely to point out a shoal of fish to a party of fishermen. A vision would not kindle a charcoal fire on the seashore. Nor cook a meal and share it. Yet Jesus did all these things to make it clear that the Resurrection was a reality.

A second great truth is symbolized here. John gives the number of fish as 153. St. Jerome said that in the zoology of his day there were 153 different kinds of fish. So the number includes a catch of every kind of fish. Therefore the number symbolizes universality, the fact that

some day all men of all nations will be gathered together in Christ.

Also, the great number of fish did not tear the net, which stands for the church. It was not torn because there is room in the church for all men of all nations. The church is as universal as the love of God in Jesus Christ. There is no exclusiveness in the church, no selectiveness. It embraces all peoples of all times.

A final reason for this chapter is what it tells us of Peter. Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Maybe Jesus pointed to the boat, the nets, the fish, and said, "Do you love me more than these things? Are you prepared to give them all up, to abandon a steady job, comfort, success, in order to preach the Gospel and care for my sheep?" Then Jesus might have looked at the rest of the little group of disciples and said to Peter, "Simon do you love me? Do you love me more than your fellow-disciples?" Peter had made that assertion once and then denied Jesus three times. Humbly now Peter simply said, "You know that I love you."

A third time Jesus asked the question to give Peter a chance to affirm his love and wipe out the memory of the three-fold denial at the time of his Passion.

We must note what love brought Peter. Love brought him a task. "If you love

me," Jesus said, "then give your life to shepherding the sheep and the lambs of my flock." We can best prove our love for Jesus by loving others. Love is the greatest privilege in the world, but love brings the greatest responsibility in the world. Finally, love brought Peter a cross. In A.D. 67, Peter was crucified on a Vatican hill, like his Master. Like Peter, we, too, can feed the lambs of Christ with the word of God. That, too, will prove our love of Christ.

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

### Daily Readings

Monday, April 30

Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29

Tuesday, May 1

Acts 7:51-8:1A; John 6:30-35

Wednesday, May 2

Acts 8:1B-8; John 6:35-40

Thursday, May 3

1 Corinthians 15:1-8; John 14:6-14

Friday, May 4

Acts 9:1-20; John 6:52-59

Saturday, May 5

Acts 9:31-42; John 6:60-69

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