

## COLUMNISTS

## Bush's overtures to Catholics one-sided

Much attention has been given early in President George W. Bush's first term to his so-called faith-based initiative, which favors government funding for social service programs run by religiously affiliated organizations. In fact, he made it the center-piece of his commencement address at the University of Notre Dame last month.

The invitation to speak at Notre Dame, extended immediately after his election was assured by a 5-4 ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court on December 12, afforded the new president a highly coveted platform from which to appeal to a constituency that is not yet in his political pocket: the nation's Catholics.

Catholic voters preferred Vice President Al Gore to then-Governor Bush by a margin of at least two or three percentage points. Not landslide proportions, but a majority nonetheless. Indeed, the more Catholic the state, the more decisive the Democratic victory last fall. Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin, and New York all voted for Gore over Bush.

This voting pattern clearly irritated some politically conservative commentators in the Catholic Church, and at least one of them blamed it all on the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, for having given us the consistent-life-ethic approach to moral issues. It is an approach that discourages



## essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Catholics from voting for or against candidates on the basis of one issue alone, namely, abortion.

To be sure, if most Catholics were to vote solely on the basis of a candidate's stand on abortion, the Republicans would win almost every time because it is a party that has actively and persistently cultivated so-called pro-life Christians. Few issues matter more to them than this.

Recent stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* indicate that President Bush has been concerned about his standing among Catholic voters and is making a special effort to reach out to the Catholic community and its leaders. A *Times* photo earlier this month shows him on stage with the cardinal-archbishops of Boston and Detroit. Soon after his inauguration, the president had dinner at the residence of the new cardinal-archbishop of Washington, D.C.

Just about every pundit who has writ-

ten or spoken on the subject points out that Mr. Bush is cultivating his conservative base because he is determined not to be a one-term president, like his father. The difficulty with his strategy (apart from the risk of alienating moderates like Senator James Jeffords of Vermont) is that it seems to identify Catholics as a slightly more moderate version of that conservative Republican base.

In that regard, the president has been relying on polling data purporting to show that religiously active Catholics are more likely to vote Republican than are religiously inactive Catholics.

Michael Novak, a prominent Catholic layman who is said to have had a hand in writing President Bush's Notre Dame speech and to have been rewarded with a ride to campus on Air Force One, told a national television audience on the "Lehrer News Hour" soon after the election that most religious (read: morally superior?) people voted for Bush, while most non-religious (read: morally inferior?) voted for Gore.

The strategy, therefore, is to play to so-called active Catholics who are allegedly less interested in social justice and human rights issues than were their parents and grandparents, and who are somewhat similar to evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants in their concern for family values and related issues.

In pursuit of this segment of the U.S. Catholic community, however, the presi-

dent has apparently decided to draw all of his political wisdom about American Catholicism from one slice of that community — a slice that is already conservative and Republican, and found, like Mr. Novak himself, at the higher end of the nation's economic ladder.

A recent story in *The Washington Post* confirms this suspicion. The names mentioned in the President's Catholic advisory group reflect a clear right-of-center bias, both religiously and politically. Should such Catholics have a voice? Of course. Should they be the only voice? Certainly not if Mr. Bush really hopes to build bridges to the larger U.S. Catholic community.

As Peter Steinfels put it in his recent column in *The New York Times*, if President Bush wants to design an effective Catholic strategy, he had better know something about people like Msgr. George Higgins, who received Notre Dame's Laetare Medal at the same commencement exercises, or the late Msgr. John Egan, another Chicago priest, whose whole life and ministry were devoted to social and racial justice and the needs of those whom society and the politicians usually leave behind.

The publisher of *Crisis* magazine is not exactly what Steinfels had in mind.

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## Jesus gives three conditions for discipleship

13th Sunday of the Year (July 1): (R3) Luke 9:51-62; (R1) 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21; (R2) Galatians 5:1, 13-18.

The Gospels for the next eight Sundays are from the central portions of Luke's Gospel (9:51-19:28), covering the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is a time when Jesus forms his disciples by his teaching and his debates with the enemies of the church. He is going to Jerusalem to die and then to go to the Father.

St. Luke tells us that "when Jesus was to be taken from this world, he firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem." Jesus had work to do and he would do it no matter the cost. In fact, he was so eager to do it that he took a shortcut to Jerusalem. He went by way of Samaria, not the roundabout way east of the Jordan River.

We, too, are on a journey to God. Our journey, too, is by way of the cross, for the disciple is not above the Master. Like Jesus, we must never let the difficulties necessary to practice our faith cause us to give up our faith. We must let nothing get in our way, even though it might mean carrying a cross. At Valley Forge in the American Revolution, many soldiers defected. Thomas Paine called them summer soldiers and sunshine patriots. They stayed in the army when the going was easy; but defected when it got tough. Do we serve God when the going is easy and desert him when the going gets tough?

Among the prisoners taken captive at



## a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Waterloo, there was a highland piper. Napoleon, struck with his mountain dress and sinewy limbs, asked the piper to play on his instrument, which is said to sound so delightful in the mountains and glens in Scotland. "Play a pibroch," said Napoleon. The highlander played. "Play a march"; it was done. "Play a retreat." "Na, na," said the highlander, "I never learned to play a retreat." Jesus never retreated when the going got tough, nor should we.

In Samaria Jesus did not get the red-carpet treatment. He was not welcomed. James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted Jesus to rain down fire on their cities as the prophet Elijah once did on his enemies. But Jesus reprimanded them. Jesus was determined and decisive in doing his work, but he was not vindictive and intolerant.

His gentleness paid off. Seven years after the Ascension of our Lord, the same John went with Peter to send the fire of

the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans through the sacrament of confirmation (Acts 8:14). They were the first non-Jews to be received into the church. Love conquers all things. A mild answer breaks wrath.

Jesus, then, stated three conditions for discipleship.

First, to follow him is not always easy. Jesus warned a would-be follower of his to count the cost. Following him demands sacrifice. Foxes have lairs, birds nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. To follow him is to carry a cross.

Secondly, when God calls, one ought to respond immediately, not dilly-dally. "Come after me," Jesus said to one. But he answered, "Let me bury my father first." In other words, I'll come after you when my father dies. Opportunity knocks but once. Strike while the iron is hot. Never put off God's graces. Jesus says to a sinner, "Go to confession now!" The sinner answers, "Tomorrow." And tomorrow may never come. Jesus says, "Give up excessive drinking." "Tomorrow, Lord," one says. Tomorrow never comes. Jesus says, "Break up that sinful relationship." The sinner says, "Tomorrow." And tomorrow never comes. Now is the acceptable time, not tomorrow.

Thirdly, Jesus wants his disciples to focus on the future, not on the past. Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. The man in the Gospel had asked the same thing that Elisha had asked of

Elijah, "Let me go home and take leave of my people." Jesus didn't say, "No"; but he warned the man that if he did, he might stay home. Jesus warned that if you put your hand to the plow and keep looking back, you'll never plow a straight furrow. Jesus was saying, "Don't use a rearview mirror of life. Don't be always looking back. Look ahead. Forget the past and press on to the future."

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## Daily Readings

Monday, July 2

Genesis 18:16-33; Psalms 103:1-4, 8-11; Matthew 8:18-22

Tuesday, July 3

Ephesians 2:19-22; Psalms 117:1-2; John 20:24-29

Wednesday, July 4

Genesis 21:5, 8-20; Psalms 34:7-8, 10-13; Matthew 8:28-34

Thursday, July 5

Genesis 22:1-19; Psalms 115:1-6, 8-9; Matthew 9:1-8

Friday, July 6

Genesis 23:1-4, 19, 24:1-8, 62-67; Psalms 106:1-5; Matthew 9:9-13

Saturday, July 7

Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29; Psalms 136:1-6; Matthew 9:14-17

## Education

Publication date: August 2 • Advertising deadline: July 26

Our annual education edition is exceptionally popular among readers — drawing high interest, praise and peer awards. This back-to-school study of trends and developments covers educational topics ranging from kindergarten to the continuing education of adults. It's a great opportunity to showcase everything from school supplies and kids' clothing to college programs and computers.