

COLUMNISTS

Vatican II-type reform would benefit Islam

In the aftermath of the horrific events at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush urged Americans not to allow these attacks to become an occasion for turning against all Muslims and people of Arabic descent.

He met with Muslim leaders at the White House and paid a visit to a local mosque. At the service in the National Cathedral, during which the president spoke, a Muslim cleric was among those who led the congregation in prayer.

Subsequently, a special edition of the popular television program, "West Wing," made the point that it is just as unfair to define Islam by the beliefs and actions of the fundamentalist terrorists as it would be to identify Christianity with the Ku Klux Klan. One can only applaud such good-faith efforts to encourage tolerance and mutual respect.

Some pacifist Catholics have, at the same time, been urging their sisters and brothers in the faith to place the terrorist attacks in some broader historical perspective. We should be asking ourselves why the perpetrators harbor such hatred toward us, and then deal with those issues rather than prepare for retribution.

We did not need to be reminded that the on-going Israeli-Palestinian turmoil in the Middle East is a key factor in all this.



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

It has also been proposed that the unspeakable evil of September 11 was, in part at least, the result of enormous, deep-seated frustration and anger over the yawning economic gap between the rich and powerful West and the Muslim East.

Our Catholic critics have cited the decade-long sanctions imposed upon Iraq and the great suffering these have inflicted, especially on children. They have also pointed to U.S. support for the various repressive regimes in the region, beginning with the late shah of Iran.

They also dismiss our government's traditional claim that it wishes only to encourage democracy and freedom in the area. This is nothing more, the critics insist, than a cover for our need to preserve access to the region's vast oil reserves.

Some within the Muslim community it-

self have argued that the terrorists and their Taliban supporters in Afghanistan are not at all representative of Islam. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece, a respected Islamic scholar at Harvard compared the terrorists to an extreme faction of the IRA (Irish Republican Army), which, over the years, has wounded or killed many innocent civilians.

He pointed out that "no one explained the atrocity in terms of Roman Catholic doctrine, nor should they have. Catholic law on just war emphatically condemns such behavior."

The second sentence is unmistakably true. The first sentence, however, is perplexing in the extreme.

No one in Ireland, or anywhere else, has ever attempted to explain or justify the terrorism of the IRA "in terms of Catholic doctrine." Neither the IRA itself nor any comparable group has ever dared to suggest that what they did, they did for God, or Jesus, or the pope. Their cause has always been political, not religious.

Whatever its spiritual strengths and the peaceful intentions of the great majority of its adherents, Islam, not just its large fundamentalist constituency, is a religion that remains discernibly closer in thinking and practice to medieval Catholicism than to the world of the 21st century.

The church of the Middle Ages had its own jihad (the Crusades), its Inquisition to repress dissident thought and free speech, its ways of crushing the legitimate aspirations of women, its self-appointed and autocratic hierarchies, and its vision of nations dominated and run by clerics.

According to Pope Boniface VIII (1295-1303), the church held title, by the will of God, to both the spiritual sword and the temporal sword. The state had the temporal sword on loan, as it were, but it was always subordinate to the spiritual. The ideal state was the fully Catholic state.

It may be difficult for some younger Catholics to believe, but such claims were not consigned once and for all to the doctrinal trash heap until the Second Vatican Council, in the mid-20th century.

What made their disposal possible was modern Catholicism's institutional capacity for self-criticism and reform. Unless and until Islam develops that same capacity, with the same free rein it enjoyed at Vatican II, the great cultural and religious chasm that separates us will remain in place, along with the dangerous misunderstandings and suspicions that feed the imagination and fury of terrorism.

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

God responds to humble prayers

30th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 28): (R3) Luke 18:9-14; (R1) Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; (R2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18.

Two men went up to the Temple. They went for the same reason: to pray. But the results of their prayers were totally different because they approached prayer in different ways.

The first prayer was a Pharisee. He went to pray to get public recognition, to parade his piety, to expound his virtues. He did not go to speak to or to listen to God.

The tax collector, however, was honest with regard to his needs before God.

The tax collector knew he had fallen under the wrong power and influence. His loyalty to Rome had produced greed rather than good. He realized that he needed to put his life under a new power and a new influence. His ultimate loyalty could no longer be to Rome but to God. He probably had not been on speaking terms with God for years — but God was on speaking terms with him. Moreover, his prayer came from his heart and touched the heart of God. The tax collector could only muster a few words and beat his breast, but God heard his prayer.

The Pharisee went to the Temple not to pray but to praise himself. He talked not with God but at God. The tax collector



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

was honest: He confessed his need for God and confessed his sins.

Another great difference was that the Pharisee placed his hope in his own virtue; the tax collector placed his hope in God.

In her book *Hope for Tomorrow*, Hazel B. Goddard describes the case of Jack, a young man struggling with alcoholism, a bad marriage and a very frustrating job.

Goddard taught Jack about faith in God, and Jack was able to stop drinking. But if anything could drive Jack back to drinking it was his job. He managed a beauty shop. Sometimes Jack would spend his whole day trying to please fussy, complaining patrons. Goddard taught Jack to go into the back room and pray during his times of high tension. Jack didn't know prayers, so his prayers went something like

this: "Look, God, you know me, how I am. I don't think you can change Mrs. ... , but you'd better take away this pressure or I'm going to walk out and you know where I'll go. Work fast for me, dear Lord." His prayer worked. Jack stopped drinking, rebuilt his marriage, has two children and has learned to run his shop smoothly. All thanks to his homely prayer.

Like many who are trapped by substance abuse, Jack knew that his only hope was not his own will power, his own virtue, his own good intentions. Jack knew that his only hope was in God. The tax collector knew that, too, so he went back to his house justified. That is a lesson we all can learn; namely, our only hope is in God.

The Pharisee was so busy singing his own praises that he did not even acknowledge the real source of all that was good in his life. The tax collector, on the other hand, who stood afar off and could not even lift his eyes toward heaven, emptied his "cup," thus allowing God to pour some new, fresh, living water into it.

Are we on speaking terms with Almighty God? Do we pray? Do we pray with the humility of the tax collector or the pride of the Pharisee? God wants us to pray, not to know our needs, but that we might learn our need for him. Each of us

can pray: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, October 29**
Romans 8:12-17; Psalms 68:2, 4, 6-7AB, 20-21; Luke 13:10-17
- Tuesday, October 30**
Romans 8:18-25;
Psalms 126:1-6; Luke 13:18-21
- Wednesday, October 31**
Romans 8:26-30;
Psalms 13:4-6; Luke 13:22-30
- Thursday, November 1**
Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14;
Psalms 24:1-4AB, 5-6; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12A
- Friday, November 2**
Daniel 12:1-3; Psalms 23:1-6;
Romans 6:3-9 or 6:3-4, 8-9;
John 6:37-40
- Saturday, November 3**
Romans 11:1-2A, 11-12, 25-29;
Psalms 94:12-13A, 14-15, 17-18;
Luke 14:1, 7-11

Gregorian Chant Mass

for
ALL SAINTS DAY (Missa de Angelis)
Thursday, 1 Nov. 2001, 7:30 PM

and
ALL SOULS DAY (Requiem Mass)
Friday, 2 Nov. 2001, 7:30 PM

sung by the
Schola Feminarum (Women's Chant Group)
Colleen Liggett, conductor • Brink Bush, organist

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