

# COLUMNISTS

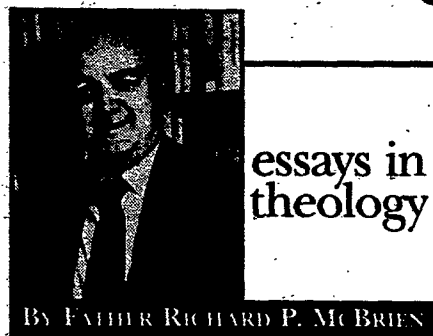
## Vatican II discouraged fundamentalism

A recent poll conducted by LeMoyne College, a Jesuit institution in Syracuse, and by Zogby International of Utica, found that U.S. Catholics look more favorably on Muslims (even after the events of Sept. 11) than on fundamentalist Protestants. This is not to say, however, that Catholics are entirely comfortable with Muslim fundamentalists.

While nearly 60 percent of American Catholics agree that "fundamentalist Christians tend to be religious fanatics" and an even 50 percent describe them as "not tolerant of others," nearly half of the Catholic population in the United States has the same reaction to Muslim fundamentalists. Forty-four percent find them to be intolerant of others, and 49 percent regard them as religious fanatics.

Nationally prominent pollster John Zogby attributes the slight edge in favor of Muslims over fundamentalist Protestants to the insistence of President Bush that the war against international terrorism is not a war against Islam and that Islam itself is a religion of peace.

Zogby also noted that the survey was conducted shortly after the Reverends Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blamed gays and lesbians and pro-choice Americans, among others, for the terrorist at-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

tacks. God, they said, was punishing the country for its tolerance of such moral perversions as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and pornography. Following a firestorm of negative reaction, Falwell apologized — to some extent at least — for his remarks. Robertson did not.

While the poll confirmed the findings of similar surveys that U.S. Catholics tend to be socially conservative (for example, 68 percent agree that abortion is morally wrong under all circumstances, and 61 percent believe the same regarding homosexual behavior), it also validated other findings that Catholics are, at the same time, tolerant of those who deviate from these moral norms.

Thus, while Catholics oppose abortion by a large majority, they do not favor making it a crime punishable by a prison

sentence. And while they regard homosexual activity as sinful, a full 83 percent say it is wrong to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

And while American Catholics give Pope John Paul II high favorability ratings (90 percent), they do not necessarily agree with his policies on such issues as obligatory celibacy for priests, women's ordination, birth control and capital punishment.

Americans should not be surprised by these statistics. Although President Bush enjoys the same high approval ratings, they do not automatically translate into support for his domestic programs.

Catholics have a healthy instinct that it is possible to have firm convictions about one's faith and one's corporate identity as a church without having to impose those convictions on others.

The Second Vatican Council, much to the chagrin of Catholicism's own brand of fundamentalists, made this point emphatically and without equivocation.

While the church believes that "the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master ... who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 10), the council also

taught that there are other Christians besides Catholics in the Body of Christ (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3), that God also uses non-Christian religions as instruments of salvation (Declaration on the Relationship between the Church and Non-Christian Religions, n. 2), that even atheists have something to teach us (Pastoral Constitution, nn. 19-21), and that, in any case, it is never morally legitimate to impose the Christian faith, directly or indirectly, on anyone else (Declaration on Religious Liberty, nn. 2-7, 9-12).

Such teachings as these run directly counter to the basic tenets of every type of religious fundamentalism, be it Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and the like.

Fundamentalists are convinced that they alone are right, and that they alone have been invested by God (or by Allah, Yahweh or Whomever) with the truth, along with a mandate to impose it on others (the "infidels").

Fundamentalists are as different from mainline, centrist Catholics as any religious group could possibly be, which is why such Catholics abhor fundamentalism of every type.

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

## Baptism is essential tie to Christ

**Baptism of the Lord (Jan. 13): (R3) Matthew 3:13-17; (R1)-Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; (R2) Acts 10:34-38.**

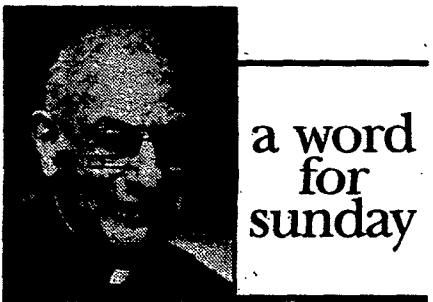
When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John was startled and unwilling to baptize him. John was convinced that Jesus did not need what he could give, but that he, John, needed what Jesus could give.

Jesus' baptism by John at first puzzled people. John's baptism was a call to repentance, to forgiveness of sins. Jesus was sinless. Yet Jesus went to John to be baptized.

First, for 30 years, Jesus had waited in Nazareth, performing house duties, working as a carpenter. He had waited to start his public life. When John emerged, Jesus knew his hour had come.

Second, Jews believed that they were the chosen people and, as such, felt assured of God's salvation and not in need of baptism. Baptism, they believed, was for non-Jew sinners. For the first time in their history, Jews were told that they too needed repentance, forgiveness of their sins. This was the moment Jesus was waiting for. When he went to be baptized, he identified himself with the people he had come to save.

After he was baptized, the heavens



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

opened. The first Adam had closed them; but Christ, the second Adam, the Lord of heaven and earth, had opened them.

The voice from the heavens uttered a sentence composed of two quotations. One from the Psalmist: "This is my beloved Son." (Ps 2:7). All Jews accepted that Psalm as a description of the Messiah, the mighty king who was to come. And the other quotation "with whom I am well pleased" was from Isaiah (2 Isaiah 42:1). This describes the Messiah as a Suffering Servant, climaxing in Isaiah 53.

Thus at his baptism, Jesus disclosed two certainties: First, he is the chosen one of God; and second, before him lay the way of the cross. At that moment he

was proclaimed King, but a King whose throne would be the cross.

Jesus did not need baptism. He had no sins to be washed away. But he knew we need baptism, and we need to know what baptism means.

First, baptism tells us that a new life is possible. That is what baptism is all about: death to sin and resurrection to a new life. Baptism also reminds us that new life is available only through Jesus Christ.

Some people think that all we have to do to change is to change our thinking. "Think positive," they say. Then our problems would be solved.

Arne Nilsen, mayor of Sund, Norway, proposed a resolution banning crankiness and requiring residents to have a positive attitude and be happy. Well, a positive attitude can be a big help in life, but it is not enough. Real change can come only through Jesus Christ.

That is why we call our baptism "Christian" baptism. Christian baptism is not merely joining a club, but entering into a relationship, with the Son of God himself.

Finally, there is no better time to make our life-changing commitment than the present time. "Now is a very acceptable

time. Now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Try to remember in the quietness of your hearts the significance of the baptism you have already received — a commitment to Jesus.

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

### Daily Readings

- Monday, January 14**  
1 Samuel 1:1-8; Psalms 116:12-19; Mark 1:14-20
- Tuesday, January 15**  
1 Samuel 1:9-20; (Ps) 1 Samuel 2:1-4-8; Mark 1:21B-28
- Wednesday, January 16**  
1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Psalms 40:2-5, 7-10; Mark 1:29-39
- Thursday, January 17**  
1 Samuel 4:1-11; Psalms 44:10-11, 14-15, 25-26; Mark 1:40-45
- Friday, January 18**  
1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22A; Psalms 89:16-19; Mark 2:1-12
- Saturday, January 19**  
1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19, 10:1A; Psalms 19:8-10, 15; Mark 2:13-17

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