

COLUMNISTS

Evangelization vs. reform uses false premise

It has become a common tactic of some Catholics on the right to argue that focusing on matters of structural reform distracts from the real work of the church, which is evangelization.

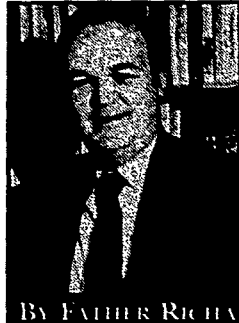
In this way they assume the high moral ground and put the reformers on the defensive. Who can deny that evangelization trumps everything else we do as church?

But by framing the argument in this way, they set up a false opposition between evangelization and church reform. The two are linked, but not opposed. It is a matter of both/and, not either/or.

Evangelization does not happen in a vacuum. It is done by specific individuals, in particular pastoral circumstances, under the supervision of certain officials.

Moreover, evangelization is not automatically effective. Apart from the workings of divine grace, its effectiveness depends upon how well its content and form are shaped and adapted to the situation of the evangelized, upon the gifts and skills of the evangelizers themselves, and upon the competence of church leaders in selecting the best people and the most promising venues for evangelization.

In other words, evangelization and church structures are mutually dependent. There can be no evangelization without structural support, and structures



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

are pointless apart from evangelization.

Whether priests are married or celibate is not important in itself, but the issue becomes important when obligatory celibacy drastically reduces the number of priests available to preach the Gospel, whether by decreasing the pool of qualified candidates for ordination or by causing thousands of already qualified and experienced priests to resign their ministry.

The evangelization party (if one can call it that) insist that nothing is more important to the mission of the church than the preaching of the Gospel. But who decides what that preaching consists of?

Would the evangelizers agree with the late Pope Paul VI that evangelization is "a message especially energetic today about liberation" (On Evangelization in the Modern World, n. 29)? Many on the evan-

gelization side of this false argument tend to dismiss that approach as encouraging a "politicization" of the Gospel.

Indeed, one implicitly blamed El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero for his own death, suggesting he brought it upon himself by his involvement with issues of social justice and human rights. The Gospel is not about politics, it was said; it is about God, Jesus, and salvation.

This begs the question. Which idea of God: the God who saves and punishes us, or the God of liberation and of justice? Which Jesus: the Jesus of pious holy cards and of the television evangelists or the Jesus who is the voice of the poor and the powerless? And which idea of salvation: salvation of the soul from the prison of corrupt flesh, or the coming to wholeness, as God intended, of body and soul?

The evangelizers say that we must preach the faith, not theology. But the faith cannot be preached except theologically. The question is not whether one uses theology for evangelization, but which theology shall be deemed suitable and which unsuitable? And who does the "deeming" and by what process?

In the final accounting, evangelization is done by actual persons. But who is qualified to evangelize and who determines their qualifications? Must they be celibate

males? Priests? Trained in seminaries? Who decides who gets admitted to those seminaries, what they will study there, who will teach them, and what spiritual program they will follow?

Does anyone seriously believe that Pius IX and John XXIII, beatified on the same day, had identical, even similar, approaches to evangelization and to the papacy itself?

Does anyone seriously believe that it will make no difference who is elected as the next pope, that Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan would provide the same kind of pastoral vision and leadership as Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani of Lima, Peru, an avowed member of Opus Dei?

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council did not accept the radically false argument that pits evangelization against church reform. It was a reformist council that placed evangelization at the center.

For Vatican II our "first and most important obligation" is "to lead a profoundly Christian life" (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, n. 36). We evangelize primarily through example.

Every experienced missionary knows that to be the case.

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

Faith is a mission to be shared

5th Sunday of the Year (February 10): (R3) Matthew 5:13-16; (R1) Isaiah 58:7-10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

In Sunday's Gospel Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world."

Who? You — you and me.

What? Salt and light.

For whom? For the earth and the world. Wow! Salt of the earth and light of the world!

Jesus is saying we don't exist just for ourselves. Our role is just like his: to be saviors of the world. Faith has been given to us not just for privilege but for mission, to be shared with others. If it is not, then the salt loses its flavor and the light is put under a bushel basket.

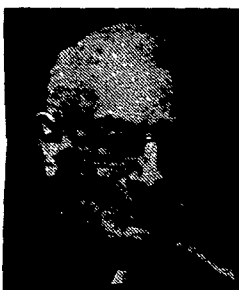
Goodness, if it is present, has got to be felt like the pinch of salt that flavors food.

Goodness, if it is present, has got to spread like the light that scatters darkness.

You cannot hide your faith anymore than you can hide the fact that you have salted food; or that you have the lights on.

Faith shows up by works: by sharing with those hungering for kindness, compassion, love; by sheltering the homeless; by satisfying the afflicted, the lonely, the shut-in — just by listening.

Salt melts snow. The mark of the devil



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

is coldness, for he is hate, and hate is coldness in human relations. Love melts the coldness, for love is unitive and outgoing.

The salt loses its flavor when we stop being concerned about others; when our prime concern becomes self to the neglect of all others.

In our Lord's day, the source of light was generally a lamp, fed by oil, and put on a lampstand.

In calling us "the light of the world," Jesus was paying us a great compliment, for he once called himself the Light of the World. To be lights, you must feed your souls constantly with the oil of prayer and the sacraments of Holy Eucharist and penance.

A movie that has been upstaging Dickens' "Christmas Carol" during the Christ-

mas season is Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life," starring Jimmy Stewart.

Stewart plays George Bailey in the small town of Bedford Falls. His father leaves him a building and loan association. George gets into financial difficulties because of his charity and gets discouraged. He becomes so depressed that he considers suicide. He goes to the town bridge intending to drown himself. Just before he does, he says a prayer. God answers his prayer immediately, as Isaiah said God would to those who help others. In answer to his prayer, God sends George's guardian angel, Clarence.

Clarence jumps into the river before George does. George reacts instinctively, jumping into the river to save Clarence.

Then Clarence shows George that his help has redeemed countless lives and has made Bedford Falls the wonderful place it now is.

And as Isaiah had said about those who help others: "Light shall rise for you in the darkness" (R1). Thus, when the people of Bedford Falls hear of George's financial plight, they rally and give him all the money he needs to meet his financial problems. When George experiences their kindness and love, he loses his depression and says, "It's a wonderful life!"

So with us. We are important and the good we do is of great consequence in the lives of others. If we are loving, servers, givers, we, too, will discover that "it's a wonderful life."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 11

1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13;

Psalms 136:6-10; Mark 6:53-56

Tuesday, February 12

1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30;

Psalms 84:3-5, 10-11; Mark 7:1-13

Wednesday, February 13

Joel 2:12-18; Psalms 51:3-6A,

12-14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2;

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday, February 14

Deuteronomy 30:15-20;

Psalms 1:1-4, 6; Luke 9:22-25

Friday, February 15

Isaiah 58:1-9A; Psalms 51:3-6A,

18-19; Matthew 9:14-15

Saturday, February 16

Isaiah 58:9B-14; Psalms 86:1-6;

Luke 5:27-32

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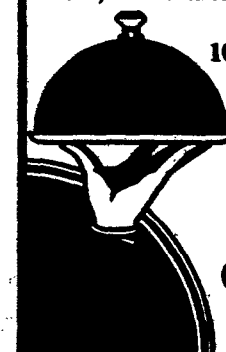
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