

COLUMNISTS

New movements not mutually supportive

Someone should write a substantial article or a small book on the new movements in the Catholic Church. These include Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, the Neo-Catechumenate, the Legionaries of Christ, and Focolare.

They share strong support of the current pope and are right-of-center on theology, pastoral life and politics. As such they are an inviting target for commentators who enjoy skewering such types.

There is a more interesting and more challenging story here than first meets the liberal eye. Although the movements are usually lumped together and taken as clear evidence of a new conservatism in the church, they do not, in fact, constitute a single, monolithic collectivity.

In one U.S. archdiocese along the east coast, the Neo-Catechumenate folks seem to be causing a considerable amount of heartburn for pastors and laity alike because of their tendency to tread a go-it-alone path when it comes to what they call "the new evangelization."

One would think that the neo-cats, as some derisively refer to them, would be delighted to work in close cooperation with an archbishop who is himself a member of one of the new movements, Opus Dei, and that he, in turn, would be enormously gratified to have Catholics



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

like them at his pastoral beck and call — so deeply committed as they profess to be to the magisterium of the church.

But apparently such is not the case. Even though both groups are Spanish in origin, one calling itself "the Way" and the other "the Work," the Neo-Catechumenals tend to be suspicious of Opus Dei because of its elitist cast. The latter actively recruits the wealthy and the powerful (people like U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and the pope's own press spokesman, Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls); the former is more blue-collar.

And Opus Dei types tend to be impatient with Catholics who fail to offer prompt, unquestioning obedience to the hierarchy, at least to bishops who, in their minds, are utterly loyal to the Holy Father and his teachings and his policies.

To be sure, the Neo-Catechumenate has enjoyed much papal favor since its founding in 1964. Pope Paul VI had something nice to say to them in a general audience in 1974, but their real patron has been the current pope. In 1990 John Paul II bestowed official recognition upon the movement, urging bishops and priests to "value and support" their work for "the new evangelization."

Apparently their ideas of ministry and their methods of evangelization do not always correspond to those approved and promoted by their pastors and bishop. And when there is a clash of ideas and approaches, the pastors and the bishop do not always win out. As a consequence, tensions develop and grow, as they recently have in at least one U.S. archdiocese.

Another example of how these intramural rivalries manifest themselves: A few years ago, as general editor of a one-volume encyclopedia of Catholicism, I assigned entries on both Opus Dei and Communion and Liberation, the two most prominent of the new movements.

One of my responsibilities was to insert cross-references at the end of many of the articles. The entry on Communion and Liberation was assigned to a member of the group, which I thought to be an ideal arrangement. Upon editing

the text of the article itself, I added a cross-reference to Opus Dei for reasons that I took to be self-evident.

When the author saw the printed version, he was highly irritated by that cross-reference, charging that the linkage was an insult to his group, Communion and Liberation.

I learned a lesson that day, nearly seven years ago. Just because two or more movements in the church enjoy the obvious favor of the pope and share roughly similar political views and similar reservations about post-conciliar Catholicism, it does not automatically follow that they like and support each other.

Thus my suggestion to probe more deeply into the internal divisions within the network of new movements, explore their underlying causes, and speculate on how they are likely to play out, especially after the plug of papal favor has been yanked out of the ecclesiastical wall-socket as a puff of white smoke wafts gently from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, announcing the election of a new pope.

An unsettling thought, no doubt, for many in these new movements.

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

Temptations resisted by prayer and sacraments

1st Sunday of Lent (February 17): (R3) Matthew 4:1-11; (R1) Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; (R2) Romans 5:12-19.

Sunday's Gospel deals with the temptations of Jesus after his baptism.

As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, a trestle bridge was built across a large canyon. The builder loaded a train to double its normal payload and placed it on the bridge for an entire day. One worker asked, "Are you trying to see if we can break this bridge?"

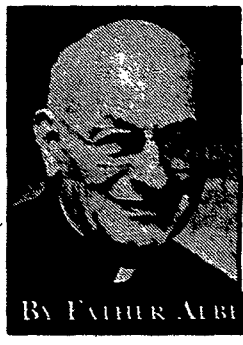
"No," replied the builder, "I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't break."

The temptations Jesus faced were not to see if he would sin, but to prove that he wouldn't; to teach us that we, too, can conquer temptation with his help.

Temptation has three components. First, there is an internal component. Do we have the will to conquer or are we weak and vacillating?

Mark Antony, one of Rome's great orators, was an intelligent person, a brave soldier and a powerful leader. But internally, morally, he was a midget. One of his friends said, "He was able to conquer the world, but unable to resist a single temptation." How tragic that such a large man would cast such a small shadow.

How different was Jesus of Nazareth!



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

He was a penniless, itinerant preacher in the eyes of Rome, yet he cast a shadow over history like none other. He had strength of character. He always did the will of his Father no matter the cost.

How strong are we internally? Do we have character? Are we able to cope, with God's help, with temptation because of what we have on the inside? Prayer and meditation will build a strong character.

Secondly, temptation is sometimes external. Jesus taught us to pray: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We are simply asking God to help us not to fall when we are tempted.

Satan used external objects to tempt Jesus. He showed him stones and urged him to turn them to bread, he showed him the temple and suggested he make

a daring leap from the top of it, he showed him the kingdoms of the world and offered them to him. Satan was offering Jesus external success, popularity and power, if he would follow the ways of the world and not the way of God.

Every day you and I are tempted, as Jesus was tempted. As he was victorious, so can we be if we have recourse to Jesus and to prayer.

Thirdly, there is an eternal component to temptation. We resist temptation best when we are committed to something so important, so lasting, of such great value that we will not allow ourselves to be dragged down to something of dubious value. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world. But he was committed to such a high calling that he could not be brought down to Satan's level.

A group of mountain hikers asked an old woodsman with an ax on his shoulder, "Where are you going?"

"I'm headed up the mountain to get some wood for repairs to my cabin," he replied.

"But why? There is wood to be found everywhere you look right here."

"Oh, no," came the quick reply. "I need the timber from the higher elevations, where the wood is hard and tough-

ened by the weather. I need to go up higher where the strong timber grows." Christ is looking for strong timber: for you and me and all who are willing to resist temptation by constancy in prayer and in receiving the sacraments.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 18

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Psalms 19:8-10, 15; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday, February 19

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalms 34:4-7, 16-19; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday, February 20

Jonah 3:1-10; Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday, February 21

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Psalms 138:1-3, 7C-8; Matthew 7:7-12

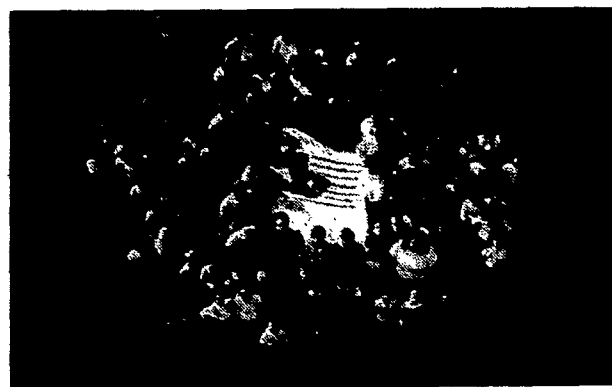
Friday, February 22

1 Peter 5:1-4; Psalms 23:1-6; Matthew 16:13-19

Saturday, February 23

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8; Matthew 5:43-48

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