

COLUMNISTS

Laity's education not reflected in diocesan press

For anyone trying to put a finger on the main causes of the current crisis in the Catholic Church, there are more than enough scapegoats to go around.

Some have blamed the counter-culturalism of the 1960s with its free and easy attitudes toward sexual behavior, especially of a homosexual kind. Others are trying to blame the Second Vatican Council for putting bad ideas in the heads of independent-minded laity and lower clergy, in the process shaking loose the divinely-ordained chain of command — from pope to bishop to priest to lay person. Still others think that the church is simply the victim of an anti-Catholic media plot.

It may not be the most important reason for the difficulty we face today, but the unhappy state of the Catholic diocesan press in this country should not be discounted as at least one negative factor.

The best educated Catholic laity in the entire history of the church are in the United States and Canada, thanks to a vibrant system of Catholic higher education, of high schools and elementary schools and of a sophisticated network of religious education programs in parishes and dioceses across North America.

With education, however, comes the ability to analyze and criticize what one reads and hears — to make judgments on



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

one's own, never taking the word of an authority figure at face value, without at least subjecting it to further examination.

One would have expected that the Catholic Church in both countries would have produced by now a diocesan press whose quality is consistent with the educationally advanced status of the church's laity. But that is clearly not the case.

A regression of the Catholic press has occurred in tandem with, probably as a result of, the transformation of the hierarchy from a moderate-to-progressive orientation represented, for example, by the late Cardinals Joseph Bernardin of Chicago and John Dearden of Detroit, the late Archbishop John May of St. Louis and the late Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio (all former presidents of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops),

to a neo-to-hardline-conservative orientation, represented, for example, by high-level appointments over the past several years in New York, Boston and Chicago.

As more moderate pastoral leaders (like Archbishops William Borders in Baltimore, Raymond Hunthausen and Thomas Murphy in Seattle, Francis Hurley in Anchorage, and Peter Gerety in Newark, and Bishops William Hughes in Covington, Francis Quinn in Sacramento, Joseph O'Keefe in Syracuse, and Bernard Flanagan and Timothy Harrington in Worcester) who favored consultation and welcomed diversity were replaced by bishops with a mandate to tighten the reins of authority and to suppress open discussion of debatable policy issues, their diocesan papers assumed the character of traditional house organs, of the sort published by labor unions and trade organizations, with a heavy emphasis on the local bishop and his activities. They seem to have room only for news stories, editorial opinions and columns which do not disturb the tranquillity of those who want to believe that all is well with the church and will ever remain so.

The most experienced, insightful Catholic editors speak, off the record, of the dismal state of their profession, as papers convert to a reduced format and a more

limited publication schedule. It is only a matter of time, they say, before even more papers close their doors or give way to a monthly, bulletin-type newsletter. Those papers that remain may do so because the bishop-publisher has the necessary resources or enjoys the prestige and personal outlet a weekly paper provides.

It is a situation not likely to improve. Last year the Catholic Press Association honored *Catholic New York* as the best weekly paper in the largest circulation class (40,000 and over). For financial reasons, the cardinal-archbishop of New York recently reduced it to a monthly publication.

There is more to the Catholic press in the United States than diocesan papers. There are some fine weekly and monthly magazines, and excellent independent papers like the *National Catholic Reporter*, all of which attract a faithful readership. But it is because they address issues that are on people's minds and are open to a broader spectrum of news and views than one usually finds in the diocesan press.

A personal note: You would not be reading this column in your own diocesan paper if that paper were also part of the problem.

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

Social morality flows from personal morality

6th Sunday of Easter (May 5): (R3) John 14:15-21; (R1) Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; (R2) 1 Peter 3:15-18.

In a pet store one day was a large cage. In it were two white doves — beating each other to a pulp — the last thing we'd expect out of two doves advertised as "Sacred Doves of Peace."

Many Christians are an embarrassment to God. They in no way resemble the spirit of Jesus. Like the doves, they often beat each other to a pulp. Unfortunately, many of these people are very visible and very vocal. They do incalculable damage to Christianity. When some people see the hostility and enmity of some Christians, they say, "Who wants to be a Christian?"

A true Christian is one who follows Jesus without embarrassing God. In the second reading of next Sunday's liturgy, St. Peter tells us the three ways we can show our faith and make it more appealing.

First, St. Peter says that we are to give an account for the hope that is within us. Christians who give scandal do not communicate hope. So often they are down on the world, down on their neighbors and down on the governing authorities. They are so often cynical, sarcastic and cruel.

It's so easy to be cynical about life. Here are a few sayings with a negative twist.



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

"Always take time to smell the roses, sooner or later you'll inhale a bee."

"Do not walk behind me, for I may not lead. Do not walk ahead of me, for I may not follow. Do not walk beside me, either, just leave me alone."

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a broken fan belt and a leaky tire."

Evil is present in the world. We know love is stronger than hate, light drives out darkness and God will still rule when the forces of death, decay and destruction have lost their ability to deface God's creation. One cannot really believe in God and be a cynic. Easter tells us that Christ is alive and one day will rule over all.

Secondly, St. Peter tells us to "speak gently and respectfully," as Jesus did.

In 1969, British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge traveled to Calcutta, India, to do an interview with Mother Teresa.

Muggeridge had to film the interview in Calcutta's Home for the Dying, which Mother Teresa and her order had established. The cameraman protested that the home was too dark for proper filming. But Mother Teresa insisted. So they gave it their best shot. Later, the crew was astonished that the film turned out so beautifully. The small room was filled with a bright, glowing light. Muggeridge believed that his light was actually the light of God's love flowing from Mother Teresa. Later, Muggeridge became a Catholic.

Mother Teresa was the soul of gentleness and reverence. Her concern for and sensitivity to others brought others to Christ.

A final thing St. Peter advised was "keep your conscience clear." Many Christians have been affected by the morality of the 1960s. Without being aware of it, they have separated personal morality from social morality. As long as they care about the poor, or fight bigotry or seek to be peace-makers in a world of strife, they really believe that it doesn't matter what they do in their personal lives.

Social morality will not be practiced

without deep personal morality. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. Peter wants us to represent Christ to the world by being positive, reverent and conscientious.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 6

Acts 16:11-15; Psalms 149:1-6A, 9B; John 15:26-16:4A

Tuesday, May 7

Acts 16:22-34; Psalms 138:1-3, 7C-8; John 16:5-11

Wednesday, May 8

Acts 17:15, 22-18:1; Psalms 148:1-2, 11-14; John 16:12-15

Thursday, May 9

Acts 1:1-11; Psalms 47:2-3, 6-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

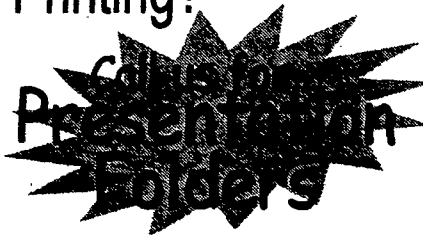
Friday, May 10

Acts 18:9-18; Psalms 47:2-7; John 16:20-23A

Saturday, May 11

Acts 18:23-28; Psalms 47:2-3, 8-10; John 16:23B-28

Looking for Quality Printing?



Through a special arrangement between Wayuga Press and the Catholic Courier Graphic's Department, you can now get quality, affordable typesetting and printing.

Give us a call for your next job!
COURIER GRAPHICS • 716-328-4340
WAYUGA PRESS • 315-754-6229

ANNUITY OWNERS READ THIS!

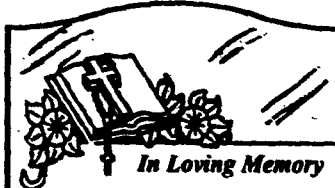
Some annuity owners lose 70% of the value of their annuity to taxes! Will this happen to you?

It's true. Annuities and IRAs can be double-taxed assets (subject to income taxes PLUS estate taxes). After estate taxes and income taxes can be as little as 30% of the value remaining.

You can learn how to help avoid the loss in the FREE educational booklet "Annuity Owner Mistakes." The booklet is free and shows how to help avoid double taxation and get more benefits from your existing annuity value.

For your free copy call

888-382-6754 (24 hours)
Asset Preservation Services • Rochester, NY



In Loving Memory
MARRION MONUMENTS

476 STATE ST.
Quality Since 1895
Large indoor display
Open M/F 10-5, Sat. 10-2
(585)546-4450

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" RM 10:13