

Vatican II reforms seen as irreversible

Peter Gerety retired in 1986 after 12 years as archbishop of Newark. Before that he had been bishop of Portland, Maine, for eight years, and before that, a priest of the Archdiocese of Hartford, Connecticut, serving for 27 years as a pastor in New Haven.

In early July Archbishop Gerety celebrated his 90th birthday with a Mass at the Newark cathedral. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that the older one gets, the more set in one's ways and more resistant to change, Archbishop Gerety at 90 displays a resilience of mind and spirit and a firm and abiding commitment to the ongoing reform and renewal of the church.

"Every once in a while in the long history of the church throughout the centuries," he said, "there comes an event that in a spectacular way makes the Holy Spirit's presence in the church visible for us. That event in my life was surely the Second Vatican Council."

Archbishop Gerety lends no support to the view that the council really changed nothing and that its meaning has been distorted by a breed of aging reformers.

On the contrary, the archbishop acknowledged the deficiencies of the pre-Vatican II church, and credited the council with correcting many of them. "The council brought an end," he said, "to the embattled, defensive Counter-Reformation period" — the same "embattled, defensive" church in which



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

many older Catholics grew up during the first half of the 20th century.

The council, he insisted, "really opened windows, let in fresh air as Blessed Pope John XXIII hoped it would. It introduced a current of reform in the church which I confidently believe was the work of the Spirit and is therefore irreversible. Obstacles may appear, voices of doom may cry alarm, but the Spirit has revealed God's purposes through the council, and those purposes will be fulfilled.

"My dream, no, my absolute conviction, is that nothing will succeed in turning back the tide of reform."

He fixed his particular attention on the liturgy. The archbishop pointed out that some Catholics "who yearn for a return to the way it was before" the council received special permission from the pope to have a Latin Mass as a source of "comfort." But he offered them words of caution: "To believe that the whole body of the church in the English-speaking world would drop English and return to the way it was before Vatican II is a hopeless dream. Such a reversal is completely impossible."

Now lay people — women as well as men — proclaim the Word of God from the sanctuary and administer Holy Communion.

"And that scene around the altar," Archbishop Gerety observed, "is really a picture of other developments in the body of the church. Women and men are taking part in parish and diocesan pastoral councils. Women and men are acting as financial and legal advisers; others are in business and administrative positions not only at the parish level but even in the sacrosanct precincts of the chancery."

Those least enthusiastic about Vatican II may agree with his analysis, but surely not with his conclusions. For them, the liturgical changes are symptomatic of what was wrong with Vatican II and with the reform movement generally, past and present.

But Archbishop Gerety knows whereof he speaks when he insists that the process is irreversible because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Lay participation in the liturgy will continue to flourish and, so, too, will lay participation in the life of the church as a whole. And "new structures will surely develop" to make this happen.

This is a grand and hopeful vision from a still vibrant and "youthful" bishop. Just like the church itself.

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

Three factors contribute to 'justification'

To the editor:

Regarding Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, column of Sept. 5: I too ... was horrified by the events of 9/11.

She stated, "after analyzing the attack ... you find ... not the slightest justification." Some may find that a tad incredible.

In her analysis were any of the following considered:

- The U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, home of some of the most sacred sites in Islam?
- U.S. support of Saudi Arabia, a feudal monarchy?
- The U.S. sponsored sanctions against the people of Iraq, causing hundreds of women and children to go without medical care?
- Fifty years of military and political support for the state of Israel, supporting one ethnic/religious group over the other? The perpetrators were the other.

Possibly a training deficiency in "Moral Theology" is the source of this lack of understanding of her analysis.

Dave Rosso
 Rochester

Wants reply on credibility

To the editor:

In the article (*Courier*, August 29) regarding recent allegations of sexual misconduct against a diocesan priest, "Father Condon declined to elaborate on why the diocese has

deemed the allegations ... credible."

This points to a very serious problem as the Church wrestles with the current scandal. How do diocesan officials determine whether or not an allegation is "credible"? What standards are used? Is there any due process here? Is there any way for the accused priest to confront his accusers?

As much as we all desire to root out those priests and diocesan employees who abuse their trust by abusing children, we also must take care to avoid another scandal by denying due process and failing to explain to the people how any allegation is deemed credible. I think that Catholic people deserve an explanation of the guiding standards by which credibility is determined.

Donald Muench
 Smallwood Drive
 Pittsford

Pope should aid animals

To the editor:

Pope John Paul II believes in the dignity of all people and has called for harmony in all human relationships. The pope has also sought to own up to past Church wrongdoing. I commend the pope for this.

However, I am saddened by the pope's apparent unwillingness to recognize that humans are not the only beings worthy of moral consideration.

In Spain and in several Latin American countries, animals are routinely abused during patron saints' celebrations. Live goats are tossed from towers; chickens are beheaded by blind-folded children; bulls — their gasoline soaked horns set afire — are chased through villages. Some of these atrocities occur on church property.

Bullfighting, a popular "sport" in Spain and Mexico, involves smearing petroleum jelly in bulls' eyes, stabbing them, and, when they have fallen but are still

Catholic Courier

©2002 Rochester Catholic Press Assn.

1136 Buffalo Road
 P.O. Box 24379
 Rochester, NY 14624

585/529-9530

800/600-3628 outside Rochester
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>
 e-mail: info@catholiccourier.com

President
 Bishop Matthew H. Clark

General Manager/Editor
 Karen M. Franz
kfranz@catholiccourier.com

Editorial Department
 Assistant Editor
 Jennifer Ficaglia
jficaglia@catholiccourier.com
 Staff Writers

Rob Cullivan
rcullivan@catholiccourier.com
 Mike Latona
mlatona@catholiccourier.com
 Staff Photographer
 Karin von Voigtlander
kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com

Editorial Assistant
 Louis Litzenberger
llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com

Business Department
 Office Manager
 Mary DiPonzio
mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com
 Administrative Assistant
 Arlene S. Gall
agall@catholiccourier.com
 Circulation Manager
 Donna Stubbings
dstubbings@catholiccourier.com

Graphics Department
 Graphics Manager
 Kim Parks
kparks@catholiccourier.com
 Graphic Artist
 Linda Jeanne Rivers
lrivers@catholiccourier.com

Advertising Department
 Display Advertising Executives
 Tracy Moses
tmoses@catholiccourier.com
 Donald P. Wilson
dwilson@catholiccourier.com