

Pope saw Vatican II as start of renewal

On October 11, the Catholic Church marks the 40th anniversary of the convening of the Second Vatican Council. The assembly's first day had only one item of business, and how historic that one item was!

On that day, Pope John XXIII gave his much-celebrated address on the state of the church and his hopes for the council.

He pointed out, to the obvious discomfort of curial officials standing or seated within yards from the papal throne, that "in the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure."

He referred to these individuals as "prophets of gloom," who "can see nothing but prevarication and ruin" and who "are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand." In their minds, the history of the church prior to the 20th century consisted of "a full triumph for the Christian idea and life."

The pope made it clear that he disagreed with such voices. "In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by [humankind's] own efforts and even beyond [our] very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable de-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

signs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the church."

While acknowledging that the church should "never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers," John XXIII insisted that it "must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate."

John XXIII signaled and endorsed a new way for the church to address and oppose doctrinal errors: not through condemnations "with the greatest severity," but by employing "the medicine of mercy."

He recognized, finally, that this council would only be the beginning, not the end, of a process of spiritual and pastoral renewal. Vatican II, he observed, "rises in the church like daybreak, a forerunner of most splendid light."

"It is now only dawn," he said. But "already at this first announcement of the rising day, how much sweetness fills our heart. Everything here breathes sanctity and arouses great joy."

It was this same spirit of joy and hope that would permeate the council's entire work.

But what was it specifically that John's council bequeathed to the church, both as gift and as abiding challenge?

It required us to think of the church hereafter as a mystery, or sacrament, as the corporate presence of Christ in the world, and not primarily as an institution or organization to which we happen to belong.

It encouraged us to see the church not as something outside of ourselves, composed of hierarchy, clergy and religious alone, but as the whole people of God of which we are all a part.

It stressed the church's perennial responsibility to be an instrument of social justice, human rights and peace — to see its social apostolate not as something merely preliminary to its real missionary work but as a constitutive element of it.

Finally, the council expanded both our earthly and eternal horizons so that we might recognize that the church also embraces non-Catholic Christians and that God's saving grace touches all people of good will.

This was John XXIII's wondrous vision, and the council's magnificent achievement.

But dawn has only now turned into day.

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

Christians suffer from Islamic law

To the editor:

In the article by Rob Cullivan in *Catholic Courier* of Sept. 26, Eric LeCompte blames U.S. policy for the creation of "cruel militants" who attacked America on September 11 and that a war against Iraq might engender hostility to the United States throughout the Middle East. Rather than blame the State sponsored terrorism of Iraq et al for the events of 9/11, he blames the victims, our nation and vicariously the dead.

On the same day the *Democrat and Chronicle* reported that "2 gunmen in Pakistan 'execute' 7 Christians." The article reported that the morning attack was "on the Institute for Peace and Justice, a Roman Catholic group trying to promote harmony among all religions." The anguished mourners outside the Institute were not Americans but clearly Pakistani. Christians of many nationalities and races have been subjected to discrimination, persecution, starvation, kidnapping and death i.e. in the Sudan, Indonesia, the Philippines, some African countries and in particular the Mideast by the same family of terrorists.

The terrorists are waging an asymmetrical war against the Western world and Christendom. Not only have Marines in Lebanon and sailors on the Cole been murdered but so have civilians in our

embassies, passengers in planes, Christian worshippers in their churches, Christians for simply being Christian and the innocents in the Twin Towers. The military strikes directly against the United States have already taken place. 9/11 was such a strike. The only question remaining is how to best defend and protect ourselves and our friends from even more devastating destruction.

Eric is free to publicly and privately speak and exercise his conscience because Americans have suffered and died for that right. However, it is a right which is denied millions of his fellow Christians in so many countries, especially where Islamic law is imposed.

Ronald J. Buttarazzi
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 Fairport

Concerned by article

To the editor:

I was surprised and dismayed to read (the Catholic News Service) article concerning the "Crossing Over" psychic show. The Bible clearly states that conducting spirits is improper: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God" Lev. 19:31.

"I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people" Lev. 20:6. See also, Lev. 20:27.

The article does recognize the fact that the Catechism specifically rejects the conducting of spirits, but then supports the viewing of the show, since this particular host claims to recite the rosary.

I do not doubt that it is possible to communicate with spirits. In fact, as stated in the above Scripture, it must be assumed that such is indeed possible. The problem and danger lies in the fact that those spirits

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