

# Crisis is a normal element of growth

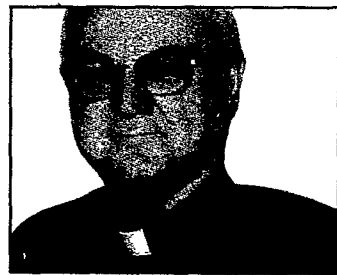
The Roman Catholic Church finds itself today in the midst of a crisis — perhaps the most serious crisis it has faced since the time of the Reformation and certainly the most serious crisis in U.S. Catholic history.

The crisis is so grave because it points a virtual dagger at the priesthood itself. Notwithstanding the central role of the laity in every aspect of the church's mission and ministries, the ordained priesthood is essential to the church's sacramental life. With the Eucharist at its center, the church's sacramental life is its greatest spiritual asset.

The word "crisis" is derived from the Greek verb *krinein*, which means "to separate" or "to decide." A crisis is, literally, a turning point — a moment or a stage at which a process of whatever kind can go in two or more directions. To be in crisis is to be at the threshold of decisive change, usually attended by risk and some measure of suspense.

The Chinese characters for "crisis" also mean an "opportunity," but one marked by danger. A crisis, therefore, presents an opportunity to move in a new and different direction, although not without risk. Such an opportunity holds the promise and the hope of ever greater possibilities, among which is that of becoming church in a new and more spiritually fruitful way.

We should be asking our-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

selves today about the challenges and opportunities that the Catholic Church is likely to face in this 21st century and Third Christian Millennium, and about the ways in which the church is likely to change in response to these challenges and opportunities.

In the meantime, however, we can affirm in faith, if not also in hope, that whatever changes the Catholic Church may undergo in this new century, certain pastoral responsibilities will continue to define the church at century's end.

One hundred years from now, the church will still be proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the promise of the reign of God's justice and peace. Precisely how it will do so, and by whom, are matters that only time will reveal.

One hundred years from now, the church will still be celebrating the Eucharist, the anticipation of the heavenly banquet to which all of us have been invited. Exactly how the Eucharist will be structured and who will preside — whether men and

women, married and unmarried alike — are also matters to be determined by history and, ultimately, by the Holy Spirit.

One hundred years from now, the church will still be renewing and reforming itself in order to project a clearer, more credible, more compelling sign of Christ's abiding presence in, and loving care for, the world.

And one hundred years from now, the church will still be employing whatever limited resources it has to minister, like the servant Christ, to all those in need. If the church remains faithful to its calling at century's end, it will still be accumulating and sharing those resources in as pastorally effective way as possible.

That future church will be the product of many crises, including the current one and others not yet encountered. During the course of this century, the church will have decided, for good or for ill, to move in this direction rather than that, and to have seized one set of opportunities rather than another.

That future church is even now in process. Like the reign of God, it is "already" but "not yet." To be sure, we are an important and indispensable part of the "already." Our hope, however, is to see and to experience something of what is "not yet."

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

## Says writer is out of step with church

To the editor:

A reply to Dr. Anthony D'Amico's letter ("Conservative finds church unwelcoming") in the March 13 issue: In your comment about the hierarchy opposing an Iraq war, you cited Bishop Clark, Sister Schoelles and Father McBrien. How come you left out Pope John Paul II? On page 5 of the same issue was a report that the Pope had sent his own representative, Cardinal Pio Laghi, to convey personally to President Bush the Pope's strong opposition to such a war. Is the Pope too liberal for you?

You'd like the church to stick to "theology and propagation of the Faith." Well, it used to be that part of theology was expounding God's moral law; it was a major responsibility of the Magisterium. Has that changed?

Take just the "recent" past: Every Pope from Leo XIII to John Paul II has made moral statements on the politics of the age. Arms race, unrestrained capitalism, capital punishment, abortion, assisted suicide, fetal experimentation, fundamental option for the poor, sexual ethics, rights of labor; they've had something to say about all these hot button political issues. Were they out of line?

Keep the Church's nose out of the politics? That sounds just like the battle cry of some radical feminists and the pro-abortion lobby. Strange company for a conservative Catholic. You

disagree with the Magisterium? Then, if you really hold to old fashioned conservative Catholicism, I think it's you, not the Magisterium, that needs to change. You're butting into the same hard challenge that liberal Catholics faced when Pope Paul VI spoke out against artificial birth control: "Me or the Magisterium?"

One last thing: you wrote, "Most people believe every word the clergy utters." I challenge you to convince either Bishop Clark or Pope John Paul II of that wild notion!

Rob Hoffmann  
Fox Run  
Rochester

## Sow love, not hatred

To the editor:

St. Francis of Assisi prayed, "Lord make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love."

Oprah Winfrey had a program dedicated to understanding the history and people of Iraq and Saddam Hussein. It was so very sad and disheartening to hear that Hussein came into this world under the hatred of his own mother. After having tried to abort him, she refused to look at him.

Where there is hatred let us sow love by our prayers for him for God's merciful redeeming love, power and light.

Dorothy Frederick  
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Rochester

## Powell does speak out on reality of war

To the editor:

A recent letter writer lamented that Colin Powell was not speaking out on the possibility of war with Iraq. Perhaps he missed Powell recently saying: "by March 17th (Hussein) will be seen to have lost his last chance to comply and I think everyone knows what that means ... it's time to force compli-

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