

Participation in Eucharist more active

On April 17 Pope John Paul II issued a new encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, on the Eucharist and its relationship to the church. Most of the attention in the media was focused on the reaffirmation of church discipline regarding, for example, the reception of Holy Communion by non-Catholics or by divorced-and-remarried Catholics.

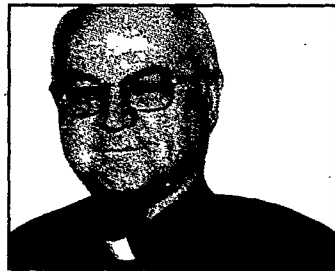
The encyclical also makes a number of positive points that any theologically educated member of the church would readily embrace.

The pope reminds us that the Eucharist is "Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food" and, as such, is "the most precious possession which the Church can have in its journey through history" (n. 9).

He acknowledges that the liturgical reforms inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council have "greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful" (n. 10).

While emphasizing throughout the encyclical the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, John Paul II points out that it is also a "sacred banquet," a communal meal. Indeed, it is "the source and the summit of the whole Christian life." (citing the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 11).

Because "Christ's passion and death, but also his resurrection," the Eu-



Father Richard McBrien

charist "makes present not only the mystery of the Savior's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 14).

The encyclical also echoes the warning of Paul (1 Cor 11:17-22, 27-34) that the Christian community cannot worthily celebrate the Eucharist "amid division and indifference towards the poor." Indeed, all who take part in the Eucharist must be "committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely 'Eucharistic'."

On the other hand, one can understand why this new encyclical has not been widely welcomed within certain constituencies to which it had been directed, namely liturgical scholars, theologians, religious educators and directors of liturgy at the parish, diocesan and national levels.

They detect too heavy an emphasis on the Real Presence and the reception of Holy Communion, notwithstanding the fact that both are essential to any truly Catholic understanding and practice of the Eucharist.

While the dogma of the

Real Presence is indeed centered on the sacramental presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine, the Vatican II pointed out that there are other presences of Christ in the Eucharist as well.

Christ first becomes present in the gathering of the community, then also in the priest-celebrant (by extension, in the other eucharistic ministers), and finally in the proclamation of the biblical Word (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 7).

The encyclical deplors the fact that "the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned" (n. 10), without acknowledging the positive aspect of this development.

It is a matter of historical record that certain types of private eucharistic devotions have flourished in times and places where liturgical participation on the part of the whole congregation had declined.

The reverse phenomenon, therefore, is more likely a sign of the church's growing appreciation for the Eucharist as "the source and the summit of the whole Christian life."

It is a development inspired by the council and cited approvingly by John Paul II himself in his new encyclical, namely, the laity's "more conscious, active and fruitful participation" in the Eucharist itself.

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

Column was speculative, fanciful spin

To the editor:

As a frequent reader of Father Richard McBrien's columns in the *Courier*, I am continually amazed by his powers of imagination. The latest example is the column which appeared in the issue of May 22, in which he spilled much ink about two letters which were supposed to have come from a bishop in South Dakota. The letters, it is said, were directed to Senator Daschle. The bishop was identified as "Robert Carlson of Sioux City, S.D."

This identification is the first tip-off that something is awry. There is no such place as "Sioux City, S.D." It doesn't exist. Neither Rand nor McNally have ever heard of it. McBrien simply dreamed it up. What an imagination! Anyway, McBrien spins this tale about two letters which came from this phantom city. The letters, he says, are "still-confidential." But that does not stop him from commenting on the content of these confidential letters. All it takes is a considerable dose of imagination.

McBrien urges us to be shocked and offended by the undisclosed content of some private letters sent from a place that doesn't exist. I must be missing something. His footwork is much too fancy for us prosaic folk.

Deacon Greg Sampson
Thomas Avenue
Irondequoit

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bishop Carlson leads the Diocese of

Sioux Falls, South Dakota; the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, is headed by Bishop Daniel N. Dinardo. We regret failing to catch the error in Father McBrien's text.

All issues not equal in faith

To the editor:

Father Richard McBrien rightly points out that the Catholic Church is not a one-issue church (*Catholic Courier*, May 22). However, all issues are not as equal as the seamless garment makes them out to be. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats abortion much more seriously than the other issues, to the point that those guilty of participating in the killing of an unborn baby can find themselves excommunicated.

Father McBrien objects to the fact that some of our bishops are reminding their pro-choice elected officials who claim to be Catholic that they cannot use their religion for political purposes. You would think that a theologian of the Catholic Church would recognize scandal when it's right before his eyes!

Mary Lou Reifsnnyder
Mountain Rise
Fairport

Questions ethic of life

To the editor:

Regarding Dr. McBrien's column of May 22: He has once again rejected church teaching and substituted his own brand of moral relativism.

On the 16th of January the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a "Doctrinal Note on Participation of Catholics in Political Life" that says, in part, politics "must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principles, which are the underpinning of life in society."

But in McBrien's world, it's fine to support a pro-abortion politician, but it's

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