

Renewed priesthood needs renewed church

The Catholic Common Ground Initiative, inspired by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago to promote unity in the church through dialogue, sponsors workshops, conferences and lectures to that end, and publishes a quarterly report on its activities.

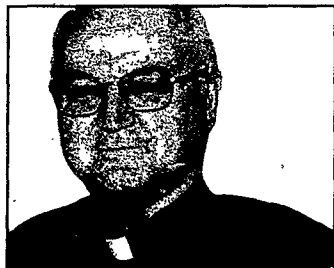
Last March CCGI held a three-day conference in San Antonio on "The Priest in the Church." Summaries of the various conferees's remarks in the June issue of Initiative Report disclosed a broad spectrum of views.

A pastor, ordained in 1958, pointed out that in the years immediately prior to the Second Vatican Council seminaries were isolated from the world, provided "almost zero" pastoral training and imposed an "authoritarian discipline."

This fact flies in the face of a theory that circulated for a time last year that the seminaries which produced some of the highest-profile predator-priests were grossly permissive institutions where faculty members winked at sexual indiscretions and seminarians were given free rein in their behavior.

Only those who never experienced seminary life in the '50s and '60s could have made a charge so wide of the mark. But it fit an ideological agenda and gained currency within a relatively tiny faction of the church.

Other participants, however, were less inclined to address the challenges facing priests today in so pastorally realistic a fashion.



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

They relied instead on a theoretical approach that priests and laity alike know does not correspond with reality at the parish level.

One lay theologian suggested that the priest is an *alter Christus* ("another Christ"). A woman religious theologian replied that the phrase had been rejected by the Vatican II in favor of one that situates the priest within the Christian community, in *persona Christi capitis* ("in the person of Christ the Head").

In fact, neither expression corresponds with the actual ministry of a pastor, or with the way in which priests who were formed in the spirit of Vatican II see themselves, or with the way that most parishioners view their pastors. Technical Latin terms of this sort contribute little or nothing to the task of identifying, analyzing and solving the problems confronting priests today.

Even further removed from the actual life and experience of priests was the insistence of another lay theologian that every priest is an icon and, when laity gaze upon him as he presides over the Eucharist, they see not

him but Christ. This thought fails to correspond to the reality it seeks to describe.

According to the report, there were other interventions that scored higher on the reality meter, but none higher, in my judgment, than those of Father Enda McDonagh, a moral theologian in Dublin, Ireland.

McDonagh pointed out that the renewal of the church itself is essential to any effective renewal of the priesthood, and that a renewal of the church means a renewal of laity as well as clergy and religious.

Unfortunately, McDonagh continued, relationships within the church — between priests and laity, priests and bishops, and laity, priests and bishops — are fractured and in need of healing.

He was supported by others, who emphasized not only the importance of healthy relationships, but also the structural dimensions of the current crisis. Attention to personal holiness is not enough.

Father McDonagh also noted that bracketing questions about married priests and the ordination of women gave rise to "some unarticulated tensions" among the participants. Those issues, he said, are in the background of every discussion about the future of the church and the priesthood, and they cannot be ignored or suppressed any longer.

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

Diocese asks for too much information

To the editor:

We received the letter from the Diocese that employees have to sign in order to keep their jobs. The statement and authorization asks all Church employees to give up a great deal of personal information that is not needed. After reading what we are asked to sign, I get the impression that the firm is brand new into the information gathering business.

They ask for your Social Security number, but if you already work for the diocese you already have this number. They want permission to check your credit record but they say that they will not check it. Why do they want permission to do this? Then they want you to sign the form stating that if they do something wrong you cannot sue them.

As far as checking an employee's name, every employee is required to submit a copy of the W-4 to New York state and if there is a problem New York state will notify you. If the Social Security number is a wrong match, the Internal Revenue Service will send you a letter automatically telling you that something is wrong with the number and the name. You already have the basic information you need.

I recommend that everyone seriously think about all the private information that you are giving away by signing this document. The

Church may need information but this is too much information and rights to give up.

Ronald P. Polacek
Wayne Business Services
Lake Avenue, Wolcott

Bishops not wishy-washy

To the editor:

In response to Mr. Dunn's criticism of Florida bishops for speaking out against the death penalty (*Courier*, Sept. 11, 2003), I would simply point out that in doing so they were in harmony with the teachings of the Pope and the Magisterium. Recognition of the legitimacy of the death penalty in the past was based on the need to protect the community, but today there are virtually no circumstances in which it is necessary to inflict death upon the guilty in order to do that. As the Pope states: "Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering the criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform" (*Evangelium Vitae* 27, 56; *Catechism* 2267). Bishops that promote and uphold Church teachings are being neither "liberal" nor "wishy-washy" — they are being faithful to their office.

Further, I find it unlikely that these bishops are indifferent to or unconcerned with the grave evil of abortion. We of the laity must realize that the culture of death is a many-headed beast, and that there are many symptoms of it that must be addressed. We cannot allow ourselves to be-

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CORRECTION

Due to a pagination error, page 14 from the Sept. 18 edition — including two letters to the editor and Father Richard McBrien's column — inadvertently reappeared in the Sept. 25 issue. We regret the error and any resulting confusion.

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