

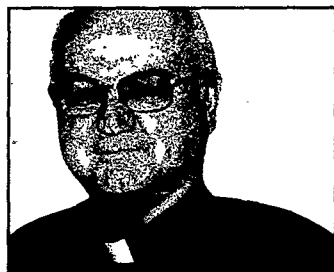
# Media asks about the pope — Part II

This is the second of two columns in which I share some of the questions (and my answers) posed by various media outlets during the past several weeks, as interest in Pope John Paul II increased even more than usual because of the beatification of Mother Teresa, the 25th anniversary of his papacy and continued concerns about his health.

A number of questions pertained to his place in history and his legacy: If you were ranking 20th-century popes in terms of impact (whether seen as positive or negative), where would you rank John Paul II? Some put him second to John XXIII. I would also, mainly because of Vatican II, but also because John XXIII introduced a whole new style of being pope that others will be measured by.

Since you said that negatives do not count, it is at least arguable that Pius XII is also above John Paul II in impact. In a sense, Pius XII prepared the way for Vatican II and major church renewal by his reforms of the liturgy, his support for a more critical approach to biblical studies and his emphasis on the church as the mystical Body of Christ.

How did John Paul II shape post-Vatican II? Positively, he reached out to non-Christians, especially the Jews, and promoted the concerns of the council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World by advancing the church's



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## Essays in Theology

teachings on social justice, human rights and peace.

Negatively, he recentralized authority in the Vatican; re-established an adversarial atmosphere in the church, especially with regard to theologians and his support of new movements such as Opus Dei and the Legionaries of Christ; and appointed men to the hierarchy, better known for their uncritical loyalty to the Holy See than for their pastoral-leadership qualities.

Did he believe in the reforms? Yes (such as the need for interfaith dialogue and cooperation) and no (such as the council's emphasis on collegiality).

Was he determined to undo the reforms? The record is mixed. On relations of the church with the outside world, he has been very progressive. But on his style of governing the church internally, he has been more restrictive than the council.

Long before the council, the attitude of many, if not most, Catholics in Italy was to applaud the pope and then do whatever their consciences dictated. Italian

Catholics look upon the pope as an icon of Catholicism, as someone who personifies it, but not as someone who necessarily dictates everything we must believe, do or not do.

The pope tends to be more popular with those who do not have to live under his rules and regulations, and whose employment does not depend on their observing those rules and regulations. American Catholics who have been more critical of the pope are those whose livelihood and ministries depend upon their remaining in line with papal rules and regulations, and those of the bishops he has appointed.

A surprising number asked about the possibility of John Paul's being declared a saint. It is possible, but there is a five-year waiting period before the process can begin, and there must be proof of at least two miracles that can be attributed to his intercession. There must also be evidence that his life was marked by heroic virtue.

Have any previous popes been canonized? Most of the popes of the first Christian millennium are saints, but only five in the second. John XXIII has been beatified, the second-to-last step to sainthood.

John Paul II may be canonized, but John XXIII will surely get there first.

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

## Film seeks repentance

To the editor:

Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion," is generating all kinds of controversy and it hasn't even been released. During EWTN interviews, director Gibson and actor Jim Caviezel explained how daily Mass, rosary devotions and frequent confession enhance filming this graphic depiction of the Savior's suffering for sin. They ardently hope this dramatic portrayal of evil, love and forgiveness will stir sincere Gospel Repentance.

Apparently, theologian Michael Novak doesn't believe this Gospel Faith is possible for everyone. While his honorable intention is to persuade people that "The Passion" is not anti-Semitic, Novak unwittingly shortchanges the Good News of Salvation. In *The Weekly Standard* on Aug. 25, Mr. Novak emphatically states, "Jews will not agree that Jesus as the Messiah took the sins of all upon himself in self-sacrifice." Does this Catholic think a faithful portrayal of Christ's crucifixion has lost its saving power, its power to stir repentance, faith and conversion?

Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (1:16).

To his credit, film director Mel Gibson shows faithfulness to the Second Vatican Council. Neither he, nor the

Gospel is anti-Semitic! By means of "The Passion," Gibson reminds us of the truth, "...Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all men so that all might attain salvation." (Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, #4)

Mel Gibson knows that "the Church must preach Jesus Christ;" the Messiah's "cross is the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace", (see Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews, I. Dialogue and #4 of Relation to Non-Christian Religions)

Dominick A. Zarcone  
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Rochester

## Best reason was omitted

To the editor:

Therese Borchard, in her "Our Turn" article from Oct. 23, cited many good reasons why cohabitation is detrimental to relationships and marriage. The most important reason she failed to mention is that premarital sex, or fornication, is a mortal sin.

Her article stated that by 1990, 60 to 80 percent of couples preparing for marriage were cohabiting. I'm sure the Catholic population isn't too far from that percentage. All one has to do is check the weekly marriage announcements in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* and notice that the majority of couples married at a Catholic church also shared the same address.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this alarming statistic is that couples aren't even aware that premarital sex is sinful.

Our society glorifies it and we hear little against it from the pulpit and many of our Faith Formation programs. I also believe we Catholics that do recognize this to be immoral, sometimes pretend it is acceptable behavior for fear we might "offend" or be judgmental of those we know that are engaging in premarital sex.

Ms. Borchard gives us

## Catholic Courier

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several reasons for premarital sex, of a better jeopardizes souls!

Christ

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To the editor

Every time McBrien's *Catholic Courier* gets McBrien's e "Pope John's position would be the final s Father was c the Holy Mot protects him tle and her lo Pope suffers Church and Paul's mission God will tell I sign. I do no God would lead in chaos with Patri