

# Conservatives try to redefine 'orthodoxy'

Although the word "orthodoxy," from a Greek word meaning "right praise" or "right belief," does not appear in the New Testament, the concern for right belief was certainly present there (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 28; 15:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3-4; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1).

In the earliest centuries of the church, orthodox faith was expressed in creeds and in conciliar and papal teachings, beliefs of the church held universally through the centuries, and the consensus of the Fathers of the Church and its theologians.

The main practical criterion of orthodoxy is the liturgy, following the ancient Latin axiom: *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the rule of prayer is the rule of belief").

For certain ultra-conservative Roman Catholics, orthodoxy is implicitly identified with the neo-scholastic theology that was dominant in Catholic catechisms and textbooks prior to the Second Vatican Council and also with the spiritual, liturgical, devotional and canonical practices of that same period.

It was a time when Catholics had no memory or experience of significant change in the church's liturgical and sacramental rites, there having been none since the 16th century. The Mass and the sacraments were celebrated in Latin, with little or no participation by the laity.

It was an era when



Father Richard McBrien

## Essays in Theology

Catholics gauged their catholicity and fidelity to the church by things they did (attending weekly Mass, reciting the rosary) and what they avoided (eating meat on Friday, divorce) — and unquestioned loyalty to the pope.

Vatican II changed all this. It taught that the church is the whole People of God, not just the hierarchy and the clergy; that the church is bigger than the Catholic Church alone and that other Christians are part of the Body of Christ as well, even if their degree of communion varies; that the liturgy and sacraments are meant to be understood and celebrated by all, laity as well as clergy; that the church is to be governed by the whole body of bishops and not by the Bishop of Rome alone; and that the church is always in need of renewal and reform.

The popes and bishops who were leading figures at Vatican II represented the Catholic center — the "orthodoxy" of the day: Popes John XXIII and Paul VI; Cardinals Suenens, Döpfner, Marty, Liéart, Frings and

Bca; Patriarch Maximus IV Sayegh and others.

They fully supported John XXIII's call for an *aggiornamento* (updating) of the church. Their views and the documents they helped the council to fashion and adopt would have marked these men today as "progressives" or, compared to many of their hierarchical successors' views, as "dissidents."

Today, in a strange twist of events, many Catholics who promote the initiatives of Vatican II are regarded as "unsafe" because they are not uncritical of particular church practices and policies, do not regard the pope as the last word on ecclesiastical topics, and believe that the laity should have more input in the governing of parishes and dioceses and the bishops more say in the governance of the universal church. These Catholics resist efforts to set this renewal on a reverse course.

The restorationists seek not only to rehabilitate the views of the council's defeated minority, but also to suppress those who stand with the council's majority. The spirit of the new "orthodoxy" is one of intolerance. Only they deserve to be heard and read, or to occupy positions of pastoral leadership, or to determine what Catholic "fidelity" means.

But that is a recipe for division, not unity.

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



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

### All can read instructions

To the editor:

With regard to recent letters concerning the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) and postures during Mass, I encourage everyone to read the GIRM themselves.

The GIRM is not a private document, available only to a select few. It is available online for all to read. The text is easy to read and comprehend. With regard to posture it clearly states "In the dioceses of the United States of America, they should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the Sanctus until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by reasons of health, lack of space, the large number of people present, or some other good reason."

By becoming familiar with the GIRM, I believe parishioners will be able to enhance their "full and active participation in the Mass," and will be better able to recognize selective implementation of the GIRM. The GIRM can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/roman-missalind.htm>. If you do not have access to the Web at home, I encourage you to go

to your local library for their helpful assistance.

Martha Malone  
Belvue Court  
Penfield

### Missed writer

To the editor:

We have missed Father McBrien's column these past two weeks (of early December).

May his absence be very short. His columns are always fresh and thought provoking. Pope John XXI-II opened the window of the Church which gave us Vatican II and much needed renewal. Father McBrien helps us understand and appreciate Vatican II with his scholarly comments.

We look forward to his return to the *Courier*.

Vincent and Eleanor  
Sementilli,  
Chemung Street  
Corning

### Likes column

To the editor:

I have missed Father McBrien's "Essays in Theology" during the last two (December) issues. Please continue his column which is educational and thought provoking. It is the first thing I read when the paper arrives.

John Finnegan  
Winding Creek Lane  
Rochester

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Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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