

"Three Strengths of Contemporary Catholicism"
 Week of October 24, 2011
 ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY
 By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

Given all the negative and disheartening news that we have been hearing about the Catholic Church in recent years, it's good to be reminded of some of the positive things about Catholicism, in addition to its sacramental life and (sometimes) vibrant parish life.

So writes my colleague and friend, Professor Brad Malkovsky, one of the best and most popular teachers in Notre Dame's Theology department. He reports that his undergraduate students have responded "quite well" to what he calls "Three Strengths of Contemporary Catholicism."

The first strength is Catholicism's openness to other religions, especially after Vatican II. It must be noted that Prof. Malkovsky specializes in Comparative Theology, and is an expert in Hinduism, having spent a good part of his graduate studies in India.

The Catholic Church, he says, has led the way here and has set an example of collaboration and sharing with other religions that is truly prophetic.

Because the short document spent so much space (its last three pages) on Judaism and anti-Semitism, Jews have rightly made a lot of the council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, better known perhaps by its Latin title *Nostra Aetate* ("In our times").

The late Cardinal-Archbishop of Vienna, Franz König, referred to *Nostra Aetate* as "one of the most, if not *the* most, important" of all of the council's declarations ("It must be the Holy Spirit," *The Tablet*, December 21/28, 2002, p. 6).

The document underlines the point that the Catholic Church "rejects nothing of what is true and holy" in other religions and stresses the importance of dialogue with them.

According to Cardinal König, "This briefest of declarations owes its existence to three people without whose determination, dedication and patience it would never have come about."

They were Pope John XXIII, who was determined to put an end to accusations that the Catholic Church is anti-Semitic; Cardinal Augustin Bea, one of the major figures at Vatican II who was asked by the pope shortly after John XXIII's election to consider how the Jewish question could be incorporated into the council; and Msgr. John Österreicher, a native Austrian and a convert from Judaism who had fled from Austria to the United States before the Second World War.

In 1964 Pope Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians and in 1988 Pope John Paul II gave it its present title, namely, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The second strength, according to Prof. Malkovsky, is the Catholic Church's openness to scientific research. Instead of simply dismissing every finding of the scientific community as unbiblical, there is a greater willingness on the part of the Catholic Church today to ask, "What is the possible theological significance of the data yielded by the new research?"

Evolution is now generally accepted, and has been since the days of Pope Pius XII (1939-58). Catholics, except those who are more influenced by evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism than by the teachings of the Catholic Church, are not part of the evolution-versus-creationism debate. That issue is settled as far as the Catholic Church is concerned.

The Catholic Church teaches that God is the Creator of the universe, but *how* God accomplished creation is compatible with evolution (see the many references in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* under "Creation").

However, Prof. Malkovsky reports that most of his students were unaware of the Church's teaching. I assume that many of his students think that evolution is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

Prof. Malkovsky also reports that *Wikipedia* has a good article on this issue, entitled “Catholic Church and Science.” I might add that the one-volume *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, which I edited, has an excellent entry on “evolution” by John Haught (pp. 497-99) and another excellent entry on “creation” by Sister Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J. (pp. 375-76).

The third strength, according to Prof. Malkovsky, is that Catholic social teaching is the most developed among the world’s religions. The Catholic promotion of human rights and justice in all spheres of life—social, economic, and political—is unique among all religions and is also too little known among Prof. Malkovsky’s students.

Most of his students have never heard of liberation theology either, or the “preferential option for the poor,” which Pope John Paul II endorsed in his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (“The hundredth year” [after Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Nnovarum*]), n. 11.

A very good link on the main themes, documents, and issues of Catholic social teaching, according to Prof. Malkovsky, can be found at www.osjspm.org/catholic_social_teaching.aspx.

I would also recommend my own article, “An Ecclesiological Analysis of Catholic Social Teachings,” in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1993, pp. 147-77.

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"St. Charles Borromeo"
Week of October 31, 2011
ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY
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This Friday is the feast of Charles Borromeo, one of the most important bishops in the entire history of the Church, one of the outstanding figures in the Catholic Reformation of the 16th century, and patron saint of bishops, catechists, and seminarians.

Pope John XXIII had a special devotion to Charles Borromeo. The newly elected pope chose Borromeo's feast day for his own coronation in 1958 (they were still crowning popes in those days, until the election of John Paul I in 1978) even though the feast day occurred on a Wednesday. Traditionally, papal coronations were held on Sunday.

Thirty-four years earlier, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli had been consecrated a bishop (today we would say "ordained" a bishop) in the church of San Carlo alla Corso ("St. Charles on the Corso") in Rome, where Charles Borromeo's heart is preserved for veneration.

Father Roncalli had spent much time at the Ambrosian Library in Milan researching the life of Charles Borromeo, especially his pastoral visitations to Roncalli's home diocese of Bergamo. It was also at the Ambrosian Library where Roncalli came to the attention of its librarian, Achille Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI.

Borromeo had been born of an aristocratic and wealthy family. His uncle, Cardinal Gian Angelo de' Medici (no relation to the famous Medicis of Florence), became Pope Pius IV in 1559 and the following year heaped honors and responsibilities upon his nephew, including the administration of the diocese of Milan, then under Spanish rule, and the cardinal's hat.

We should keep in mind that Borromeo wasn't even a priest at this time. It was a common practice to confer the cardinal's hat on one's nephew (thus, the term "nepotism," from the Italian word for nephew, *nipote*) and even to hand over the administration of a diocese to a layman.

Borromeo also served as the new pope's secretary of state (another custom), which required him to take up residency in Rome and to delegate the duties he had in Milan to others.

Charles strongly supported his uncle's decision to reopen the Council of Trent in 1562 (it had been suspended since 1552) and was himself an active participant at the council, drafting its Catechism and contributing to the reform of liturgical books and church music.

Borromeo was deeply affected by the death of his older brother that same year, and was determined to live a holier life. He was ordained a priest the following year and two months later was consecrated a bishop. He was only 25!

As papal legate to all of Italy, he convened a provincial council at Milan, which promulgated the reforms of Trent. After his uncle died in 1565, he obtained from his uncle's successor, Pius V, whom he had strongly supported for election to the papacy, permission to reside in his diocese. He became the first resident archbishop of Milan in 80 years.

Borromeo's pledge to live a holier life after his brother's death was fulfilled in his adopting a simple standard of living. He gave away much of his substantial revenue to the poor.

As archbishop of Milan he held councils and synods, made regular pastoral visits to his parishes, reorganized the diocesan administrative structure, established seminaries, enforced standards of morality for his clergy, and founded a confraternity to teach Christian doctrine to children.

Indeed, his reforms were so far-reaching that some members of the Humiliati, a lay movement that was originally founded to serve the poor, but which had grown rich and lax itself, hired someone to assassinate the archbishop in 1569. Charles was slightly wounded, and the group was later suppressed.

The following year and again in 1576 Borromeo organized and took a personal role in the

feeding of thousands during famines and nursing many others during a plague.

When in 1578 even his cathedral canons balked at some of his reforms, he founded a society of diocesan priests, the Oblates of St. Ambrose (a famous predecessor in Milan), to carry out his wishes.

However, Borromeo's influence continued at the highest levels of the Church. When Gregory XIII was elected to succeed Pius V in 1572, he, like Borromeo, was determined to promote the decrees of the Council of Trent and Catholic reform generally.

In 1583 Gregory appointed him apostolic visitor to Switzerland, where Borromeo had to confront witchcraft and sorcery as well as Calvinism and Zwingliism. This position and his ongoing efforts on behalf of the renewal and reform of the Church in Milan and in the Church universal eventually wore him down.

Borromeo died in Milan on November 3, 1584. He was only 46. A cult developed immediately, and he was canonized in 1610.

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