

"The Column at 45"  
 Week of July 4, 2011  
 ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY  
 By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

This Friday "Essays in Theology" will mark its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The column began on July 8, 1966, seven months after the adjournment of the Second Vatican Council.

Most of the commentary which this column has provided over the years has been designed to assist Catholics to appreciate the significance of the council and to apply its teachings to the life of the Church in their parishes, dioceses, and nations, and indeed to the universal Church itself.

The column began quite unintentionally. After returning from two years of doctoral studies in Rome, I wrote a three-part series on the task of theology today with the hope of having it published in my archdiocesan paper, *The Catholic Transcript*.

When I submitted the articles to the editor, Msgr. John S. Kennedy, he suggested that I do a weekly column.

And so these essays began to be published in early July, 1966, and have been published ever since. The only time the column had to be suspended, for health reasons, was for three months last fall and into January of this year.

My home archdiocese was, and still is, Hartford, Connecticut. Msgr. Kennedy retired as editor of *The Catholic Transcript* in 1981, after having served as rector of St. Joseph Cathedral in Hartford from 1959 to 1971. He died at age 91 in October, 2000.

I remain indebted to Msgr. Kennedy for his extraordinary example as a priest and a writer, and for his generous and unstinting support and encouragement over so many years.

The very next week Msgr. Frank Lally called with an invitation to publish the essays in *The Boston Pilot*, the archdiocesan paper of Boston. I was teaching at the time at Pope John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, a suburb of Boston.

Cardinal Richard Cushing, at the time the archbishop of Boston, rendered his enthusiastic support and patronage to the column. "Write about anything you want," he said, "but don't write about money!" As one of the great episcopal fund-raisers, he regarded that topic as his own special preserve.

After Cardinal Cushing died in 1970 and was succeeded by Humberto Medeiros, the column appeared only intermittently in *The Boston Pilot* and then disappeared completely.

The column was "banned in Boston" long before it was banned in other dioceses around the United States as more liberal-to-moderate bishops like Cardinal Cushing were replaced by more conservative bishops like Cardinal Medeiros.

The first column called attention to the "wide gap between the theological advances of [the] council and the theological understanding of many Catholic people—clergy included."

The same could be said today, but I would make it even clearer now that the word "clergy" also includes bishops, almost none of whom were present at Vatican II and therefore were not spiritually and pastorally transformed by the council, as Cardinal John Dearden, archbishop of Detroit, and so many other bishops were at the time.

I have tried over these past 45 years to remain faithful to the column's original intention and purpose, which was to bring the fruits of the council to as wide an audience as possible.

However, as Vatican II bishops left the scene through death or retirement, and the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Jean Jadot, who had been appointed by Pope Paul VI, was sacked by the newly elected Pope John Paul II, the composition of the U.S. hierarchy gradually changed and so, too, did episcopal support for this weekly column.

Twenty years ago I was given a Certificate of Appreciation that was jointly conferred by *The Catholic Transcript* and the Catholic Press Association at its convention that year in Tempe, Arizona.

The citation read: "Through his insightful column, *Essays in Theology*, Father McBrien has chronicled the journey of the Church since Vatican II with extraordinary clarity. He has provided provocative insights to the challenges facing the faithful, making theology (faith in search of understanding) accessible to the people of God and bringing it home to the readers of the Catholic press."

In my formal response to the honor bestowed upon me two decades ago, I noted that the writing of the column was, and still is, for me a form of ministry to Catholics who want and deserve a more serious and critical interpretation of their faith and of its public implications.

That purpose, however, has led the column inevitably into the realm of controversy, which often creates anxiety in the minds of the Church's gate-keepers.

Many of those gate-keepers do not like controversy, especially when questions are raised about the quality of their own leadership.

This essay is provided by the Faithful of Southern Illinois (FOSIL). Please share it with a friend. We welcome your comments and contributions. Let us know if you wish to be added to our mailing list. Our new website that includes these essays and Roger Karban's commentaries on the Sunday Scripture readings is [www.fosilonline.com](http://www.fosilonline.com). **Faithful of Southern Illinois, P. O. Box 31, Belleville, IL 62222**

The Center of Concern"  
Week of July 11, 2011  
ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY  
By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

Only my close boyhood friends knew this, until now, but I was the playing manager of a baseball team in the Jaycee-Courant League in Hartford, Connecticut, many summers ago. "Jaycee" was short for "Junior Chamber of Commerce," and "Courant" referred to *The Hartford Courant*, the oldest continuing daily newspaper in the United States.

We were originally called "The Terrors," but I changed the name in the second year when our sponsor, Donald Williams, a young insurance executive, gave us uniforms.

Previously, we wore the inscribed tee-shirts, with the name of the team and the sponsor (Fred H. Williams Insurance) that were distributed to each team at the beginning of the season.

I thought "Terrors" was inappropriate, and changed it to "Eagles." Also, we lost most of our games that first year. We didn't frighten anybody.

Our proudest achievement was that we didn't forfeit any of our games. The team always showed up. I had seen to that by phoning the players before each game.

Don Williams wasn't happy about the name-change (he had a sentimental attachment to the original name), but it was a *fait accompli*.

This is a long, roundabout way of explaining why this week's column is about an independent faith-based organization with ties to the Catholic Church, The Center of Concern.

My star pitcher, Ken Melley, is now treasurer for The Center of Concern and he asked me to consider doing a column about the organization sometime.

Founded some forty years ago with the direct assistance of the late Jesuit priest, William Callahan, it has continued its efforts on behalf of social transformation, especially at the international level.

Over these four decades The Center of Concern has been a prophetic voice pointing to the root causes of hunger, economic and social injustice, and human rights violations, while working to transform them.

Its key projects include Education for Justice, the Global Women's Project, the Rethinking Bretton Woods Project, and the Ecology and Development Project.

The Education for Justice Project reaches out to educators, parishes, and other faith-communities to provide them with the resources of Catholic social teaching on a wide range of social and economic issues.

The Global Women's Project analyzes the effects of political, economic, and social policies on women, men, families and other communities in order to advocate more just policies.

The Rethinking Bretton Woods Project works with governmental and non-governmental leaders, policy-makers, academics, grassroot activists, and the general public to reform international financial institutions.

And Ecology and Development Project analyzes the root causes of the ecological crisis, underscoring the social justice ramifications.

Although Father Bill Callahan is not mentioned in any of the literature that I have seen, he did have an important role in the Center's founding some forty years ago.

Bill Callahan died at age 78, from the complications of Parkinson's disease, almost exactly a year ago. A Jesuit until 1991 when the Society expelled him, mainly for his strong advocacy of the ordination of women to the priesthood—a much milder stance got Bishop William Morris sacked recently in Australia.

He was also controversial for his support of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and for his initiating a ministry for gay Catholics. "It is not clear to this day," the obituary in *The National Catholic Reporter* observed, "what specific issue(s) motivated his final dismissal from the New England Jesuits."

Father Callahan was a self-described "impossible dreamer," which is why one of the several organizations he helped to found was called the Quixote Center.

According to the obituary in *The New York Times*, Bill Callahan aggravated church officials during the U.S. tour of Pope John Paul II in 1979 by urging priests to refuse to help the pope distribute Holy Communion so that more lay and religious women would have to be enlisted.

When the same pope insisted that ordination was not a human rights issue, Callahan retorted, "Perhaps this is not a human rights issue because women are not human or they do not have rights."

He also founded in 1975 Priests for Equality to work for the ordination of women, and the Quixote Center the following year, along with Dolly Pomerleau, whom he eventually married days before he died.

Such are the origins of The Center of Concern. Its Web site is: <http://coc.org>

This essay is provided by the Faithful of Southern Illinois (FOSIL). Please share it with a friend. We welcome your comments and contributions. Let us know if you wish to be added to our mailing list. Our new website that includes these essays and Roger Karban's commentaries on the Sunday Scripture readings is

[www.fosilonline.com](http://www.fosilonline.com). Faithful of Southern Illinois, P. O. Box 31, Belleville, IL 62222