NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Cardinal Mahony at Notre Dame

Richard McBrien | Oct. 12, 2009 Essays in Theology

Cardinal Roger Mahony, archbishop of Los Angeles, spoke recently at the University of Notre Dame on the topic, ?Fostering the Baptismal Priesthood in the Year for Priests.?

He departed from his prepared text at the outset, referring to Notre Dame as ?the premier Catholic university? in America. His standing-room-only audience gratefully applauded.

The cardinal?s gracious gesture came relatively soon after some 80 fellow bishops -- a minority, to be sure, but a large one -- had publicly criticized the university for inviting the President of the United States to deliver this past May?s Commencement address and to receive an honorary degree.

Indeed, Cardinal Mahony?s very appearance at Notre Dame served as a message, not only to the university but to the Catholic church at large, that he and the majority of U. S. bishops did not agree with the criticisms mounted by that large minority of bishops.

In doing so, Cardinal Mahony took a more indirect approach than had been taken a month earlier by Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, in an interview with Tom Roberts, editor at large of the *National Catholic Reporter* (?Bishop decries ?combative tactics? of a minority of U. S. Bishops [1],? 8/12/09).

Archbishop Sheehan pointed out that he had told his fellow bishops at their June meeting that more can be accomplished through collaboration and seeking common ground than through confrontation?something he had learned from the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin.

He cited his own experience in discussions with New Mexico?s Governor Bill Richardson. In part because of these discussions, the Governor reversed his long-standing support for the death penalty. ?We need to be building bridges, not burning them,? the archbishop insisted.

Asked if there were any other bishops who agreed with him, Archbishop Sheehan replied, ?Of course, the majority.?

Indeed, there has been a persistent rumor that the papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, privately chastised the bishops for the actions of some, lest the Catholic church in America be regarded as politically partisan.

There is a stark contrast between the behavior of the minority of U.S. bishops with the posture adopted by the Pope and the Vatican generally. President Obama was received cordially by Benedict XVI in early July, less than two months after the Notre Dame graduation.

In the same month the Pope made the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, an honorary canon of St. John Lateran basilica, even though Mr. Sarkozy is pro-abortion rights, pro-gay marriage, and married invalidly to an actress.

Suffice it to say, Cardinal Mahony gave an excellent presentation at Notre Dame that emphasized the sacrament of Baptism that binds everyone in the Church -- laity, religious, and clergy alike -- as the basis of our common priesthood. One hopes that the complete text will be published soon.

For those who would like to probe the cardinal?s thinking on the subject more deeply, I would strongly recommend his pastoral letter on ministry, ?As I Have Done for You,? written in collaboration with his priests and lay ministers and published in *Origins* nine years ago (5/4/00).

The letter insisted, as did the cardinal?s remarks at Notre Dame, that an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers is not a ?stopgap measure.? Even if there were once again an abundance of vocations to the ordained priesthood, ?there would still remain the need for cultivating, developing and sustaining the full flourishing of ministries that we have witnessed in the church since the Second Vatican Council.?

Unfortunately, the cardinal pointed out, it has taken the grave shortage of priests to awaken the church to an appreciation of the great variety and value of its lay ministers.

?Both ordained and baptismal priesthoods share in this one priesthood [of Christ]. ... What emerges from the Second Vatican Council is a clear theology of the laity rooted in an understanding of the church as the people of God, in the universal call to holiness and in an appreciation of the diversity of the nature of the church both hierarchical and charismatic.?

Following the lead given by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (Love in truth), and connecting its concerns with this Year for Priests, Cardinal Mahony noted in his Notre Dame address that ?the ordained priest best serves his people by promoting their royal priesthood. ...?

The priest is not to focus only on his own spiritual life or the uniqueness of his ministry, ?but on how ... he might teach and guide, assist and encourage his parishioners. ...?

Pastorally important words from an important pastoral leader.

© 2009 Richard P. McBrien. All rights reserved. Fr. McBrien is the Crowley-O?Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/28/2017 - 01:46*): https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/cardinal-mahony-notre-dame

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/14575