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Author interview: Fr. Richard McBrien

by Thomas C. Fox

David Gentry-Akin, associate professor of theology at St. Mary's College of California, writing in the Oct. 3 issue of *NCR*, called Fr. Richard McBrien's new book, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*, "breathtaking in its scope and yet manageable in its presentation."

"The book," published by HarperOne, the religious books division of HarperCollins, he said, "is not strictly a history of the church, though of course a great deal of history is to be found between its covers. Rather, it's a focused study of ecclesiology, literally, the study of the church."

McBrien is a priest of the archdiocese of Hartford, Conn. He is the author of a number of other books, including his best-selling *Catholicism*, *Lives of the Popes*, and *Lives of the Saints*. He is general editor of the one-volume HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism.

McBrien is past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and winner of its annual John Courtney Murray Award for "distinguished achievement in Theology."

I spoke with him recently about his book. The interview is divided into four parts.

Episode One

The first part deals with his reasons for writing the book and what he hopes the book will accomplish. He explains why he dedicated the book to the late Cardinal Yves Congar, a French Dominican theologian. He speaks about "the watershed" pontificate of Gregory VII at the beginning of the Second Christian millennium and how the Catholic church became a "more papal" church during that pontificate.

Read a transcript of Part One.

Episode Two

The second part deals with another watershed moment in church history, the Second Vatican Council.

McBrien explains why the council plays a key role in his book. He talks about those trying to downgrade the council's significance and the pastoral challenges being presented to the church today. **Read a transcript of Part Two.**

Episode Three

The third part deals with women doing theology in the church today. He calls this "the most significant development in Catholicism" in the past three decades. He talks about the development of Latino and Latina theologies and the emergence of lay groups, left and right, in the life of the modern church.

Read a transcript of Part Three.

Episode Four

The fourth part deals with the current pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI and McBrien's assessment of the current pontificate. He also talks about where he finds hope in the church today. **Read a transcript of Part Four.**

(Tom Fox is NCR editor.)

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