



KNOW YOUR FAITH

Faith is not only received but shared. It grows in the quiet talk of love.

Solving the Problem of Factions in the Church

By FR. WALTER M. ABBOTT, SJ.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians shows the apostle handling a number of moral problems which had arisen among his converts in the big commercial center of Greece.

The letter, probably written in 57 A.D., shows how a bishop handled such problems a quarter of a century after the founding of the Church.

It has been well said that in this kind of letter Paul does not present his normal kind of preaching and teaching, the kind of thing he usually said when he gave instruction in the faith. That kind of thing would

have been doctrinal. It would have been his proclamation of the gospel, the good news about Jesus and the explanation of God's wonderful works through out history leading up to Jesus.

If something in his proclamation of the gospel were misunderstood, then we would get something about it in a letter. At the end of this first letter to the Corinthians we have exactly such a matter, chapter 15 on Christ's Resurrection and the resurrection of all the dead, which we shall study in the last of our discussions on this epistle.

In the 14 chapters that make up the bulk of this letter, however, Paul ranges over such

problems as factions in the Church, disagreements on sexual activity, Christians taking other Christians to court, marriage, virginity, remarriage of widows, the eating of meat from pagan temples, the dress of women and the question of what we would call today the liberation of women, abuses in the celebration of the Eucharist, charisms (gifts of the spirit) such as that of healing (which he mentions in this letter only in passing) and speaking with strange sounds (to which he gives a great deal of attention in this letter).

Except for that item about food from pagan sacrifices, it sounds like quite a modern list

of problems. The first item, the problem about unity and factions in the Church, takes up the first four chapters of the letter. If you read 1:1-9 and 2:10-16 together, I think you will agree that he approaches moral problems with the attitude of running them straight up to God, to the Trinity itself.

It is to the Christians' union with Christ that Paul appeals when he handles the problem that some in Corinth were saying they followed Paul, others Apollos (the gifted preacher who, as we shall see, was with Paul when he wrote this letter). Still others said they followed Peter. Perhaps they were a group that didn't want to regard Paul as on a level with the other apostles. Those who were saying "I am with Christ" may have been a middle group claiming to stand on the gospel itself as distinct from anything anyone may have said about it.

It is indeed Christ, Paul says, to whom all should look, for he is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:24). Paul

stresses that "God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom—by him we are put right with God, we become God's own people, and are set free" (1:30).

Paul here is saying basically what he had already written in the two letters to the Thesalonians, that every Christian has a duty to be holy, to lead a life which develops in the Lord and which should be worthy of its origin and end, namely, God. He seems to be saying that if they will just meditate and pray on the fact of their union with Christ they will end the business of factions since they will see that they are "God's field" in which Paul, Apollos and others are at work, and they are "God's building" with Jesus Christ as "the one and only foundation". They are also "God's temple" — "God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple".

Paul's attitude is that we are a new creation living in Christ as members of his body. As we shall see, this will settle many things.

Let the Poetry Loose

By FR. CARL J. PFEIFER, SJ

Life is not so much a problem, or series of problems, to be solved as a mystery to be entered into with reverence. Most of us want to have definitive answers to life's questions, with clear and precise definitions, for the important aspects of human living. We are reasonable creatures and find a certain security in being able to encompass life's moments with our minds much as we become secure when we can firmly lock something in a box. Accurate definition provides control. Men can control the powers of nature and the forces of psychological and social life only in so far as these forces can be named or defined.

But, man is also a poet, an artist, a lover. Most people recognize that there are dimensions of life that are mysterious and beyond the full grasp of intellectual definition. No one can fully define love as a scientist may be able to define hydrogen. The relationship between any two people has depths and nuances that escape clear precision.

A dimension of mystery poet, artist and lover in all of us cautions us against placing the rich fluidity of man's vital experiences in overly neat categories or mental boxes.

There is in all of us a healthy tension between the desire for such full knowledge that yields control over reality, including people, and the reverence and surprise that holds us back from wanting to clutch at and dissect the unfolding mystery of our experience.

This very human tension is found in our attempts to explain our experience of God and his gracious involvement in our world. We need to put into words what we know, while we hesitate because the best chosen words can still betray us. This tension is recognized in the Scriptures in God's unwillingness to reveal to man his

name, and the Hebrew's profound reluctance to even utter God's name.

It explains the great variety of attempts found in the Bible to describe God, and the utter absence of any clearcut definitions. For the prophets, the psalm-singers, and the wise sages God is "Rock," "Wind," or "Breath." He is "Shepherd," "King," "Savior," "Father," "Mother." One thing is clear: man could never name God in the sense of fully grasping who he is. The truly wise man concludes his attempts to describe God in this way: "We could say much more and still fall short; to put it concisely, 'He is all.'" (Sir 43:27).

Every attempt to speak of God and His involvement in human affairs must fall short. Yet every age experiences the need to express its experience of life's mystery, its knowledge of God in relationship with man. There is ever the need for establishing orthodox limits to man's expressions about God. With the need is the ever present danger of stifling the exploration of the mysterious reality of God's activity which can never be fully expressed in human language. There is inevitably the possibility, indeed the necessity, of development and growth in man's efforts to express authentically what he comes to know of His God.

The Church, being made up of men and women, existing in given cultures, speaking in time-conditioned language, will normally give evidence of growth in its doctrinal pronouncements.

Without going into the vast reaches of the Church's doctrinal definitions over the past two millennia we can reflect on a clear example of doctrinal development within the life-span of many Catholic adults. The example is not one of mere speculation by theologians, but is from the official teachings of the Church. In Vatican Council I, before the turn of the century, the Bishops in Council described the Church in terms that fit the cultural situation of the times. The Church was spoken of as a "perfect society," similar to but superior to all other societies. This description shed considerable light on the nature of the Catholic Church, its relation to Christ its founder, its hierarchical structure, the place of the Pope, and the necessity of belonging to this society in order to be saved.

Mentioned, but not given as much stress, was the biblical notion of the Church as the "Mystical Body of Christ."

Gradually during the early decades of this century the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ seemed to more fully express the reality of the Church.

Now we find in Vatican Council II a further development. Without negating previous teaching about the Church, the Council focuses on the Church as the "People of God."

The new insight, drawn from the Old Testament, focuses our attention on the fact that the Church is made up of human beings, weak, fallible, always needing reform, entering into a pilgrimage with the rest of men in their efforts to improve the human condition and create a better world for human development.

Each of these definitions of the Church brings out important aspects of our growing understanding of the mystery of the Church.

God, Christ, Church, Sacrament, Grace, Sin, can never be captured in any one formulation.

Life, touched by God's graciousness, is a mystery that words betray unless spoken with careful reverence and poetic surprise. There can never be one orthodox catechism for all time or for every culture.

Q. and A.

In recent weeks the *Courier-Journal* has received inquiries on changes in Roman Catholic law on burials and funeral practices. The following is a response to some of the questions frequently asked and is made in terms of ecclesiastical law.

The author of this article has had two years of formal training in the reading of canon law. The material researched for this writing was the actual text of the law and reputable commentary.

By JOHN DASH

What about cremation?

For many years it was a forbidden practice in the Church. The reason was that a number of philosophies and societies sprang up in recent centuries which held the human body to be of negligible worth and promoted cremation as a means of contradicting Catholic teaching on the sanctity of the body and belief in resurrection.

In 1963, however, this law was changed. Cremation is now regarded as an acceptable way to dispose of the deceased, even though most Church lawyers prefer burial.

The ecumenical movement is evident in the question whether a non-Catholic spouse can be buried in a Catholic cemetery along side his Catholic partner. Yes. Roman Catholic rites, in some cases, may even be celebrated.

Can a Catholic be buried in a private memorial garden rather than in a Catholic cemetery?

The law prefers use of Catholic cemeteries. One may, however, be buried in a memorial garden provided the plot is blessed. This can be done by the priest at the graveside.

Laymen may choose both the church in which their funeral is to be celebrated and the place of their burial.

There are several items which make celebration of funeral rites and Catholic burial illegal in certain cases.

Some of the best known are suicide; being excommunicated; dying in a duel, and being a notorious apostate from the Christian faith.

Contemporary understanding of suicide, as an act of a severely disturbed person, mitigates the first and allows for Catholic burial.

Denying Catholic rites is considered by canon lawyers to be a penalty for crimes against the Church and society. Commentators on the law hasten to add that any sign of repentance displayed by the public sinner on his deathbed should be sufficient grounds to remove this penalty.