

A Word for Sunday

With Father Albert Shamon



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48; (R1) Numbers 11:25-29; (R2) James 5:1-6.

Perhaps two of the strongest denunciations in Scripture of intolerance are in next Sunday's first reading and the gospel.

Moses quashes the intolerance of Joshua. And Jesus rebukes the intolerance of the son of thunder, John, and in so doing makes a statement that can undergird all ecumenism: "Anyone who is not against us is with us." Vatican II echoed this sentiment in its significant Decree on Ecumenism, in a passage that read, "Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interests of the faith" (No. 4).

I remember having dinner one evening with Archbishop Sheen in his apartment. After dinner, we talked about books. He asked me if I were familiar with Spurgeon. I said I wasn't. With Barclay, then? Again I had to answer, "No." Then, to justify my ignorance, I said, "Bishop, I thought we were not to read Protestant scripture scholars."

The archbishop laughed heartily. Then he pulled down Spurgeon from his bookshelf and read me one of his sermons on the Psalms. It compelled our admiration. When I left that evening, he gave me a volume of Spurgeon and one of Barclay and said, "Read them." I did. And how glad I am that the good archbishop opened this treasure trove for me. Even the decree contains the comment that the love of our separated brothers for the scripture had led them "to a constant and expert study of the sacred text" (No. 21).

The Ecumenical Movement refers to those activities that were started and organized to foster Christian unity. The movement began among Protestants in Edinburgh in 1910. In 1948, the Edinburgh Conferences bloomed into the World Council of Churches.

Undoubtedly this movement was an answer to a Unity Octave of Prayer begun by Father Paul Francis in January, 1908. In 1909, Father Paul and all the other members of the Franciscan religious community known as the Society of the Atonement became Roman

Catholics. The Decree on Ecumenism brought the Catholic Church lock, stock, and barrel into the movement. The decree listed three activities that can best foster Christian unity.

The first is the soul of the movement, spiritual ecumenism: "holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians."

The second is dialogue, a meeting of the theological experts on both sides to discuss, as equals, doctrinal and moral matters for greater understanding — not in a polemical manner that seeks to prove or disprove, but in an irenic way that seeks what unites, not what divides. Here, a warning was issued: "Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning" (No. 11). Years ago, some ecumenist prated, "Doctrine divides, service unites — let's work together and forget about truth." Protestants themselves discovered that such a pragmatic approach to Christian unity finally ends in a babel of confusion.

The third activity is mutual cooperation in such social matters as the dignity of the human person, the promotion of international peace, the application of the gospel to social life, relief services, and so on.

The decree then exhorted the faithful to refrain from superficiality and imprudent zeal, both of which can hinder real progress towards unity (No. 24). Superficiality implies not really understanding the positions of our separated brothers, and imprudent zeal denotes the temptation to forget our differences, to bypass questions of doctrine and authority, simply going along to get along.

The decree concludes with a request for prayer, constant and fervent, for unity is ultimately the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Ecumenism is not a take-it-or-leave-it movement. It is the will of Christ himself, who said, "Anyone who is not against us is with us," and "I pray that all may be one that the world may believe you sent me" (Jn. 17/20-21).

Father Shamon Lecture

Father Albert Shamon, Courier-Journal columnist, will speak at an all-day congress sponsored by the Southern Tier Curia, Legion of Mary. The event will be at St. Patrick's Parish Hall, 251 W. Clinton St., Elmira, on Saturday, Sept 28, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

The theme of the congress will be "Crusade for Souls." Father Shamon's talks will focus on evangelization.

The congress is open to the public, and no reservations are necessary. Participants are asked to bring a brown bag lunch; beverages will be provided.

On the Right Side

With Father Paul J. Cuddy



Rock Hudson and mystery

From a disappointed reader: "I did not expect you to cave in and go soft on the morals of the Church. Your September 11 article on Rock Hudson bothers me. The Bible is perfectly clear that homosexuality is an abomination before God. You express your concern about Hudson's soul for his lack of religious faith, but you don't sound like the Bible about the terrible sin that brought him AIDS. Please don't let us down."

Comment: To keep the record straight: what is sinful is not the biological or psychological orientation of gayness, but the exercise of homosexual actions. Let me relate an event that has seared my memory for more than 30 years.

While I was a chaplain in Texas in the fifties, a phone call came from an orderly room. "A man wants to see you, chaplain," the caller said. "It seems to be urgent."

He came: a man in his mid-forties, obviously affluent, torn with agony. His son, around 20 years old and newly arrived at the Air Force base, was in the base jail because of his homosexuality. Would I go to see the son and talk to him? "Of course," I replied.

It was a strange case. The youth was handsome, intelligent, well-mannered, not effeminate. He had gone to a Catholic high school, and in his third year had become involved with a group of gays. Upon his arrival at the air base, he was billeted with some 40 other young airmen in a common dormitory. For him, this was the same agonizing problem that a 250-lb. macho fullback for the Buffalo Bills would have if he tried to sleep in a dorm with 40 young girls. The youth had made no untoward proposal to any of the young men. Before he could, he turned himself in to the commanding officer. The young man was discharged and returned home with his father. My heart ached for both of them, and from that day, I have had a great compassion for men in such a dilemma.

Please get a copy of "The Devil's Advocate" by Morris West (Wm. Morrow & Co., 1959). There is a stormy scene set in Calabria between the devil's advocate, Msgr. Meredith, sick unto death, and a gay Mr. Black, who had designs on a young teenager, Paolo Sanduzzi, described as "a classic David."

The dialogue reads as follows:

Msgr. Meredith: "You are doing a detestable thing. When you set out to corrupt this boy, you are committing a crime against nature."

Mr. Black: "Monsignor, let's say I am whatever one calls me — an unnatural man, a corrupter of youth. What does the Church offer me? The Church answers every damn question in the book — excepting the one you need answering. What about my nature? I was born the way I am. It was my nature to be drawn more to men than to women. I wasn't seduced in the shower room or blackmailed in the bar. God knows I've suffered enough because of it. I'm lonely. I need love like the next man! My sort of love. Your Church has all the answers. Give me this one!"

Msgr. Meredith: "To your problem — and to lots of others — there isn't an answer that doesn't involve a mystery and an act of faith. I can't tell you why God made you the way you are any more than I can tell you why He's planted a cancer in my stomach to make me die painfully while other men die peacefully in their sleep. The cogs of creation seem to slip all the time. Why? Only God knows."

Mr. Black: "No matter what a bloody mess Creation gets into, you take it and like it; because that's a cross God lays on your back. That's no answer!"

Msgr. Meredith: "Have you a better one, Mr. Black?"

Mr. Black: "I have indeed. You keep your cross and your hairshirt, Meredith. I'll take the cash in hand and waive the rest."

I am not sure the book is in print, but you can get it at the library. A gay orientation is a cross for the individuals, their families and friends. Molestation of children is always a worry, but that dreadful vice seems to be shared by heterosexuals. Of these Jesus warned, "Better a millstone about the neck than to scandalize one of these little ones."

However, rather than concentrate on one mysterious cross only God seems to understand, why not bestir your indignation over a variety St. Paul gave us? "The works of the flesh are manifest: enmities, contentions, anger, quarrels, murders, drunkenness, carousing and such-like" (Gal. 5:19). Is it possible that those given to macho indignation are equally indignant over seduction, drunkenness, dope, injustices, yelling around the house and, as St. Paul puts it, "such-like"?

Chilean cardinal warns of protest violence, cancels memorial Mass

Santiago, Chile (NC) — Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno Larrain of Santiago canceled a memorial Mass scheduled for Sept. 4, fearing the violence which erupted during a protest called the same day by an anti-government alliance.

At least five people were killed and at least 50 were injured during the demonstrations by supporters of the multi-party alliance which the cardinal had helped to form.

The Mass was to be held to commemorate the death of a French priest, Father Andre Jarlan. The priest was shot in his office Sept. 4, 1984, while protestors and police clashed in the streets outside.

Residents of La Victoria, the Santiago slum where Father Jarlan worked and died, lined the streets with candles Sept. 3 and decked buildings with portraits and white bunting. They said they would hold their own memorial service during the day.

The anti-government protest, described by observers as the largest in a year full of such demonstrations, was marked by clashes between demonstrators and police. Police said 300 people were arrested.

Juan Pardo, 16, was shot as 100 demonstrators attacked a community center occupied by police. Hospital officials said he died of a stomach wound. Father James Wheeland, an American in Santiago, said parishioners told him the fatal shot came from the community center.

The injured were hurt in scuffles with police and in efforts to stop buses from making their scheduled runs.

As the protest began, several bombs exploded in the city. According to residents, troops were deployed in working-class suburbs after protesters burned several buses, blew up lampposts, built barricades and almost halted public transport.

The non-communist Democratic Alliance coalition of opposition parties had asked Chileans to refrain from violence and use the day of protest to gather signatures of support for a recent pact, signed by 11 political

parties, calling for a prompt return to democracy.

The pact, the first of its kind since Gen. Augusto Pinochet seized power in a 1973 coup, resulted from negotiations sponsored by the cardinal.

But the pact was shunned by the banned Communist Party, which said it resented criticisms of the party's support for violence as a legitimate popular response to military rule.

In a statement released Sept. 3, the military government criticized the pact, saying, "There are fundamental differences of principle between the published document

and the 1980 constitution."

Under the popularly approved constitution of 1980, Pinochet is due to rule until 1989 and could stay in power until 1997.

The bishops of Chile have said that a restoration of basic freedoms to the country is necessary before social divisions can be healed. The text of their statement was published in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

On Sept. 3, 45 students, most of whom were under the age of 18, reportedly were arrested in clashes with police after protesting the planned closure of a school.

Lay School of Theology announces offerings

Genesee Ecumenical Ministries' annual Lay School of Theology and Ministry will begin October 7. Thirteen courses will be offered, and the program is expected to bring together people from varied traditions and to provide opportunities to share together. This year's 13 courses reflect three major areas: scripture, spirituality and contemporary issues. Effort has been made to offer two morning courses in varied locations at which babysitting will be offered.

Course offerings are: "A Guide to the Bible," Rev. Anthony Ricciuti, Mondays Oct. 7 to Nov. 4, and Rev. Patricia

Youngdahl, Oct. 15 to Nov. 12, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Third Presbyterian Church; "Mid-life Transitions and Spiritual Growth," Sheila Kane, Mondays Oct. 7 to Nov. 4 and Wednesdays Oct. 9 to Nov. 6, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., St. Thomas Episcopal Church; "The Movie and the Message," Dr. Jesse Brown, Mondays, Oct. 7 to Nov. 4; "Bioethics Today: Old Models and New," Rev. Daniel Tormey, Mondays, Oct. 7 to Nov. 4; "The Spiritual Pathway — Some Sidetracks," Dr. James Dombeck, Tuesdays Oct. 8 to Nov. 5; "John, the Maverick Gospel," Dr. Paul Hammer, Tuesdays Oct.

8 to Nov. 5; "Faith in Action, Rev. Dr. Larry A. LeFeber, Wednesdays Oct. 9 to Nov. 9; "What Are They Saying About Jewish-Christian Relations, Rabbi Judea Miller and Rev. Joseph Brennan, Wednesdays Oct. 16 to Nov. 20, Temple B'rith Kodesh; "Central America and Liberation Theology," Dr. Marvin Mich, Wednesdays Oct. 9 to Nov. 6; and "Becoming Disciples," Rev. Robert E. Barr Jr., Wednesdays Oct. 9 to Nov. 6.

For further information, call (716)232-6530.