

Church must endure amid controversy

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

"Controversial" is practically a fifth mark of the church, alongside "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."

To be fully active in the church is to be touched in some way by one controversial issue or another: the role of women, the appointment of bishops, intercommunion, the Universal Catechism, clerical celibacy, dissent, abortion, birth control, gay rights, Marian apparitions, and on and on.

The church has never been free of controversy, nor of the conflicts that controversy provokes. There were acute tensions even in the earliest Christian communities.

In spite of inevitable controversies and conflicts, the work of the church goes on.

Every week the Christian community gathers for the Eucharist, where the Word of God is proclaimed, the prayer of thanks-

giving is offered, and the body and blood of Christ are distributed and consumed.

Every week new members are baptized, sins are forgiven, the sick are visited, the ill are anointed, the dead are buried, and the young are taught.

Every week ministries are exercised on behalf of those with special needs.

During the course of every year the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is celebrated; the young are confirmed; couples are married; parish missions are conducted; church facilities are renovated; parish committees meet; the troubled are counseled; the needy are assisted.

And this work goes on in spite of the frustration, demoralization and even anger of many (ordained and lay alike) who continue nevertheless to serve the church generously, sacrificially, and with a perseverance rooted in faith and hope, and informed by love.

Thus, although women remain excluded

from ordination and from many positions of pastoral leadership, it is women who still do most of the church's work.

And although many middle-aged priests are frustrated by the tensions between Vatican II Catholics and those who want to restore the Catholicism of the 1950s, it is so often the middle-aged priest who provides the kind of credible and effective pastoral leadership that one longs for and welcomes in today's church.

In vibrant parishes across the land, such people as these plan and execute the community's liturgical celebrations, preside and preach at worship, proclaim the Word of God, distribute Communion, teach the young, visit the sick, prepare children and adults for the sacraments, organize and distribute assistance for the needy, and build bridges of cooperation to non-Catholic religious communities and to the wider civic community.

Thus the day-to-day, week-to-week



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

ministerial work of the church for the most part, by Catholics who are troubled by the limits placed on the pastoral role of women in the church, by the loss of good men from the priesthood, by the manner in which the church presents its teaching on human sexuality, by the pattern of episcopal appointments, by instances of censorship in the Catholic press, by the inordinate interest in apparitions, and by the general lack of attention to papal and episcopal teaching on social justice.

These are not "the simple faithful" who must be protected from dangerous ideas. They are the gifted and dedicated faithful who make the church work.

Let no man separate what God has joined

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 10:2-16; (R1) Genesis 2:18-24; (R2) Hebrews 2:9-11.

A wife once asked me, "Father, do you know why God created woman?"

I listened as she gave the answer: "Because after God had created man, He looked at him and exclaimed, 'Good heavens, he'll never make it alone' — so He created woman." I laughed.

The Talmud states that God chose to create woman from the side of man so as to teach that she is to be a helpmate like himself, walking beside him in the journey of life, standing beside him in the struggles of life, and always being the one closest to his heart.

A point I think we are liable to forget about the Genesis story and the Gospel story is this: God instituted marriage, not

man. "(God) brought her to the man." He did so that the two might become one. In becoming one, they might become fertile and multiply and fill the earth.

Jesus echoed the same thing in the Gospel when He said, "Let no man separate what God has joined" — what God, not man, has joined. Marriage is God's doing. He made it indissoluble because through marriage human life is brought into the world. Animals can usually manage for themselves within a short time after their birth, but humans need years of love and security to reach maturity.

When a boy graduated from high school, his mother gave him an envelope containing her two apron strings. In our advanced technological society, youths need the family even beyond the high school years. Divorce not only attacks the family, but the children of the family. It is the children who suffer. Hence the injunction of Jesus: "Let not man separate what

God has joined."

We've all heard the saying that marriages are made in heaven. There is more truth in this saying than we might first surmise. Often we hear at a wedding that he or she has made a good "choice." But God has more of a hand in bringing a couple together in marriage than most of us realize. The Bible is full of God-made marriages: Isaac and Rachel, Tobias and Sarah and, of course, Mary and Joseph.

But men and women are two totally different kinds of people — equal but different. Their differences are not antagonistic, but complementary. They differ as the glass from the wine that fills it, as the violin from the bow that draws music from it.

As Hiawatha explained when he went to woo Minnehaha: "What the cord is to the bow, woman is to man. Though she bends him, yet she obeys him; though she draws him, yet she follows him. Both (are) in-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

complete without the other."

Moses permitted divorce to prevent the murder of unwanted wives. In his patriarchal society, the father was absolute head of the clan, and could execute with impunity a displeasing wife to marry another. Moses permitted divorce to prevent murder. Jesus abolished this concession so unfair to women.

Divorce has been the edge of the wedge prying open the door to artificial contraception and abortion. Our moral domestic ills will be solved only by a return to the indissolubility of marriage established by God Himself.

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