

# Where is ecumenism at today?

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

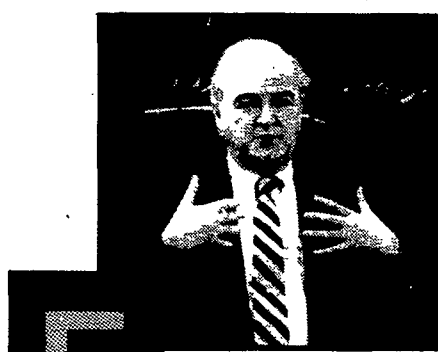
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began on Saturday, Jan. 18, providing an annual occasion for assessing the current state of ecumenism.

I shall limit myself here to the dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and to the Vatican's official response to the final report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

The Vatican's response, jointly formulated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, characterizes the commission's work as "a significant milestone not only in relations between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion but in the ecumenical movement as a whole."

The Vatican points, first, to eucharistic doctrine as the area where the commission was able to achieve "the most notable progress toward a consensus," especially with regard to the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist and belief in the Real Presence.

The Vatican also welcomes the commission's agreement on the distinction between the priesthood of all the faithful and the priesthood of the ordained, both rooted in the one priesthood of Christ, and it applauds the commission's sacramental understanding of the church as against a purely congregational



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model.

The Vatican notes, finally, that there was even significant agreement reached on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, as something "not contrary to the New Testament and ... a part of God's purpose regarding the church's unity and catholicity."

The Vatican rejoices, therefore, "in the fact that centuries of antagonism have given way to reasoned dialogue and theological reflection undertaken together."

Then comes the "but."

The Vatican observes that there are other areas where "complete agreement or even at times convergence has eluded" the commission.

These have to do with papal infallibility, the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the As-

sumption, the manner in which papal primacy is exercised, the reception of doctrine by the faithful, the authority of ecumenical councils, the relationship of non-Catholic churches to the Catholic Church, and the role of Peter among the twelve. Even on those matters where the Vatican has found significant agreement between the two churches, the Vatican nonetheless complains that "the faith of the Catholic Church" could have been "even more clearly reflected in the final report ..."

Specifically, the final report might have acknowledged that the Eucharist "makes present" the sacrifice of Calvary, that the eucharistic sacrifice is "propitiatory" and can be of spiritual benefit to the deceased, that the elements of bread and wine are "substantially" changed into the body and blood of Christ, and that adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament is entirely appropriate.

With regard to the ordained ministry, the Vatican faults the final report for not stressing that "only a validly ordained priest can be the minister who, in the person of Christ, brings into being the sacrament of the eucharist," and for not insisting that it was "Christ himself who instituted the sacrament of orders as the rite which confers the priesthood of the new covenant."

Finally, the Vatican expresses displeasure with the commission's approach to the interpretation of Scripture. The commission, it says,

places too much reliance on the historical-critical method and too little on the role of the magisterium.

Nevertheless, the Vatican's response ends on a hopeful note, urging continued dialogue and recommending itself to the process whose outcome would be "the restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, has offered a brief response to the Vatican's statement (both statements are available in the Dec. 19, 1991 *Origins*.)

He welcomes the Vatican's response as "another significant step along the road toward visible unity of the church which is our Lord's will."

However, in the same spirit of ecumenical honesty that was manifested in the Vatican document, Archbishop Carey faults the Vatican's response for demanding too much of its dialogue partners.

"If either communion," Archbishop Carey notes, "requires that the other conform to its own theological formulations, further progress will be hazardous."

And so it will.

But what Archbishop Carey and others may not realize is that the sorts of theological formulations found in the Vatican's response would also be considered problematical for the great majority of Catholic theologians and biblical scholars today.

More about that next week.

# Work is more than a way to make living

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

Should Catholics be any more moral than any other workers? The answer to that question revolves around what is meant by the word "should."

If by "should" is meant that Catholics are held to a higher standard of morality in the marketplace than Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, followers of other faiths or believers in nothing at all, the answer is an obvious and resounding "no." No divine double standard exists by which Catholics are required to act in one way while others are not.

If it is wrong for a Catholic to cheat a customer, to falsely advertise a service, to produce an unhealthy product or to give less than maximum effort, then it is wrong for everyone.

If by "should," however, is meant that Catholic teaching and sensibility ought to make a difference in how Catholics go about their daily work, then the answer to the question must be "yes."

Catholics should be known for

the quality and the moral nature of the work that they perform, because Catholicism is an activist, this-world oriented, pragmatic, "roll up your sleeves and let's get to work" religion.

This can be seen clearly in the recent statement by the U.S. Catholic bishops on the 100th Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the great social encyclical by Pope Leo XIII. Entitled "A Century of Social Teaching: A Common Heritage, A Continuing Challenge," the pastoral message declared that "our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church."

The bishops point out that "the social dimensions of our faith have taken on special urgency and clarity over this last century," even though "many see religion as something personal and private."

Specifically, the bishops talk about the religious importance of daily work. "Work is more than a way to make a living; it is an expres-

sion of our dignity and a form of continuing participation in God's creation," they say.

Catholicism, according to the bishops, "offers not an alternative social system, but fundamental values that test every system, every nation, and every community. It puts the needs of the poor first. It values persons over things. It emphasizes morality over technology, asking not simply what can we do, but what ought we do."

This is pretty heavy-duty stuff for those who think that religion is merely about pious practices and attending occasional religious services. What the bishops are saying is that how Catholics act out their faith in their daily work on their jobs, with their families, and in their communities is the measure of their religious beliefs.

"Our social vocation takes flesh in our homes and schools, businesses and unions, offices and factories, colleges and universities, and in community organizations and professional groups," they insist. "As believers, we are called to bring our values into the marketplace and the political arena, into community



## FAITH AND WORK

and family life, using our everyday opportunities and responsibilities, our voices and votes to defend human life, human dignity, and human rights. We are called to be a leaven, applying Christian values and virtues in every aspect of our lives."

This implies that Catholics *should* be more moral than other workers, even though every worker *should* be as moral as every Catholic!

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a s d f g h j k l q w e r t y

j Answer key: r

i PASSOVER LOCUSTS e

o BLOOD FLIES w

a DARKNESS BOILS q

FROGS Hidden Word: PLAGUES

z x c v b n m l k j h g f d