

Agreements require cooperation

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

In his commentary on the Vatican's recent response to the final report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Dr. George Carey, archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, pointed out that "if either communion requires that the other conform to its own theological formulations, further progress will be hazardous."

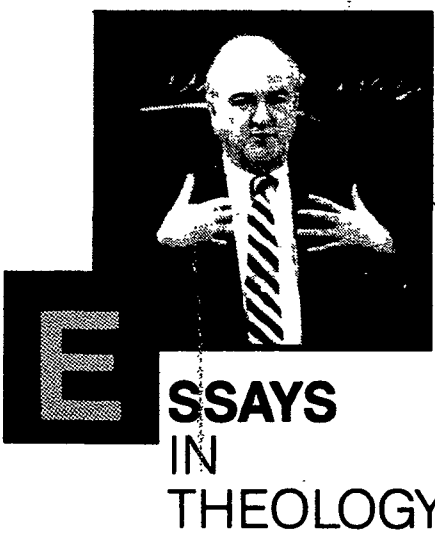
Archbishop Carey's observation implies an important ecumenical principle that is applicable beyond the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

No two churches can ever hope to achieve unity with one another if either or both should insist that its own particular way of expressing its faith must be the inviolable standard for the other.

But that is precisely Archbishop Carey's concern regarding the Vatican's response to the commission's final report.

The Vatican statement acknowledges and applauds a considerable measure of agreement and convergence on matters of real doctrinal substance, particularly concerning the Eucharist and the ordained ministry.

At the same time, however, it seems to challenge the final report for not adopting the exact formulations that were widely in use in Catholic theology before Vatican II. The Vatican's response notes, for



example, that Anglicans have difficulty with the claim that infallible teachings of the pope "can be known to be assured before their reception by the faithful."

But many Catholic theologians today would insist — alongside their Anglican counterparts — that the reception of doctrine by the faithful, in whom the Holy Spirit also dwells, is an integral and essential element of a doctrine's authoritative character.

The Vatican's response tends to present the issue in an either/or rather than a both/and manner. What the Vatican document calls the "certain knowledge" of a defined truth is guaranteed both by the reception of the faithful and by the authoritative definition on the

part of the authentic teachers. Neither reception alone nor the definition alone is sufficient.

Secondly, Catholic biblical scholars would also want to qualify the assertion in the Vatican's response that "the bishop of Rome inherits the primacy from Peter who received it 'immediately and directly' from Christ."

The assertion seems to reflect what biblical scholars would call a pre-critical understanding of sacred Scripture. They point out that Christ left no precise ecclesiastical blueprint by which the church was to be structured.

This is not to say that the Petrine primacy is without biblical or historical warrant. It is simply to say that its foundation is not so clear and explicit in the New Testament as some Catholics have assumed.

Thirdly, Catholic sacramental theologians would insist that it is possible to explain the mystery of the Real Presence without the use of neo-scholastic philosophical categories like substance and accident or the concept of "transubstantiation."

The fact that other Christian churches use different concepts, categories and terms does not necessarily mean that they differ from Catholics on the fundamental conviction of faith that Christ is really and truly present in the sacrament.

Fourthly, when the Vatican's response to the commission's report insists on the point that "only a validly ordained priest can be the minister who, in the person of Christ,

brings into being the sacrament of the Eucharist," it seems once again to be framing the question in an either/or rather than a both/and manner.

The whole congregation is engaged in the celebration of the Eucharist. Indeed, as the council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy assured us, Christ is already present in the gathering of the community, even before the eucharistic prayer and the words of consecration are proclaimed (n.7).

To be sure, the priest who presides at the Eucharist has a crucial and irreplaceable role to play in bringing the sacrament into being. But so, too, does the worshipping assembly.

The Eucharist is not, after all, the priest's private devotion, nor is it something he alone does. Pope Pius XII reminded us in his 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei* that the liturgy is "the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members" (n.20). In the end, Archbishop Carey's concern about the Vatican's response to the commission's final report only underscores a crucial distinction that Pope John XXIII emphasized in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."

We should be looking for agreement at the level of substance, but we cannot always require it at the level of formulation as well.

Knowing our humility is not enough

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 5:1-11; (R1) Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Humility is a much misunderstood virtue. It is the recognition of who we are in relation to God. As God told St. Catherine of Siena, "I am all that is, you are all that is not." Or, as Abraham confessed to God, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gn. 18:27).

In the presence of God both Isaiah and St. Peter realized their nothingness. "I am a man of unclean lips," Isaiah confessed. And Peter falling to Jesus' knees said, "I am a sinful man."

Humility, however, is more than just knowledge. To know is not virtue. Humility is truth, but that is only the half of it. The other half is to admit it. Humility knows and then acts in accordance with that knowledge.

Mary knew she was but a handmaid in relation to God, but that was not her humility. Her humility lay in her obedience to God: "Be it

done to me according to your word," she said, acting on that relationship.

Thus Isaiah's humility shone forth in his "Here I am, Lord, send me!" And Peter's also did in his "If you say so, I will lower the nets."

Our Lord was being mobbed by the crowds — and for good reason: they wanted to hear the word of God. To save Himself, Jesus got into Peter's boat. After teaching the crowds, he said to Peter, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."

Can you imagine Peter's initial reaction? "Hey, Lord, you're just a carpenter. Shoemaker stick to your last. Any fisherman knows you never fish in the daytime, especially at noon. Furthermore, we had fished all night and had caught nothing."

Peter could have stopped there. Had he not listened to Jesus, though, he would have missed his whole life's calling. Peter, however, was humble. So he said, "But if you say so, I will lower the nets." Two great miracles happened. First, a wonderful catch of fish. Then a great vocation: a call to become fi-

shers of men, just as Isaiah was called to become a prophet.

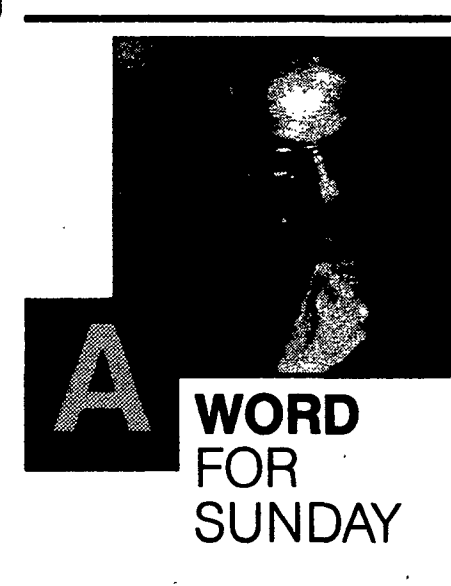
What is the key to vocation? Humility and faith.

Peter believed when all around him gave him no reason to believe, when the very opposite seemed true. So often we won't do anything unless we have a perfect set of circumstances. So often we live only by common sense, by reason, and not by faith. Often we say, if only I had his talent, his wealth, his pull, his power. "If clauses" are the devil's claws.

The error in this kind of reasoning is that we often reckon without Jesus. Without Jesus, Peter labored all night and caught nothing. With Jesus' help, however, they caught such a great number of fish that their nets were at the breaking point.

St. Therese of Lisieux used to say, "I alone am nothing. But Jesus and I are a majority." Without Him we can do nothing, but with Him, there is nothing we cannot do.

Secondly, Peter had not only humility and faith, he also had the spirit to try, try and try again. So



often we fail to achieve because we give up too soon. The constancy of the dropping water wears a hole in the rock.

Perseverance crowns our effort. Sanctity is a series of beginnings. A saint is a sinner who keeps trying. John J. Corbett said, "To be a champion, fight just one more round."

Peter was a man who merely kept on trying all his life.

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