

Does church have four parties?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

The church has never been free of conflict.

Even the apostles quarreled among themselves about who would have the highest places in the kingdom of heaven.

The first major controversy to erupt following the Resurrection concerned the church's relationship to Judaism.

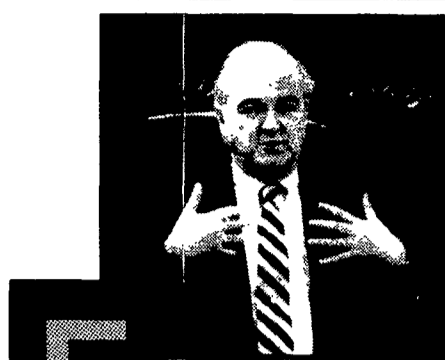
Since Christianity had emerged from Judaism, and since Jesus was and remained a Jew, many of the early Christians believed that the way of Christian discipleship was necessarily a Jewish way.

But as the Gospel was preached beyond Jerusalem and as thousands of Gentiles entered the church, new pastoral questions arose: Must these converts be circumcised? Must they observe Jewish dietary laws?

For years New Testament scholars assumed there were only two basic answers to these questions: those of the Gentile Christians associated with Paul, and those of the Jewish Christians opposed to Paul.

Scholars now identify four basic approaches:

- On the right were ultra-conservative Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who insisted on the full observance of the Mosaic law, including circumcision. They were called the "circumcision party" (Acts 11:2).
- On the center-right were mod-



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erately conservative Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision, but required Gentile converts to observe at least some of the Jewish purity laws. This, for example, was the approach of Peter and James.

• On the center-left were moderately liberal Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision for Gentile converts nor require them to observe Jewish dietary laws. But neither did they demand a break with Jewish cultic practices, nor did they require Jewish Christians to abandon circumcision and the Mosaic law. This was Paul's approach.

• On the left were those who called for a radical break with Judaism. This group consisted of Jewish

Christians and their Gentile converts who rejected not only circumcision and Jewish dietary laws but also Jewish cultic practices associated with the Temple and feasts. Stephen, the first martyr, and Philip both advocated this approach.

The conflict over obligatory celibacy for priests is not a two-sided debate between those who want the law changed and those who don't. Four points of view exist, not two.

On the right are those who insist that the discipline of obligatory celibacy should never be changed.

On the center-right are those who believe that the discipline will, and should, be changed eventually, but that this is not the opportune time to make the change.

On the center-left are those who believe that the discipline should be changed and indeed that it is already a matter of some pastoral urgency. In the meantime, however, the law should be observed.

On the left are those who believe that priests should be free to marry now, even before the law is changed, and that if they do marry, they should continue to exercise their priestly ministry, however irregularly or surreptitiously.

The ordination of women is a second example.

The right insists that women's prohibition from the priesthood is of divine law and, therefore, can never be changed.

The center-right claims that the idea is difficult to reconcile with

tradition, but that it is at least conceivable that some future pope might permit it.

The center-left argues that women should be ordained, and that there are no scriptural or doctrinal reasons against it. Until the law is changed, however, women should not attempt to exercise the priestly ministry.

The left says that women should be ordained now. But since the church won't ordain them, women can be designated for ministry by their own private communities and can preside at their Eucharists.

This four-sided approach is helpful for many reasons, but I mention only two.

First, we see that — in spite of their claims — ultra-conservatives are not within the mainstream of the church. Their views are significantly different from those of moderate conservatives, with whom they like to be associated for respectability's sake.

Second, we see that the church's liberal side is two-dimensional, not one-dimensional. There are liberal Catholics to the left of those whom the ultra-conservatives excoriate and denounce as radicals and even heretics. These moderately liberal Catholics are within the church's mainstream, together with their moderately conservative counterparts.

The latter, however, would be well-advised to watch the company they keep.

We should all be like Good Samaritan

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 10:25-37; (R1) Deuteronomy 30:10-14; (R2) Colossians 1:15-20.

Where's God? Moses said, "In His word" (R1). Jesus said, "In your neighbor" (R3).

An Irishman asked his Jewish friend, "Why is it, Abe, Jews always answer a question by asking one?"

Abe answered, "Well, why shouldn't we?"

A lawyer questioned Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Jesus answered his question with a question: "What is written in the law?"

The lawyer gave a textbook answer: "Love God and your neighbor." To save face, however, the lawyer asked another question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered with the masterful parable of the Good Samaritan. And again, He ended it with a question.

The lawyer had asked, "Who is my neighbor?" He was throwing the burden on the other fellow. Jesus suggested the real question: "How do you become a neighbor?" It wasn't knowledge that the lawyer needed, but a new heart. So Jesus

tells him how one becomes a neighbor: by helping another in need.

The man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem was 1,500 feet higher than Jericho, which was 19 miles to the east of Jerusalem and nine miles north of the Dead Sea. The route was infested with robbers, especially since Herod had just laid off 40,000 men working on the Temple. More than 12,000 priests and Levites, who served in the Temple, lived in Jericho.

A priest and a Levite returning home to Jericho came across the man wounded in the parable. Mind you, the half-dead man was a fellow countryman, and the priest and Levite were religious people. Yet they passed by him.

A Samaritan helped him, of all people. He administered to the wounded man, using the oil and wine prescribed by the Greek and Latin physicians of that time. He brought him to an inn, and, when business called him away, he gave two days' wages for his care and promised to pay whatever remained when he returned.

How wonderful the Samaritan's love. He shows he isn't prejudiced because he helps an inveterate enemy. And he isn't selfish, for he

gives of both his time and money.

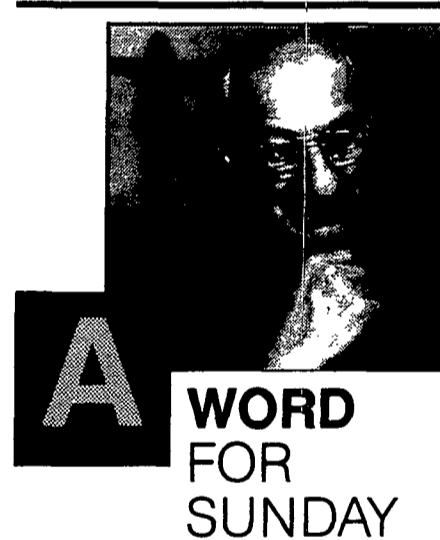
What is it to love my neighbor? In the family, it is to be tender, loving and caring for one another. In the neighborhood, it means being friendly, courteous, respectful, outgoing and helpful. Among friends, it means being sympathetic, understanding and loving.

For country, it means being patriotic. 'Tis a dirty bird that befools its own nest. For the church, it means being kind and patient, avoiding rash judgments and harsh criticisms.

The lawyer learned, not who is my neighbor, but how he ought to be neighborly.

V.P. Menon was a great figure in India after World War II. He had a great reputation for charity. When he first came to Delhi to seek a government job, all his possessions — his money, ID cards, everything — were stolen. Penniless, he turned to an elderly Sikh, explained his troubles and asked for a loan of 15 rupees until he got on his feet.

The Sikh gave him the money. Menon asked for his name and address to repay him. The Sikh said he owed him nothing. As help came to him from a stranger, so it should go back to a stranger in need. Menon



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never forgot.

His daughter said that the day before he died, a beggar came to the family home at Bangalore needing help to buy sandals for his ulcerated feet. Menon told his daughter to take 15 rupees from his wallet. It was his last act. He ministered to strangers because a stranger had ministered to him.

Jesus is the good Samaritan who has ministered to us. Although we are wounded by sin, He has saved us. "Then go and do the same."

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