

Pope opens new dialogue on papacy

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Pope John Paul II's new encyclical, "Ut Unum Sint" ("That They May Be One") calls for renewed and even daring efforts at restoring the Christian churches' unity.

Although the encyclical lists five areas that need further study before "true consensus of faith" can be reached (namely the relationship between Scripture and tradition, the Eucharist, the ordained priesthood, the church's teaching authority, and the role of the Blessed Virgin), the papacy is the underlying central issue.

The Vatican press conference at which the encyclical was launched was dominated by questions concerning papal primacy — that is, the authority which the Catholic Church claims the bishop of Rome possesses over the universal church.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, told assembled journalists, "The pope sees the Catholic position on primacy as an essential point of faith, but the way it is exercised is a question to be discussed."

This utterly crucial distinction — between the papal office's essence and its exercise — is to be found in the encyclical itself.

In accepting his own "particular responsibility" to make Christian unity possible, the pope embraces various non-Catholic Christian churches' re-



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

quest "to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation."

"Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us," he asks, "persuade church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject ...?"

In inviting this new dialogue on the papacy, the pope acknowledges that it will be "an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself."

There will be areas of longstanding disagreement to work out. The encyclical points out, for example, that because the pope is not merely a symbolic figure, he has a duty to admon-

ish, to caution and to declare at times that this or that opinion being circulated is irreconcilable with the unity of faith."

But it would seem that this duty pertains more to the papal office's exercise than to its essence. And it is the papacy's exercise, rather than any specific doctrines about the papacy, that is the real cause of concern, not only for non-Catholics but even for many Catholics as well.

To appreciate the significance of this distinction between the essence and the exercise of papal authority one has to pay particular attention to the historical context in which the distinction is being advanced.

The historical context, so important to Pope John Paul II, is the approaching end of the second Christian millennium and the beginning of the third. Unlike the popes who were in office just before and at the turn of the second millennium one thousand years ago, the current pope views the beginning of the third Christian millennium as a watershed of the highest religious consequence.

It is a time for putting the church's and the world's houses in order, for bringing peace to humanity, for restoring unity to the Body of Christ, for building bridges between the church and the world's other great religions so that we might create together a strong, united moral front against the common enemies of secularism and materialism.

But the forthcoming transition

from one millennium to another is significant for a second reason as well. During the first Christian millennium the papal office was exercised in a far more limited way than during the current millennium.

Emperors rather than popes convened the early ecumenical councils, while the papacy functioned in large part as an agent of conflict-mediation. Disputes that couldn't be settled at lower levels were referred to Rome for resolution.

According to the great Dominican theologian, Cardinal Yves Congar, the turning point came at the beginning of the second Christian millennium with the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-83). It was Gregory who, in an effort to shore up the church's powers against the intrusions of lay princes and the German emperor in particular, began the papacy's transformation into a highly centralized, monarchical office.

Most Catholics today assume that the powers the pope exercises — as well as the manner in which he exercises them — are rooted in the will of the Lord himself. But the papacy of the first Christian millennium presents a very different picture from the papacy of our own second millennium.

Should the papal office's exercise in the third Christian millennium be more like that of the first than of the second, Pope John Paul II's hopes for reunion may have a far greater chance of fulfillment.

The way to paradise is marked with crosses

Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 9:18-24; (R1) Zechariah 12:10-11; (R2) Galatians 3:26-29.

After drawing a half-black, half-white heart in a "Peanuts" cartoon, Lucy said to Linus, "There are two forces constantly at war with each other in the human heart." Linus grabbed his middle and gulped, "I can feel them fighting."

A missionary was talking to an old Native American about what it was like to be a Christian. The Native American said that being a Christian was like having two dogs inside of him fighting. There was the bad dog (Sinwardness) and the good dog (Godwardness).

"Which dog is winning?," asked the missionary.

"The one I feed the most," the Native American said.

There you have it. Every day we make thousands of choices: to speak or not to speak; to be on time or to be late; to be kind or to be mean; to pray or not to pray; to look at porn or to look away. Each choice brings us closer or further away from the person God intends us to be. It all depends



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

on which "dog" we are feeding the most.

Our Lord put it this way: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps."

Our Lord said that following Him begins with a desire. "Whoever wishes to be my follower" — wishes or thirsts for Him as the parched earth does for rain.

Our Lord then went on to warn that there are two things that can kill

such a desire: one inside us, to which Lucy and the Native American referred, namely, our bad self; and the other, outside us, namely, the crosses of each day. Therefore every Christian ought to have a double plan of action: the resolve to deny self, and the resolve to carry the crosses of each day.

Christ was never so foolish as to attack institutions, governments, or the Establishment. As far as we know, He never got involved in a great social cause of any kind. He knew better than to waste His time treating symptoms, such as racism, phony politics, the media. Instead Christ worked with the disease: man himself. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

"Who wishes to be my follower must deny his very self" — his self-sufficiency, if he would have faith; his self-will, if he would have obedience; his self-seeking, if he would have charity; his self-righteousness, if he would have humility; his self-indulgence, if he would have chastity; and his self-complacency, if he would have achievement.

As for life's crosses, Christ never promised to take them away. Men and women lost the earthly paradise; they

must never again try to regain this paradise lost. Their goal now is the heavenly paradise. The way to it is marked with crosses. *Per aspera ad astra* — through bitter paths to the stars.

As the angel in Gethsemane did not take away Christ's cross but helped Him to carry it, so Christianity does not eliminate life's crosses but gives one the shoulders to bear them.

When barbarous Danes overran England, Alfred the Great pleaded for help to Our Lady. Our Lady answered him thus:

"Night shall be thrice night over you,
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?"

Our Lady was saying, in effect, that things would get three times worse for Alfred before they would get better. Then she went on to remind him that he was making little use of his faith. Faith is meant to give one a cause, purpose to life. A cause gives joy, but even more, faith gives hope. Alfred should have joy and hope even in the throes of defeat.

No matter how dark these days may seem for Christians, if one has faith, there has to be both joy and hope.

GREGORY PIERCE column will run next in July 13 issue.

Kids' Chronicle Answer Key

1. Accountants (e), 2. Artists (j), 3. Brides (a), 4. Carpenters (h), 5. Dancers (b), 6. Editors (i), 7. Firefighters (c), 8. Musicians (f), 9. Students (d), 10. Teenagers (g)

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