

COLUMNISTS

Sectarians a world apart from Catholicism

One dictionary defines a sect as a "group of people forming a distinct unit within a larger group by virtue of certain refinements or distinctions of belief or practice."

Religiously, a sect is a group or faction "that has separated from a larger denomination."

Sectarianism is an attitude or form of behavior associated with a sect. Thus, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* describes sectarianism as an expression of "the desire to be separated from the larger Christian community by appealing to individualistic aspects of Christianity, stressing the importance of moral purity, and defusing true Christianity as incompatible ... with engagement with modern culture."

"Sectarians," the encyclopedia continues, "tend to reject the value of diversity and define themselves in opposition to others. They are not instinctively drawn to ecumenism and dialogue" — unless perhaps it is in outreach to other sectarians within other denominations.

"Indeed, the sectarian defines the Church as the exclusive locus of God's activity, and the mission of the Church as limited to a countercultural, other-worldly salvation."

Although there are some positive as-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

pects to sectarianism, it is the antithesis of Catholicism.

Catholicism emphasizes the essential goodness of creation. The sectarian views the created order as mired in sin — the devil's playground.

Catholicism affirms, furthermore, that the world has been spiritually renewed by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the ongoing sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit. The sectarian views the world, for all practical purposes, as still under the dominion of sin. Any serious engagement with the world can only be corrupting.

Catholicism teaches that there is a fundamental interplay of nature and grace, insisting that grace builds on nature and that nature is elevated by grace. The sec-

tarian pits fallen nature against grace. The world becomes a theater of human failure and divine unpredictability.

Catholicism is committed to, and actively engaged in, the renewal and reform of social, economic, and political structures for the sake of justice and peace; it even views such activity as a participation in the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying activity of God. The sectarian regards such initiatives as a form of moral hubris, of presuming to act as and where God alone can act.

Catholicism seeks dialogue with those outside the Catholic Church, Christians and non-Christian alike, on religious and secular issues of common concern. The sectarian views such dialogue as a slippery slope toward the compromise and eventual corruption of faith itself.

Catholicism adopts a catholic, i.e., all-embracing and open, posture toward cultural diversity, acknowledging that much of contemporary culture is consistent with the Gospel while some other aspects are not. The sectarian regards all culture outside the sect (including even the culture of the wider church) as hostile to pure Christianity. Thus, the sectarian's attachment to the term "countercultural."

Catholicism recognizes that we live in a world of moral ambiguity, where many ethical problems admit of no easy solution. The sectarian assumes that the simple, unexegeted incidents narrated about Jesus in the New Testament provide all the direction a Christian will ever need to answer every moral question.

In one of the most curious — and distressing — developments since the Second Vatican Council, sectarianism has begun to make significant inroads into Catholicism itself. And, remarkably, those roads come from the left as well as from the right.

What seems to attract both types of Catholics is sectarianism's simplicity and its seemingly uncompromising devotion to principle.

There are many Catholics today, including some bishops, who have taken up this so-called countercultural cause. They see it perhaps as a way of strengthening the case against optional celibacy for priests, women's ordination, abortion, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and other hot-button issues.

What they don't seem to realize, however, is that counterculturalism is sectarianism.

Sectarianism is not the natural ally of Catholicism. It is its antithesis.

How to be salt of the earth to others

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:13-16. (R1) Isaiah 58:7-10. (R2) 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Our Lord says in the Gospel that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

In February we are generally still battling snow and what we use is salt. Salt melts snow. The mark of the devil is coldness, for he is hate and hate is coldness in human relations. Love melts the coldness in human relations. Love is warm and tender. Love is outgoing: It reaches out to others, it cares, it gives, forgives, ever stands with open hands to give and give and give.

A book that I gave as a Christmas present this past year was Canfield and Hansen's *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. If you have not read it, please do. It is food for the soul. Here's just a little of what the book says about love. "We believe that we are hurt when we don't receive love. But that is not what hurts us. Our pain comes when we do not give love. We



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

were born to love.... We function most powerfully when we are giving love. The world has led us to believe that our well-being is dependent on other people loving us. But this is the kind of upside-down thinking that has caused so many of our problems. The truth is that our well-being is dependent on our giving love. It is not about what comes back; it is about what goes out!" (Page 50).

The salt loses its flavor whenever we stop being concerned about others; when our prime concern becomes self

and not others. Society without love becomes as flat and tasteless as fish without salt.

Another great compliment Our Lord paid us was to call us "light of the world" — not just of our parish, or America, but of the world. Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter on the Third Millennium said that this is the new evangelism, namely, to bring the light of the Gospel to the whole world.

Isaiah describes what this light is in the first reading. It is to "share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked ... and do not turn your back on your own."

Mother Teresa gives a very simple example of how to be a light, namely, by smiling. "Smile at each other," she says. "Smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other — it doesn't matter who it is — and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other."

So smile! Reach out a helping hand to others. Share with them the meaning and purpose of life.

You are salt and light for others, to bring them to Christ and Christ to them. The Cursillo technique is effective for this: "Be a friend. Make a friend. Bring that friend to Christ."

Daily Readings

- Monday, Feb. 5**
1 Kgs 8:1-7, 9:13; Mk 6:53-56
- Tuesday, Feb. 6**
1 Kgs 8:22-23, 27-30; Mk 7:1-13
- Wednesday, Feb. 7**
1 Kgs 10:1-10; Mk 7:14-23
- Thursday, Feb. 8**
1 Kgs 11:4-13; Mk 7:24-30
- Friday, Feb. 9**
1 Kgs 11:29-32, 12:19; Mk 7:31-37
- Saturday, Feb. 10**
1 Kgs 12:26-32; 13:33-34; Mk 8:1-10

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