

Archbishop Quinn's speech raises key issues

Last week I commented on leadership and authority in response to an article by Jesuit theologian Richard McCormick. The article helped me in reflecting on my personal experiences relating to the demands and opportunities of those themes over the years.

I wanted to share those reflections with you for two reasons: 1) I believe our church needs to study and discuss these themes in a very serious way, and 2) so many who follow this column deal with these issues in everyday life. The size, shape and form of that involvement vary according to the circumstances of our lives, but most of us are engaged with these issues. And I think most would agree that, while such work gives life, it also has its cost.

A recent news story highlights what, in my opinion, is the serious need for our church to study carefully what we mean by leadership and authority, and how best we can exercise them in this day and age.

The story reported on a June 29 lecture given at Oxford University by John R. Quinn, retired archbishop of San Francisco. In that lecture, Quinn accepted an invitation from Pope John Paul II for the churches to reflect and comment on the papal office.

In extending that invitation, the Holy Father made a distinction between the essence of the office and the way it is exercised. The pope properly defended the need for and the importance of the Petrine ministry. At the same time he recognized that the papal office is for many a roadblock to Christian unity, and expressed a desire to remove barriers that flow not from the nature of the office but from the way it is exercised.

I understood him to mean not only that he

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

was quite willing to receive and entertain thoughtful comments in response to his invitation, but also that he was willing to make changes he judged appropriate based on the input he received.

In his Oxford speech, Quinn took up the pope's invitation in a careful and thoughtful fashion. He reflected on his personal experience with the Holy Father, which has been quite extensive. The archbishop at various times worked very closely with our Holy Father. Archbishop Quinn served as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; was appointed by the pope in the 1980s to chair an extensive pastoral study of religious life in our country; and also was asked by the pope to offer pastoral service to the Archdiocese of Seattle at a very sensitive moment in the life of that local church.

Out of those experiences, Quinn gives high marks to our Holy Father for his grasp of issues, genuine concern for the churches and the support he gave to Archbishop Quinn and colleagues as they carried out their tasks. Those experiences underlined for Quinn the importance of the pope's ministry as human guarantor of the unity of the

church, as head of the College of Bishops and as one who confirms his sisters and brothers in the faith.

Archbishop Quinn contributes some suggestions for thought about the shape and function of the papal office. I hope I do his work justice by naming the following themes, which spoke most forcefully to me:

1) Over time, the papal curia has become an entity that sometimes stands between the Holy Father and other members of the College of Bishops in ways that are not helpful.

2) We bishops — including our Holy Father, the first among us — need to probe for better ways consistently, practically and effectively to live out the relationships to which we are called by virtue of our membership in the College of Bishops.

3) It would be healthy for the church if we were at all levels to live out more fully the principle of subsidiarity, that is the principle calling for decision making as close to the grass roots as possible, so long as that does not impinge on the values, rights and freedom of the wider community.

I think the Quinn lecture is a significant contribution to a necessary conversation. I applaud him and thank him for it. At the same time, I am aware that the speech has its critics, not the least of whom is Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of New York.

Whether you lean toward Quinn's line of thought or that of his critics, I hope you will agree that the conversation is an important one for the health and vitality of the church. And, I hope you will agree that it is important enough to warrant a serious and systematic study by our church.

Peace to all.

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