

COLUMNISTS

Pope deserves praise for graciousness

The recent official visit of the archbishop of Canterbury to Pope John Paul II was filled with positive ecumenical words and gestures, particularly the vesper service in Rome's Church of St. Gregory the Great.

It was Pope Gregory the Great who sent Augustine, the prior of Gregory's monastery in Rome, to England in 596 A.D. to refound the church there.

Augustine landed in Kent in 597, and established a monastic community at Canterbury. A few months later Ethelbert, king of Kent, formally embraced Christianity. His wife Bertha had already been a Christian before their marriage.

In 601 the pope conferred the pallium, a symbol of pastoral authority, on Augustine as archbishop of Canterbury and as the effective primate of all England.

The same year (601) Gregory sent other missionaries to England to support Augustine's work. The new group was led by Mellitus and Paulinus, who later became bishops of London and York respectively.

The present Canterbury Cathedral is the third building on the site. Excavations in 1993 revealed the remains of a Saxon church, dating back to Augustine's time.

And so it was fitting that George Carey, the present archbishop of Canterbury, in a direct line of succession from Augustine, and John Paul II, the present bishop of



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

Rome, in a direct line of succession from Gregory the Great, celebrated a vesper service together in the Church of St. Gregory the Great in Rome on Dec. 5.

For the Romans, gesture is crucial. In this instance, the gesture was not only "bella" (beautiful, fitting, in Italian), but "bellissima" (most beautiful, most fitting).

During Archbishop Robert Runcie's visit to Rome in 1989, George Carey's predecessor wore choir robes in procession and for the joint prayer service in the same church. This time Archbishop Carey was invited to don cope and miter, just as the pope had done, and then to have his wife Eileen accompany him in the procession.

At a time when the Roman Curia has been receiving criticism, we may need to be reminded that the Curia is a large and highly diversified entity. In this instance,

the preparations for the archbishop's visit were handled with ecumenical sensitivity. Much of the credit goes to Cardinal Edward Cassidy and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In his remarks at the vesper service, John Paul II joined the archbishop and his party (including Anglican bishops from Africa, Europe and North America) "in giving thanks for the seed that St. Augustine of Canterbury planted in England and for the manifold fruits which that seed is still producing at the threshold of the third millennium."

After touching upon an issue that divides the two communions, the ordination of the women, the pope prayed "for a hastening of the day when, without renouncing in any way what is essential to this (Petrine) ministry in accordance with Christ's will, we may together discover the forms in which it will be accepted by all Christians as a service of love."

Archbishop Carey, in his turn, acknowledged that the Anglican Church developed out of the Reformation. Contrary to conventional Catholic wisdom, however, he noted that "the Reformation was not a tragedy so much as a rediscovery; a rediscovery of the Bible and its authority; a rediscovery of the importance of justification by faith; a rediscovery of the ser-

vanhood of ministry and priesthood."

To be sure, he said, those elements were already present in the ancient church, but they needed a rediscovery. Fortunately, the Second Vatican Council made these same, rich rediscoveries, and thereby opened the worldwide church to renewed ecumenical dialogue and collaboration.

Toward the end of his remarks, Archbishop Carey spoke directly to the pope, referring to his ministry as "distinguished," and pointing in particular to the pope's significant 1995 encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* ("That They May be One"), in which he invited other churches to enter into dialogue with him about the manner in which the papal ministry is exercised.

"If we ... are going to lead our people toward that goal (of unity)," Archbishop Carey declared, "it can only be done by the generosity to forgive, by the willingness to tolerate diversity in matters outside the biblical core of our faith, and by the humility to accept gifts from one another that may surprise and confound us."

Archbishop George Carey himself is one of those "gifts" to the church. John Paul II deserves praise for having received him so graciously last month in Rome.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Baptism offsets consequences of the Fall

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 1:7-11. (R1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7. (R2) Acts 10:34-38.

Next Sunday celebrates the baptism of the Lord. This feast brings the Christmas cycle to a close. Why was Jesus baptized? There are two reasons for his baptism.

One reason was for John's sake. John needed a revelation to explain the kind of Messiah Jesus was going to be. The Jews expected a political Messiah. John expected an avenging judge.

But after Jesus' baptism, John heard a voice from the heavens say, "You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests." John realized that these heavenly words were from Second Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of the Messiah as God's servant, as one who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoldering wick, but one who would come to heal and to liberate.

Further on, Isaiah spoke of God's servant as one who would suffer and be led like a lamb to the slaughter and thus take away the sins of many (Is 53:7,12). Thus the day after the baptism of Jesus, John pointed out to two of his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God."

The other reason for Jesus' baptism was to teach us what baptism is. Baptism is the



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

fundamental sacrament, just as birth is a basic prerequisite for human life, so rebirth into divine life is a necessary requisite for living as children of God. So Jesus began and ended his public life with baptism: with John in the Jordan and with the cross on Calvary, for the blood and water from his pierced side signified the Eucharist and baptism.

In Eden our first parents enjoyed two great gifts.

First, they had divine life. Redemption gave back what they had lost: divine life. "I am come that they may have life," Jesus said. He couldn't have meant human life, for his hearers already had that. The life he referred to was the one his hearers did not have: divine life.

Secondly, they had inner balance. Their passions were subject to reason and reason to their wills and their wills to God. Thus they were naked and experienced no shame. Moreover, they were intimate with God, on talking terms with him.

But once they sinned, they were stripped of these two great gifts. They lost their innocence, for after sin, they covered their nakedness, felt shame. They lost their intimacy with God, for they felt guilt and hid themselves from God. But the great tragedy of the Fall was that it affected the entire human race. Thus everyone is born with original sin: a strong inclination to evil and without divine life. Thus man runs away from God and the flesh lusts against the spirit.

Baptism is given to offset this double consequence of the sin of Adam. Our baptism gives us the Holy Spirit who transforms the very being of our souls; this transformation is called sanctifying grace. Baptism does not take away concupiscence, our strong tendency to evil. But it helps neutralize this by inserting us into a support community. Baptism makes us Catholic; that is, children of the church.

The church is a family; and like any family she helps her children by word, the

Scriptures, and by sacrament, especially Mass and confession; she helps them develop the divine life given at baptism.

A final point. As Jesus' baptism inaugurated his public ministry, so our baptism is not so much a privilege as a call to mission, a call to be a light to the world and bring it to the Light, by being good and doing good. Jesus went about doing good after his baptism, so must we do the same.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, January 13

Hebrews 1:1-6; Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday, January 14

Hebrews 2:5-12; Mark 1:21-28

Wednesday, January 15

Hebrews 2:14-18; Mark 1:29-39

Thursday, January 16

Hebrews 3:7-14; Mark 1:40-45

Friday, January 17

Hebrews 4:1-5,11; Mark 2:1-12

Saturday, January 18

Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 2:13-17

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