

Body of Christ must be healed of its division

Each year the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25) challenges the church to remain alert to the divisions that persist in the Body of Christ, because the abiding danger is that separated Christians will learn to accept the divisions as permanent.

There are several principles that should guide the churches — and the Catholic Church in particular — as they address the problem of Christian disunity. The most important can be found in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism, promulgated more than 32 years ago by Pope Paul VI.

1. The unity of the church does not exist already in the Catholic Church. Ecumenism, therefore, is not a matter of non-Catholics' returning to a preexisting Catholic unity. Ecumenism's goal is the restoring of the unity that has been lost and that does not now exist (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 1).

2. The disunity among Christians is not something that we should simply learn to live with. On the contrary, it "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature" (n. 1).

3. It is wrong to attribute blame for the disunity to one side or the other. The divisions between East and West and then, within the West, between Catholics, on



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the one hand, and Protestants and Anglicans, on the other, were created by "developments for which, at times, people of both sides were to blame" (n. 3).

4. The differences that separate Eastern from Western Christians, and Catholics from Protestants and Anglicans, are not always differences in kind, but more likely differences in degree (n. 3). For that reason we can longer speak of the Catholic Church as if it and the Body of Christ were "one and the same," as Pope Pius XII once taught. Other churches are also part of the Body of Christ.

5. What unites the Christian churches, even in their state of ecclesiastical separation, is more important than what continues to divide them. All Christians are justified by faith in Christ and are incorporated into him through the same baptism, which is the "fundamental sacramental bond of unity" (n. 22); we accept

the same Scriptures as the Word of God; and we are animated by the same life of grace and by the same virtues of faith, hope, and love, along with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (n. 3).

6. All of the Christian churches, each in their own way, have "significance and importance in the mystery of salvation." Indeed, the Holy Spirit uses them as "means of salvation" (n. 3).

7. Nevertheless, it is also the teaching of the council that the Catholic Church is "the all-embracing means of salvation" and that it is through the Catholic Church that "the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (n. 3).

8. The principal human means of collaborating with God in the quest for Christian unity are: the elimination of words, judgments and actions regarding other Christians that falsely or unfairly characterize them; opening and sustaining dialogue with other churches; cooperating with other churches in the pursuit of the common good under the light of the Gospel (see especially n. 12); common prayer; and simultaneous efforts toward the renewal and reform of the separated churches so that the whole Body of Christ can be renewed and reformed in accordance with the Lord's will (n. 4).

9. "While preserving unity in essentials," we must "preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life

and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth" (n. 4; also nn. 16 and 17). In any case, charity must always prevail (n. 4).

10. Catholics have much to learn from, and be edified by, the faith and virtues of non-Catholic Christians (n. 4).

11. "Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to its own calling." Renewal and reform must touch upon ecclesiastical conduct, church discipline, and even the process by which doctrines are formulated (n. 6).

12. Normally common worship (intercommunion) is forbidden because of the lack of unity which the Eucharist is meant to signify. On the other hand, the Eucharist is also a means of achieving that unity. Both truths have to be honored, not just the first (n. 8).

13. Not all truths are of equal weight. There is a "hierarchy of truths," based on their relative distance from the "foundation" of the Christian faith (n. 11).

As Pope John Paul II has acknowledged in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, a great obstacle to church unity is the manner in which the papal office has been exercised.

If we could make progress there, much of the rest might fall readily into place.

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

Our lives can be changed like the water at Cana

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 2:1-12. (R1) Isaiah 62:1-5. (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

Our Lord began his public life with a banquet and ended it with a banquet. At both banquets, at Cana and at the Last Supper, wine played an important part.

Cana was six miles northeast of Nazareth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was at the wedding, as were Jesus and some of his disciples. Mary seemed to have had the authority to order the servants.

In Israel at that time, a wedding lasted from three to seven days — a welcome interruption in the humdrum of working day in and day out. The groom would conduct his bride to his home at evening with torches. Then the celebration would begin and both bride and groom for a week would be treated like a king and queen.

At the wedding feast in Cana, a wine shortage developed. Without wine there would be no joy, for wine delighted the heart of man. But the wine did not make one drunk, for traditionally the wine was diluted with water. Still a wine shortage at a wedding feast would have been a catastrophe. The guests would have turned on the groom, the groom on the bride,



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the parents of the bride on the parents of the groom — there would have been a regular donnybrook. But the problem never materialized, because Jesus and Mary were there.

Mary noticed the problem and turned to Jesus. She didn't know what he was going to do, but she trusted him. Because she cared for others, she went to him.

Jesus responded to his mother in a way that might on the surface seem disrespectful. But it was not. First of all remember that John was writing 60 or 70 years after the event. In the hindsight of history, he saw that Mary was the woman spoken of in Genesis and in the Book of Revelation. So in his Gospel he always has

Jesus refer to his mother as "woman" — at Cana and from the cross. At first he says he is not concerned, then, "My hour has not yet come"; that is, his initiative was to be begun by Mary. She understood this, for she instructed those waiting on table, "Do whatever he tells you."

He told them to fill the six water jars with water, about 150 gallons. They did "to the brim" to make it clear there was only water in them, room for nothing else. And Jesus changed the water into choicest wine. The waiter in charge said to the groom: "People usually serve the best wine first. You haven't."

This first of Jesus' miracles shows three things about him. First, Jesus was no killjoy, "no pale-faced memento of solemnities." Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevski said, "Cana of Galilee ... Ah, that sweet miracle! It was not men's grief, but their joy Christ visited. He worked His first miracle to help men's gladness."

Secondly, Jesus' first miracle was in a home, the most precious place in all the world, not in the Temple or before the crowds. We should love our homes and do our greatest acts of love and charity there.

Thirdly, Jesus worked his first miracle, not to raise the dead nor to cure the leper, but to prevent a young couple from being embarrassed. He acted out of sympathy and kindness for simple folk.

Jesus comes into life to turn ordinary water into the glad wine of joy. If you want new life, follow Jesus. If you want the joy of life, do whatever he tells you.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, January 19

1 Samuel 15:16-23; Mark 2:18-22

Tuesday, January 20

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Mark 2:23-28

Wednesday, January 21

1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51;

Mark 3:1-6

Thursday, January 22

1 Samuel 18:6-9, 19:1-7; Mark 3:7-12

Friday, January 23

1 Samuel 24:3-21; Mark 3:13-19

Saturday, January 24

2 Samuel 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27;

Mark 3:20-21

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