

Pastoral bishops maintain unity

In recent years there has been a growing concern in the church about the quality of appointments to the hierarchy. The concern is not confined to liberal laity, religious and clergy. Many bishops have also been disappointed by the Vatican's failure to consult adequately with them, and by the occasional selection of men they have opposed.

Unfortunately, the arguments over the appointment of bishops have too often been expressed in simplistic liberal-versus-conservative terms. Pastoral aptitude and ministerial performance are the only proper bases for judgment about the suitability of candidates for the episcopacy.

But what does the word "pastoral" mean?

There are many models of good pastoring (the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was such), but a recent article in *America* magazine offers a particularly apt example.

Entitled "Reflections for Rome" (4/18/98), it is an account of Archbishop Rembert Weakland's latest, and probably last, *ad limina* report to the Vatican.

The plain article synthesizes the archbishop's voluminous report (comprising some 22 chapters) on his own Archdiocese of Milwaukee. "A useful report," he writes, "cannot be just a presentation of



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

statistics but must also elicit some reflections on what lay behind them. Who are these Catholics we are trying to pastor? What is the strength of their adherence to the church? What are their joys and also their fears? How divided are they on major issues confronting church and world? What are they really thinking?"

Too long to summarize, the article contains a number of useful insights: What follows is but a sample.

1. Catholic clergy are no longer drawn primarily from the blue-collar stratum of society but from the upper-middle class. It is difficult for such clergy to understand and identify with the very poor and with the blue-collar Catholics who feel threatened by the new ethnic groups.

2. Many of the working poor Catholics feel that their church has abandoned la-

bor and now sides with management and the wealthy. "They observe that the members of the boards of colleges, universities, hospitals and even the members of the parish councils of the large churches in the suburbs are anti-labor, anti-union, and, thus, anti-working poor."

3. The most vociferous group of Catholics in the United States are those spurred on by people like Mother Angelica and Father Joseph Fessio, SJ. The archbishop refers to them as papal maximalists because their theology can be summed up in the phrase "loyalty to the Pope." He points out, however, that their loyalty is selective. They do not express the same loyalty to John XXIII or to Paul VI. Neither do they show any interest in the current pope's social teachings.

4. The largest group of Catholics are found in the middle. To the extent that they are even aware of Mother Angelica, they find her arrogant and obnoxious. They've never heard of *The Wanderer* and do not read *Our Sunday Visitor*, *The Register*, *The National Catholic Reporter* or *Commonweal*. They never use the word "magisterium." They are proud of the present pope but have read nothing he has written. They are happy with the results of Vatican II in their parish life.

These middle Catholics are not anti-

clerical, but want a church that listens to them and treats them like adults, not children. They respect their priests, but they are also aware of the shortage of clergy and fear its long-term consequences. They wonder why the church isn't open to reasonable solutions to the problem, such as the ordination of married men.

The archbishop believes that this middle ground is holding, and that U.S. Catholicism is still strong. But "maintaining unity and ministering to such diversity" is the special challenge facing the church's ministers as we move into a new millennium.

Pastoral bishops like Rembert Weakland have the capacity and vision to meet that challenge. But, thanks to Vatican litmus tests, they are now in dangerously short supply.

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

In the column published in the April 30, 1998 edition of the Catholic Courier, ("Sharing Communion heightens tension"), Father McBrien incorrectly identified Msgr. Denis Faul as a bishop and Dungannon as a diocese. He also incorrectly identified Cardinal Cahal Daly as the archbishop of Armagh and the primate of all Ireland. Cardinal Daly is retired.

Hold fast to the church, to God

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 17:20-26. (R1) Acts 7:55-60. (R2) Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20.

In Yakima, Wash., a while back, a dying man, Grant Flory, said to his family: "Get me to the Mustangs' playoffs. No matter what." Grant was referring to his old high school team, the Prosser Mustangs. So in early December, when the Mustangs played in Seattle's Kingdome, Flory's cremated remains were taken there by his son.

Family members said anyone who knew Grant Flory wouldn't be surprised by his request. He was a real football fan.

Isn't it odd that there are Christians more dedicated to their favorite sports team than they are to God. They give money to their team. Know more about the players than they do about the heroes of the Bible. Will sit in a cold, miserable rain to watch a game; and yet crab about having to go to church on Sunday. No wonder Jesus ended his life praying for his church.

First of all he prayed for unity, "that all may be one." The sacramental grace of every Mass is unity. The bond of unity is love. The source of love is God. Thus at Mass we pray, "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ (Holy



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Communion, the sacrament of love) be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit (the God of Love)."

The church is meant to be a community of loving persons. It was this love that brought pagans into the church. "See," they said, "how these Christians love one another." No doubt that is why recent research has indicated that people who attend church are less likely to be ill over time than those who do not attend church. For everyone needs love, especially a loving community.

Depressed people want to be alone. Should we let them be? Not if we want them to improve. There is something about being with others that lifts our spirits. The church puts us in touch with one another. Jesus prayed that we be one

with one another.

Secondly, Jesus prayed that we be one with God. He prayed to the Father "that they may be one in us." There is more than a horizontal plane to the church. There is also a vertical plane. That's what separates the church from the average social club. In church we not only get in touch with each other but more important we get in touch with God.

During a frightful storm in the Georgian Bay of Canada years ago, a ship was wrecked. Many perished. The mate, with six strong men and one timid girl, escaped in a boat; but the waves were high and the craft turned over and over until, one by one the strong men lost their hold and disappeared beneath the angry billows.

The mate, however, lashed the girl to the boat, and thus she drifted to the shore. She escaped because she was fastened firmly to that which would not sink.

When we cling to the church, we fasten ourselves to that which will not sink. We do this by our unity with one another by love and with God by prayer and the sacraments.

Finally, Jesus prayed that we might see "this glory of mine." What was the glory of Jesus? It is the Holy Spirit, the one who glorifies the Father and the Son. Je-

sus prayed that we might receive the Holy Spirit. For it is the Holy Spirit who can make us one, for he is the Spirit of Love and of Truth.

Love is unitive, it is the bond of unity. It unites wills. Truth also is unitive, for it unites minds. Love and truth make people one in heart and mind. Jesus so wills this "that the world may believe that you sent me."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 25

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

Tuesday, May 26

Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11

Wednesday, May 27

Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11-19

Thursday, May 28

Acts 22:30, 23:6-11; John 17:20-26

Friday, May 29

Acts 25:13-21; John 21:15-19

Saturday, May 30

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31;

John 21:20-25



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