

Vatican II opened doors to non-Catholics

Before the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church regarded Protestants and Anglicans as heretics and revolutionaries (not reformers), and Orthodox and Oriental Christians not in union with Rome as schismatics.

Catholics were forbidden to read their books without explicit permission, and were not allowed to marry them without a special dispensation, and then only on condition that the non-Catholic party make a written promise to raise the children in the Catholic faith. A Catholic in the United States who married outside the church was automatically excommunicated.

Given the serious restrictions placed on these so-called mixed marriages, it is not surprising that the *Baltimore Catechism* (number 3) should have warned that "sinful and unhappy marriages frequently result from the company-keeping of Catholics with non-Catholics" (Q. 467.a).

So insistent was the church on keeping Catholics apart from non-Catholics, that there were pastors who denied Communion to parents who sent their children to public schools. And non-Christians were regarded as the equivalent of pagans since, unlike Protestants and separated Eastern Christians, they did not believe in Jesus Christ as their divine redeemer. For



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

example, the church knew that it was historically linked with Judaism, but it regarded the Jews as a people who had rejected Christ, putting him to death on the cross. Until John XXIII, the Catholic Church prayed for the conversion of the Jews in its Good Friday liturgy, referring to them as a "perfidious" people.

So little regard did the church have for non-Christians that it allowed for the dissolution of a marriage between a non-Christian and a Catholic in order to allow the Catholic party to marry someone else. This was (and still is) known as the Privilege of the Faith.

The Second Vatican Council changed all that, particularly through its historic Decree on Ecumenism and its equally historic Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

(better known by its Latin title, *Nostra aetate*. Some major elements of that teaching follow:

1. The unity of the church is something to be restored. It does not exist already in the Catholic Church (no longer described as the "one, true Church"), to which separated Christians must simply "return" (Decree, n. 1).

2. Both sides were to blame for the breakdown of unity between the Catholic Church, on the one hand, and the separated churches of the Reformation and the East, on the other (n. 3).

3. Christians baptized in these other churches are "incorporated into Christ" and, as such, are in a "certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church" (n. 3).

4. These non-Catholic communities are churches in their own right and, as such, can serve as means of salvation (n. 3).

5. There are certain limited instances where common worship and the reception of Communion may take place in the other's church (n. 8).

6. There must be dialogue between and among the separated churches, including the reading of one another's theological works and common classroom study (nn. 9-10).

7. Not all doctrinal truths are of equal

importance. It is unnecessary, therefore, that there be agreement on every disputed point of doctrine before there can be unity between the churches (n. 11). The Catholic Church must not attempt to impose any burden "beyond what is indispensable" (Acts 15:28; n. 18).

8. The Catholic Church "rejects nothing which is true and holy" in non-Christian religions, and urges dialogue and cooperation with them (Declaration, n. 2).

9. The Jews, with whom Catholics share a "common spiritual heritage," are a people still "dear to God," and nothing in Catholic liturgy, preaching, or catechesis should ever say or imply otherwise (n. 4).

10. Persecution and discrimination against anyone because of their religion is always to be deplored, and this applies in particular to the Jews, who cannot be blamed for the Crucifixion (n. 4).

Under the direct impact of the council, relations between the Catholic Church and the separated churches of West and East have improved dramatically. And so, too, have the church's relations with Jews and other non-Christians.

Vatican II continues to enrich and reshape the church in every way.

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

God loves to forgive us

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 15:1-32. (R1) Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14. (R2) 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

Author Ken Davis writes that not long after Diane and he were married, he thought it would be fun one day to hide her wedding ring, which she had left on the bathroom sink. That night he woke up to the sound of uncontrollable sobbing.

"What's wrong?" he mumbled, still half asleep.

"Nothing," she replied.

Wide awake now, Ken wondered how she could cry so uncontrollably in the middle of the night over nothing. So he kept probing. Finally, Diane blurted out, "I've lost my wedding ring."

Relieved, Ken confessed, "I have your ring," thinking she would hug him in relief and he could go back to sleep. The hug never came.

"What?" she growled.

"I took your ring as a joke," Ken said. "I know just where it is, so you can go back to sleep."

"It was dark," Ken wrote, "so I didn't see her fist coming — but I did feel it land. In 20 years of marriage, that was the only time she ever hit me. It was also the last time I ever took her wedding ring."

I guess most of us at least temporarily



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

have lost something valuable to us. In chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel Jesus speaks of a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son.

We may wonder why the woman in the Gospel made such a fuss over losing one of her ten silver coins. In the East when a man took a bride, he would give her a ribbon strung with ten coins. She would wear this token of love on her head, like a wedding band. If a woman were caught in adultery, one of the coins would be taken out leaving a gap to show that she had disgraced her marriage vows. So this woman frantically searched for the lost coin. It wasn't the coin that mattered; her reputation and marriage were at stake.

Fortunately she found the coin. And when she did, she called in her friends and neighbors and said, "Rejoice with me. I

have found the silver piece I lost."

Then Jesus added the story's moral: "So there will be joy in heaven over one repentant sinner." There was the same joy over finding the lost sheep and the son.

The joy in the three parables testifies that repentance is possible and that God loves to forgive. Forgiveness is what God is all about.

Roy Angell tells the story of a widow who had lost her only son and husband in World War I. She was bitter: Her neighbor down the street had five sons and had lost none. One night in her grief she had a dream. An angel stood before her and said, "You might have your son back again for 10 minutes. What 10 minutes do you choose? Him as a little baby, a dirty-faced schoolboy, a student in high school or a young soldier going off to war?"

The mother told the angel she chose none of those times.

"Let me have him back when as a little boy, in a moment of anger, he doubled up his fists and shook them at me and said, 'I hate you! I hate you!' Then in a little while his anger subsided and he came back to me, his dirty little face stained with tears, and put his arms around me. 'Momma, I'm sorry I was so naughty. I'll never be bad again; I love you with all my heart.'

Let me have him back then," the mother sobbed, "I never loved him more than at that moment when he changed his attitude and came back to me."

Jesus said this is how God feels about us. Even more important he forgives. Thus the angels rejoice over one lost who is found.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, September 14**
Numbers 21:4-9; Philippians 2:6-11; John 3:13-17
- Tuesday, September 15**
1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-31; John 19:25-27 or Luke 2:33-35
- Wednesday, September 16**
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13; Luke 7:31-35
- Thursday, September 17**
1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 7:36-50
- Friday, September 18**
1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 8:1-3
- Saturday, September 19**
1 Corinthians 15:35-37, 42-49; Luke 8:4-15



CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGES

1998, 1999 & 2000

FATIMA, GARABANDAL, LOURDES, PARIS, LISIEUX, NEVERS, LA SALETTE, PADUA, VENICE, FLORENCE, PISA, ASSISI, ROME, LORETO, PADRE PIO, MEDJUGORJE, JERUSALEM, BETHLEHEM, GALILEE AND NAZARETH

are some of the places offered in itineraries ranging from 9 to 28 days. In 2000 many feature the Holy Year in Rome and the Oberammergau Passion Plays. A tour chaplain accompanies your group and daily Mass is scheduled. Low prices. Group discounts available. These features and careful planning with the interests of you, the Catholic traveler, in mind assure an exciting and spiritually rewarding journey.

Call today for your free, all-new color brochure

SPIRIT TOURS + 1-800-995-4346

America's Most Experienced Catholic Travel Center

HART MONUMENT COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)
(716) 865-6746

Looking for Quality Printing?

Call us for...
Brochures & Newsletters

Through a special arrangement between Wayuga Press and the Catholic Courier Graphic's Department, you can now get quality, affordable typesetting and printing.

Give us a call for your next job!
COURIER GRAPHICS • 716-328-4340
WAYUGA PRESS • 315-754-6229