

British bishops take backward steps

Two months ago the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales released an important document on eucharistic sharing entitled, "One Bread One Body." It followed an exhortation by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George L. Carey, to rethink some traditional reservations about intercommunion. The British bishops' answer, however, seems to have taken a few steps backward rather than forward.

As the London *Tablet* pointed out in its editorial of Oct. 3, the new norms for intercommunion are more restrictive than those of a 1993 Directory on ecumenism, as well as the guidelines laid down by the Catholic bishops of Germany, Southern Africa and Brisbane, Australia. These allow for eucharistic sharing in "exceptional cases," which may be regular, even weekly, occurrences.

By contrast, "One Bread One Body" restricts the intercommunion to a "unique occasion," including, for example, persecution or imprisonment. It also removes discretionary decisions from parish priests. The 1993 Directory had allowed "Catholic ministers" to "judge individual cases and administer these sacraments" in accordance with "general norms" established by the diocesan bishop.

This latest document forbids priests from doing so, except where there is dan-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ger of death. Otherwise, every individual case must be brought before the bishop or his delegate a requirement that could cause a delay of several days or even weeks.

In practice, however, eucharistic sharing goes on all the time, not only in the British Isles, but in the United States and many other parts of the church.

"One Bread One Body" is divided into three sections, plus an introduction in which the bishops express their repentance for the continued divisions within the Body of Christ and ask forgiveness for any responsibility on their part.

The first section, "Our Catholic Faith," presents a theological overview of the Eucharist, connecting it with the mystery of the church itself. It echoes the teaching of Vatican II that Catholic and non-Catholic

Christians are, to one degree or another, in communion with one another. But they emphasize that such communion is "imperfect."

The bishops insist, therefore, that the ordinary meaning of receiving Communion at Mass is that "we are in full communion with the Catholic Church, united with the bishop of this local community and with the Pope."

They make the further point that "only a validly ordained priest ... brings into being the sacrament of the Eucharist," and declare that ordained ministers of other churches "rooted in the Reformation" cannot be regarded as validly ordained. This would mean that even the Archbishop of Canterbury is to be regarded as a lay person, not a priest, an ecumenically appalling inference when explicitly spelled out. But that is exactly what is implied.

Again by inference, the British bishops place such fellow Christians as the Archbishop of Canterbury in the same category as catechumens, those in mortal sin and Catholic children who have not yet received First Communion.

The bishops hold out to such Christians the opportunity for a "spiritual communion," which is about as satisfying as a "spiritual dinner" would be.

The second section, "Together yet Di-

vided," acknowledges the "pain" that attends upon our inability to share the Eucharist with one another. But "taking the pain away does not in itself bring healing; it can sometimes dull our sense of the need for serious medical attention."

The implication here again is unfavorable to Christians not in full communion with Rome. They must somehow stop the behavior responsible for their poor health, seek "medical attention," and experience for the first time the perfect health that Catholics alone enjoy.

The last section, "General Norms," lays out various regulations, two of which have already been mentioned above. Only a diocesan bishop or his delegate may grant permission for intercommunion on the occasion of a baptism, confirmation, first Communion, marriage or ordination.

An invitation to eucharistic sharing, even under these limited circumstances, must never be made by the priest. The initiative must always be the non-Catholic's. But how often does a person in real life invite herself or himself to dinner?

In the meantime, Catholics and non-Catholics alike are, as *The Tablet* put it, voting with their feet. Forward, not backward.

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

Take the Son, gain all

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 24:37-44. (R1) Isaiah 2:1-5. (R2) Romans 13:11-14.

Advent is a time to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Christ's birth. To enable us to do this, the church turns our hearts and minds to the prophecies of Isaiah to learn what God has done, what he wants and our role is in his plan.

Scientists have made unsuccessful efforts to communicate with the universe. But God has already communicated with us some 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem. Isaiah wrote: "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established ... nations shall stream toward it; ... that God may instruct us in his ways and we may walk in his paths. For from Zion shall go forth instruction."

Isaiah knew God would reveal himself to his people. God would not allow them to wander forever in the darkness of unknowing. When he chose to do this, he wrapped himself in human flesh. As man, he revealed the nature and the power of God, and his purpose for us.

Then Isaiah tells us what God wants of us. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

for war again."

Virgil wrote:

"When right and wrong are confused, wars prevail and all manner of crimes. The plough receives no honor; the fields run to weed, because the farmers have gone to serve as soldiers, and the curved sickles are turned into the rigid sword."

Some would say that it is human nature to turn from peace to war, from love to hate, from sharing to greed.

What God wants is a new creation.

There was a Burma Shave sign once: God's plan had a happy beginning, But man spoiled his chance by sinning.

We trust that the story Will end in God's glory, But at present, the wrong side's winning.

It seems today that the wrong side is winning. But God wants all people on this earth to live in peace and harmony. He wants every child to be born into a world of love and caring. He wants people with pure hearts and pure motives. God wants a new human creation.

Advent reminds us of our role in God's plan. "Let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Theologians use a fancy phrase, "realized eschatology." It simply means to live our lives as if Christ's kingdom were already established. It is to live with pure and loving hearts harboring no anger, no lust, no greed. To be committed to rooting out injustice wherever it is found, to the end that someday God's plan will be realized. To achieve this we must invite the Lord of Advent into our lives.

A wealthy man enjoyed collecting fine art from all over the world. He had a son. The son grew to enjoy art, and he and his father spent many pleasant years collecting paintings for their mansion.

When war broke out, the son was killed in action trying to save a fallen comrade, who was an artist. In gratitude he painted the son and gave the painting to the father. The old man cherished it.

When the father died, art collectors crowded the mansion to bid on his great

collection. The picture of his son was the first piece auctioned. The collectors grumbled; they were there to bid on real art. Only one man bid on the son's picture. A friend. Suddenly, the bidding was closed. The collectors were furious. Why? The auctioneer said the father's will stated that whoever takes the son gets it all.

That's what Advent says: Who takes the Son gets all.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, November 30
Romans 10:9-18; Matthew 4:18-22

Tuesday, December 1
Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 10:21-24

Wednesday, December 2
Isaiah 25:6-10; Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday, December 3
Isaiah 26:1-6; Matthew 7:21,24-27

Friday, December 4
Isaiah 29:17-24; Matthew 9:27-31

Saturday, December 5
Isaiah 30:19-21,23-26; Matthew 9:35-10:1,6-8

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