

## COLUMNISTS

## Church regresses from Christian unity

Although ecumenical words and gestures still abound, we may be worse off ecumenically than at any time since the Second Vatican Council. The two benchmark issues are the mutual recognition of ordained ministries and eucharistic sharing, or intercommunion.

Bilateral consultations (that is, post-conciliar meetings of bishops, other pastoral leaders, and theologians representing the various Christian churches) have urged the respective churches to recognize one another's ordained ministries and to allow eucharistic sharing. When these reports were submitted to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, they were placed, figuratively, in the "For Information" box, not the "For Action" box.

Not only has there been no official progress on these two issues since the council, but we have actually gone backwards. The gap is widening between official words and gestures, on the one hand, and official policy and unofficial practice, on the other.

No words and gestures could have been more moving than those of Pope John Paul II on the 1,400th anniversary of St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to Britain, launched by Pope Gregory the Great in 596.

At a joint vesper service at the Church



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

of St. Gregory the Great in Rome, Dec. 5, 1996, the pope reminded the Archbishop of Canterbury, George L. Carey, and other Anglican bishops attending, of the "reality of our brotherhood," of our "real though not yet full communion," and of "how much unites us." He prayed for "the courage to work ever more assiduously to overcome our remaining divisions."

The pope also reiterated his appeal, made in his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, for dialogue on ways of improving the manner in which the papal office is exercised, so that "it will be accepted by all Christians as a service of love."

But far more significant than the pope's warm words were his remarkable ecumenical gestures on that occasion. He invited the archbishop of Canterbury and the other Anglican bishops to join him in

the procession into the Church of St. Gregory the Great in full episcopal vestments, and to do so in the company of their wives. This was in striking contrast to the service conducted in the same church seven years earlier with the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, who was not invited to vest in full episcopal regalia.

In connection with the same recent visit, the pope presented Archbishop Carey with a pectoral cross worn by bishops.

These gestures were in striking contrast to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's commentary on the pope's *motu proprio* of last July, *Ad tuendam fidem* (which imposed unspecified canonical penalties for theological dissent). The commentary listed Pope Leo XIII's 1896 declaration that Anglican orders are null and void among the church's unchanging dogmatic teaching, such that any dissent is tantamount to heresy and punishable by a "just penalty."

Its inclusion in the commentary, on the eve of the Lambeth Conference, surprised and dismayed not only the archbishop of Canterbury but also the cardinal-archbishop of Westminster, Basil Hume, and the Vatican's chief ecumenical officer, Cardinal Edward Cassidy. The latter had been informed of the matter two hours before the commentary was released. The former had received no advance notice.

If, in fact, Anglican orders are sham sacraments, as the archbishop of Dublin has characterized them, the Archbishop of Canterbury is a lay person, not a priest, much less a bishop. But if he is not a bishop, why did Pope John Paul II give him a pectoral cross and invite him to don full episcopal vestments to process with him?

And if we are more conscious of "our brotherhood" and of what unites us, as the pope pointed out, why are we retreating from progress made in intercommunion? Why are we making it more difficult for Catholic and non-Catholic Christians to share in the Eucharist?

At the same time, however, many Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants have been voting with their feet against official rules and regulations on intercommunion. Indeed, there is an ever-widening gap between the church's official policies, on the one hand, and the actual practice of the church's rank-and-file, on the other, and even, it seems, of the Holy Father himself, at least in the matter of the pectoral cross and the vesper procession.

These are just a few thoughts for reflection during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

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

## Are we caught up in Jesus' vision?

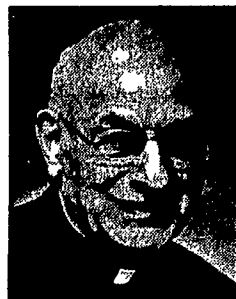
**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Matthew 4:12-23. (R1) Isaiah 8:23-9:3. (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17.

Jim Egan worked at the West Coast Computer Fair in 1977. His job was to help customers decorate their booths. Industry shows are the cheapest way to reach customers, but some entrepreneurs hardly have enough to rent a booth, let alone pay for the decorations.

A couple of long-haired kids approached Egan for some chrome displays to make their booth "look flashy." Egan said his displays were for rent. The kids said they were short of cash, but perhaps Egan might like some stock in their new company. Egan had many such offers in the past so he said he'd accept only hard cash. So Steve Wozniak and Steven Jobs did without the chrome, fixed up their booth, and kept the stock in Apple Computer to themselves. Presumably, Egan is still decorating booths for hard cash. Sometimes it is a good thing to catch someone else's dream.

The Gospel is the story of men and women who got close enough to Jesus to catch his dream. Doesn't it amaze you how quickly the disciples left their fishing nets to follow Jesus?

Matthew tells us that Jesus was in Ca-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

pernaum. Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, fishing.

"Follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed him. Going on, he saw another set of brothers, James and John, and their father mending their nets; and he called them. Immediately, they also left their trade and their father, and followed Jesus.

Doesn't that seem rather abrupt to you? No discussion. Could we not say that these four fishermen acted rather impulsively? Evidently, they were caught up in Jesus' dream.

First of all, there had to be something very impressive about Jesus for them to act so rapidly. Ordinary run-of-the-mill peo-

ple don't sweep us off our feet that quickly. Those four fishermen — Simon, Andrew, James and John — got excited when they met Jesus. They left their families, jobs, everything important to them for an uncertain future as his disciples. There had to be something very special about Jesus.

There also had to be something very special about Jesus' dream. He went about proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom. What was there about that kingdom that got these fishermen so excited? Why don't we get just as excited?

Sometimes I think that the Gospel of the kingdom has been so poorly presented that we have never been captured by its attractiveness and its power.

Jesus had a vision for the world, a dream, a picture of how life is intended to be. He saw a world where God would rule in every heart, where there would be peace and justice and joy. A world of love and harmony and unity. Couldn't you get excited about such a world — a world where God reigned, a world without murder, without broken families or drug addiction, a world without fear or poverty or disease?

The disciples got excited. They got especially excited about the role they would

play in bringing about the realization of Jesus' dream. They knew about fishing for fish. But Jesus was calling them to something far more significant — to fish for men, to introduce men and women into this kingdom of love and peace and joy, to change the world. Christ is still looking for co-workers — men and women who will be fishers of men, who will introduce others into his kingdom. Can he count on us?

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, January 25

Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22;  
Mark 16:15-18

Tuesday, January 26

2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5;  
Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday, January 27

Hebrews 10:11-18; Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 28

Hebrews 10:19-25; Mark 4:21-25

Friday, January 29

Hebrews 10:32-39; Mark 4:26-34

Saturday, January 30

Hebrews 11:1-2,8-19; Mark 4:35-41



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