

COLUMNISTS

Document challenges Catholics, Anglicans

The Gift of Authority, an agreed statement issued May 12 by the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, acknowledges the exercise of authority can be oppressive and destructive ... even when churches uncritically adopt certain patterns of authority.

It also points out that, in spite of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the church has sometimes forgotten, neglected, and even abused elements of the church's communion of faith and life as well as the tradition entrusted to it.

Christians need to retrieve forgotten elements, and to sift out what is seen as inadequate or even misleading in a new context. The statement calls this re-reception. The process does not require uniformity of expression and formulation, nor is the task of discerning and communicating the tradition limited to the hierarchy. The people of God is the bearer of the living tradition, because the Holy Spirit works through all members of the community, in particular its theologians.

Communicating, receiving and re-receiving the tradition involves all the baptized — bishops, clergy, and lay people. Their common grasp of the faith is known as the *sensus fidelium*. Those who exercise episcopal (oversight) must not be separated from the symphony of the



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

whole people of God. They need to be alert to the *sensus fidelium*, in which they share, if they are to be made aware when something is needed for the community's well-being and mission or when some element of the tradition needs to be received in a fresh way.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics can agree in principle on all of the above, the statement observes, but need to make a deliberate effort to retrieve this shared understanding. They can do so by explicitly recognizing in one another's community elements of the apostolic tradition that they may have rejected, forgotten, or not yet fully understood: After all, when Christians do not agree about the Gospel, their preaching of it is less effective. If we are not one in faith, we cannot be one in life. And we cannot be a sign of the re-

conciliation that Christ has won for all.

The challenge and responsibility of those in pastoral leadership positions is to exercise their ministry and their authority in a manner that promotes unity and that enriches rather than diminishes the legitimate diversity of local churches.

No local church, however, is self-sufficient. The universal church is a communion of local churches. This communion is manifested especially through synods and councils at all levels. Through these events each local church can learn from other local churches, and all are able to teach in solidarity with one another.

That teaching, whether by synods, councils, or individual bishops, must always be the product of consultation with the faithful. Through such consultation the bishops, individually and collectively, are able to discern and articulate the *sensus fidelium* present in both the local churches and in the wider communion.

Because human weakness and sin can distort the human structuring of authority, loyal criticism and reforms are sometimes needed. Moreover, the exercise of authority must always respect conscience, because the divine work of salvation affirms human freedom.

The agreed statement ends with a practical charge to each church. Anglicans

should ask themselves, for example, how decisions affecting the whole church could be made binding upon all, and to what extent decisions taken unilaterally at local levels concerning the whole church weaken that communion of faith and life.

Roman Catholics, in their turn, should ask themselves if there is sufficient consultation between the bishop of Rome and the local churches prior to important decisions affecting local churches or the whole church, whether a variety of legitimate theological opinion is taken into account, and whether the structures and procedures of the Roman Curia adequately respect the exercise of episcopal ministry at other levels.

The statement recommends, finally, that Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops find new ways of cooperating in the exercise of their respective ministries. They might meet regularly, teach and act together on faith and morals, and offer corporate witness in the public sphere on issues affecting the common good.

The Anglican Communion and many Roman Catholics will surely welcome this document. The question is: Will it pass muster in the Vatican?

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

Cross of Jesus keeps us steady

Sunday of the Year (Aug. 8): (R3) Matthew 14:22-33. (R1) 1 Kings 19:11-13. (R2) Romans 9:1-5.

After the miracle of the loaves and the fish, the disciples get into their boat and precede him to the other side, to Capernaum.

He insisted, because after the miracle of the loaves, the people wanted to make Jesus king by force. As things stood at that time, such a move would have fomented a revolution against Rome and needless bloodshed. To make matters worse, the disciples were siding with the people. So, Jesus made them get into a boat and precede him to the other side of the lake. He'd handle this problem by himself.

How did he handle it? "He went up on the mountain by himself to pray." Whenever Jesus had a problem, he prayed to his heavenly Father. He prayed against the temptation of letting people make him a king. He prayed, too, for both the people and his own disciples who were still so earthbound, as to conceive the messianic kingdom as a political one!

While Jesus prayed, his disciples were in trouble. One of those sudden storms so frequent on the Lake of Galilee arose. The disciples couldn't reach land. So at 3 a.m. Jesus came to them, walking on the



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

water.

Isn't that typical of Jesus? Always, whenever the winds of trouble or temptation, the waves of sorrow or pain threaten to inundate us, Jesus is there! He says to us, "Do not be afraid. Take courage. It is I! Get hold of yourselves."

And their reaction? Peter typically acts on impulse, he leaps before he looks. But because his heart was in the right place, he made out all right.

A saint is not someone who never falls. A saint is somebody who never stays down. A saint is a sinner who keeps trying.

Of Blessed Katharine Drexel it was said, "She kept on going and she kept on trying. She admitted her defeats, but was not vanquished by them. Rather, she rose up and, relying on the grace of God, tried

again for victory."

Another thing about Peter: When he kept his focus on Jesus, he could do the impossible, like walking on water. But when he took his gaze off Jesus and focused on the winds and the waves, he began to sink. Too often we focus on our problems. But worse, we try to solve them by depending on our own resources.

Jesus saved Peter and calmed the storm. He said to Peter, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" So in the journey on the sea of life, we must never be afraid, for we are never alone. We must never magnify problems or focus on them, for there is no problem Jesus cannot solve easily. Feeding 15,000 was nothing to Jesus; nor a violent sea storm. He is all-powerful; all we need is faith.

St. Francis de Sales had noticed a custom of the country districts in which he lived. He had often noticed a farm servant going across a farmyard to draw water at the well; he also noticed that, before she lifted the brimming pail, the girl always put a piece of wood into it. One day he went out to the girl and asked her, "Why do you do that?"

She looked surprised and answered, "Why? To keep the water from spilling ... to keep it steady!"

Writing to a friend later on the bishop told this story and then added: "So when your heart is distressed and agitated, put the Cross into the center of your heart, to keep it steady!" In every time of storm and stress the presence of Jesus and the love that flows from the cross bring peace and serenity and calm.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, August 9

Deuteronomy 10:12-22;

Matthew 17:22-27

Tuesday, August 10

2 Corinthians 9:6-10; John 12:24-26.

Wednesday, August 11

Deuteronomy 34:1-12;

Matthew 18:15-20.

Thursday, August 12

Joshua 3:7-10, 11, 13-17

Matthew 18:21-19:1

Friday, August 13

Joshua 24:1-13; Matthew 19:3-12

Saturday, August 14

Joshua 24:14-29; Matthew 19:13-15

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Kids Chronicle Answers from page 12

1. New, 2. Old, 3. Old, 4. New, 5. New,
6. Old, 7. New, 8. New, 9. Old,
10. Old, 11. New, 12. Old

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