

COLUMNISTS

Anglicanism's lack of central authority

One occasionally hears an apologist for Roman Catholicism refer disparagingly to Anglicanism as an example of what the Catholic Church might look like if it lacked a strong central authority. The assumption bears closer analysis.

In a recent issue of *The Tablet*, a lay-edited Catholic periodical published in London, there is an article by Rowan Williams, the Anglican archbishop of Wales, entitled, "Our differences need not destroy us" (4-8-00). The article provides a follow-up reflection on the meeting of Anglican primates in Oporto, Portugal, at the end of March.

Underlying the discussions was a widespread concern over the highly irregular consecration of two bishops in Singapore in late January. Without warning, the head of the Anglican province of Rwanda had consecrated two U.S. Episcopal priests, one under his own authority and the other under that of the Anglican province of Southeast Asia.

Both of the new bishops hope to minister to Episcopalians alienated from their church's leadership on such issues as the ordination of women and homosexuality. Although a number of congregations have already requested their services, the ordaining Rwandan bishop had asked that no action be taken until



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

after the primates' meeting in Oporto.

Some wondered if the primates might actually uphold and validate the consecrations, given the numerical majority of the African and Asian archbishops who had supported a controversial statement against homosexuality at the Lambeth Conference two years earlier. But that did not happen.

One influential African archbishop declared that the discussion had been largely a waste of time for him, given the fact that his country is embroiled in a civil war, the effects of the AIDS epidemic, and a severe debt crisis. "Some of us," he said, poker-faced, "are tired of sex."

While a few progressive prelates pressed for a condemnation of the Singapore consecrations, the consensus was that the initial response by George

Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury, had said most of what needed to be said, namely, that it was an action that had damaged the communion and that its haste and secrecy had sent some very unhelpful messages about the proper processes of scrutiny and discernment for episcopal appointments.

Central to the discussion at Oporto was the clear statement that a province only excludes itself from the Anglican Communion by public and formal rejection of the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral, adopted in 1888, namely, the supremacy of Scripture in doctrinal matters, the two sacraments instituted by Christ (baptism and Eucharist), the Nicene and Apostles' creeds as rules of faith, and the historic episcopate.

Archbishop Williams pointed out that, while there can be differences of interpretation on one or another element, what cannot be abandoned is this "grammar" of Anglicanism. There can still be debates, even sharply divisive ones, on specific issues like homosexuality, but they need not lead to formal breaks in communion. The emphasis must remain on the essentials, leaving room for the continued pursuit of "a common agenda on most issues of mission and of justice, where the most deeply felt concerns of

practically all the primates actually cluster."

"In the last analysis," he concluded, "Anglicanism has always been wary of a central executive power. It has worked on the assumption that a common ecclesial language and theological method take you a long way, and its authority has been a mixture of authoritative texts and a process of rather untidy corporate interpretation of them."

It is this sort of approach that feeds the cynicism and inflates the triumphalism of Anglicanism's Roman Catholic detractors. But what is the alternative?

Excommunication of theologians? Peremptory removal of bishops? Summary rejection of the careful work of national episcopal conferences? Withdrawal of authority from international committees of competent scholars, charged by the bishops themselves with preparing translations of Scripture and of liturgical texts? The continued appointment of bishops by a secretive and closed process?

Anglicanism may have its problems, but a highly centralized authority that brooks no challenge isn't the solution.

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

Bear fruit through Christ, the true vine

Fifth Sunday of Easter (May 21): (R3) John 15:1-8; (R1) Acts 9:26-31; (R2) 1 John 3:18-24.

Again a reminder to "Save Our Sunday." Save it for God and for family by keeping the Sunday morning until noon free from games, shopping, etc.

Listen to what Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator*: "If keeping the seventh day were only a human institution, it would be the best method that could have been thought of for the polishing and civilizing of mankind."

Edwin Markham in his great poem, "The Man with the Hoe," depicts what happens to man when Sunday rest and worship are abolished.

Who made him dead to rapture and despair,

A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,

Stolid, stunned, a brother to the ox?

Markham answers that it was unremitting toil that left no time to worship, to rest, to think, to pray, to hope.

Volumes could be written on why we should at least once a week worship God and rest. Common sense tells us that a bow always strung soon loses its snap. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

boy," could be amplified to say, "It can make Jack's dad a neurotic or psychotic."

Our blessed Lord said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all the other things that men labor and sweat for will be given you besides."

It is just idiotic stupidity and satanic selfishness to deny God one morning a week for Church and for family. Man's body needs it, man's soul needs it, and man needs it to remain a man.

Now let us get to the Sunday readings.

Our Lord's hearers were often farmers or shepherds. Thus last Sunday, Jesus spoke of himself as "the good shepherd." This Sunday he calls himself "the true vine." The key words are "good" and "true".

Israel was the vine of God. In fact, a

golden vine was embossed on the temple door to signify Israel's relationship to God. The prophets often spoke of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord but only to berate her for bearing no fruit. Jesus implied the same thing by calling himself "the true vine." Israel was not a true vine. Clinging to her would not save. Salvation would be found only by union with the true vine, Jesus.

"Apart from me" — not "without me," for Jesus is always with us; but we can cut ourselves off from him.

"Apart from me you can do nothing" — not you will do little, but nothing, just as a branch separated from its vine can produce nothing. So Jesus repeatedly says, "Live in me," then you will produce much fruit.

Grapevines need pruning to make them more fruitful. God sometimes prunes us with afflictions, makes us ready for his word as ploughing makes the soil ready for the seed. However, our blessings far outweigh our afflictions, just as the grapevine gets more sunshine than showers.

The grapevine is the most perfect of plants. It has no thorns. It does not harm whatever it clings to, but provides shade and shelter. Even its leaves are edible.

We, too, should never harm, should seek to give rather than to receive. We should not produce thorns — piercing words and hurting actions. We should be a staff, a companion, a shelter, a shoulder for others.

Lastly, we should radiate joy, for the fruit of the vine is the grape; the fruit of the grape is wine; and wine gives joy to the heart of man, especially when it is changed into the blood of Christ.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 22

Acts 14:5-18; John 14:21-26

Tuesday, May 23

Acts 14:19-28; John 14:27-31

Wednesday, May 24

Acts 15:1-6; John 15:1-8

Thursday, May 25

Acts 15:7-21; John 15:9-11

Friday, May 26

Acts 15:22-31; John 15:12-17

Saturday, May 27

Acts 16:1-10; John 15:18-21



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