

COLUMNISTS

Salvation document could be more positive

For the most part, Vatican documents attract little attention beyond a narrow circle of bishops, chancery types and theologians. However, many rank-and-file Catholics and some of their non-Catholic friends seem to have taken special notice of last month's declaration on salvation outside the church, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is entitled *Dominus Iesus* (full text in *Origins*, 9/14/00).

Their reaction has been one of confusion and embarrassment. They have been asking, "Is the Catholic Church going backwards? What about Vatican II?"

Quoted fragments created the impression that the pope himself (not just the impersonal "Vatican") was reverting to the triumphalism of the pre-Vatican II era when Catholics claimed, without qualification, to be "the one, true Church," when the salvation of non-Christians was regarded as chancy at best.

This new document can be divided, for purposes of analysis, into two parts. The first pertains to the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions; the second, to the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches. (Examination of the second part will be reserved for next



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

week's column.)

In brief, the document could conceivably have been written on the day after the Second Vatican Council adjourned in December 1965. It is not simply a throwback to the pre-Vatican II era. It takes into account the teaching of the council, although interpreted narrowly rather than broadly.

Citing the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, it reaffirms the principle that "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard to the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people" (n. 2).

On the other hand, the declaration either ignores some of the major post-conciliar developments in inter-faith dialogue or looks askance at efforts in that direction, especially of Asian Catholic theologians and their counterparts elsewhere who have been seeking paths to a more fruitful dialogue between the church and the other world religions.

Instead of encouraging these developments, the declaration adopts a negative, judgmental tone. This approach is consistent, however, with a recent pattern of interventions by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dramatized by the excommunication of an aged Sri Lankan theologian, Tissa Balasuriya, in 1997 (lifted the following year) and accentuated by the heavy-handed punishment of Jacques Dupuis, a Jesuit professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, removed from his teaching position on the eve of retirement.

Dominus Iesus characterizes the approaches of such theologians as "relativistic," that is, as effectively denying the uniqueness of our salvation in Jesus Christ and the completeness of his revelation, and placing all religions on a more or less equal plane.

To be sure, some few theologians have proposed in recent years that Christ is a

cosmic, universal reality, of which Jesus of Nazareth is only one historical manifestation. The declaration justifiably challenges that view, insisting that there is "a personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth."

That said, the document might still have been more positive in tone, not only with regard to the interfaith initiatives of various Catholic theologians but about the salvific role of non-Christian religions themselves. Instead, the declaration insists that these religions have "beliefs," but no "faith" in the theological sense of the word.

While they do not have "Christian" faith, faith itself is not limited to Christians. If one truly believes in God, it is because that person somehow received the gift of faith from God, even if it has no explicit reference to Jesus Christ.

It is possible for a Christian to have faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the Redeemer of all humankind, and to affirm that the love and saving will of God extend to all the peoples of the world.

The Second Vatican Council was not alone in saying so. When one actually reads the text, so does *Dominus Iesus*.

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

God sees married couple as one person, inseparable

27th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 8): (R3) Mark 10:2-16; (R1) Genesis 2:18-24; (R2) Hebrews 2:9-11.

Last Sunday, Oct. 1, was Respect Life Sunday. This event will close with a Eucharistic Prayer Vigil on Monday, Oct. 9, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

The closing event will feature a Solemn Mass at 12 noon on Oct. 9. The keynote speaker for the day will be Mother Angelica of Eternal Word Television Network.

A triduum of prayer and fasting Oct. 7-9 is requested to bring about the worldwide conversion of souls and a permanent end to abortion. Mother Teresa, before her death, felt that prayer is the answer to all the world's problems.

Please join this worldwide crusade of prayer and fasting. From the day you read this article, try to attend daily Mass; say the rosary and chaplet of divine mercy; pray and fast for worldwide conversion and a permanent end to abortion; sponsor eucharistic adoration and holy hours; organize rallies and rosaries and sponsor pro-life speakers. Remember: "The salvation of many depends on the actions of a few."



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Sunday's Gospel talks about marriage. The Bible says that when two people promise God to stay together forever, those two people become like one person in God's eyes.

If I remove the staple holding two pieces of paper together, they become two separate sheets again. However, if I took those two pieces of paper and glued them together, I couldn't separate them without tearing them. In marriage God is like the glue that holds a couple together. Once joined by God, a couple cannot be easily separated. Jesus said, "Let no man separate what God has joined."

Moses permitted divorce to prevent the murder of unwanted wives. In a patriarchal society, the father was the ab-

solute head of the family. A man could execute with impunity a displeasing wife and marry another. Moses permitted divorce to prevent murder. However, Jesus abolished this concession so unfair to women. Divorce has been the edge of the wedge prying open the door to artificial contraception and abortion.

Our moral and domestic ills will be solved only by a return to the indissolubility of marriage as established by God himself.

When Henry Ford and his wife were celebrating their golden wedding anniversary, a reporter asked the usual question: "To what do you attribute your fifty years of successful married life?"

Ford, in his usual crisp manner, answered, "The formula is the same formula I have always used in making cars, namely, just stick to one model."

That's the mind-set every man and woman should have when they enter marriage: a commitment till death. If they do, their marriage will be blessed by God!

A woman once asked me, "Father, do you know why God created woman?"

I knew she had an answer, so I said, "Why?"

She said, "After He created man, God

looked at him and exclaimed, 'Good heavens, he'll never make it alone.' So He created woman."

I laughed and said, "I thought you were going to say, 'After creating man, God said, 'I can do better than that,' so He created woman.'"

Washington Irving put it: "She could light in this world of sin and pain, the lamp of love and joy again."

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

Daily Readings

Monday, October 9

Galatians 1:6-12; Luke 10:25-37

Tuesday, October 10

Galatians 1:13-24; Luke 10:38-42

Wednesday, October 11

Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14; Luke 11:1-4

Thursday, October 12

Galatians 3:1-5; Luke 11:5-13

Friday, October 13

Galatians 3:7-14; Luke 11:15-26

Saturday, October 14

Galatians 3:22-29; Luke 11:27-28

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October 11th, 7 pm

"Understanding Today's Housing Options"
October 18th, 7 pm

"Making Sense of Legal & Financial Options"
October 25th, 7 pm

"Why Not? Finding a Job at 57, 67 or 77"
October 25th, 7 pm

(The above 2 seminars given same date, same time)

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