

COLUMNISTS

'Dominus Iesus' projects a narrow view

If the confusion and controversy surrounding the recent Vatican document on salvation outside the church teaches us anything, it is that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith should have its documents written by those who, while embracing the basic teachings on the essentials of faith, have a breadth of theological vision and ecumenical experience, and an aversion for polemics.

The principal problem with *Dominus Iesus* is less with its content than its tone and narrowness. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said as much in his own public reaction to the document.

"By restating the long-held view of the Roman Catholic Church on the position of other Christian churches," the Anglican primate wrote, "this document breaks no new ground. But neither does it fully reflect the deeper understanding that has been achieved through ecumenical dialogue and cooperation during the past thirty years."

First, let us be clear about what the document does not say about non-Catholic Christian churches and communities.

It does not say, as some pre-Vatican II documents did, that they are heretical bodies, clearly beyond the pale of Christ's saving grace.

Nor does it say that salvation is possi-



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ble only through membership in the Catholic Church, as the late Father Leonard Feeney, SJ, taught in the late 1940s (and for which he was eventually condemned by the Holy Office, the forerunner of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

What *Dominus Iesus* does say is no more than what the Second Vatican Council itself taught, namely, that, from the perspective of the Catholic Church, other Christian churches and ecclesial communities lack, to one degree or another, something essential to the fullness of the Body of Christ.

Some non-Catholic Christian churches and ecclesial communities may lack one or another of the seven sacraments. Even more lack the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. Most are without an episcopate in historic continuity with the Apostles.

All lack the Petrine ministry exercised by the bishop of Rome. Consequently, their communion with the church is, by degrees, "imperfect."

As ecumenical and as theologically forward-looking as Vatican II was, it did not teach that all of the Christian churches (or denominations) are equal to one another.

Contrary to widespread public impressions, therefore, *Dominus Iesus* does not repudiate the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. But it does interpret some of the teachings too narrowly.

The main example: In the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, a frequently analyzed passage touches upon the relationship between the one Church of Christ and the various churches that comprise this Body of Christ.

The conciliar passage reads: "This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him." (n. 8)

Dominus Iesus interprets this passage to mean, in effect, that the Body of Christ and the Catholic Church are one and the same reality, just as Pope Pius XII taught back in the 1940s. The other Christian bodies cannot be regarded as churches in the strict theological sense

of the word, because there is only one church, namely, the Catholic Church.

This more constricted reading had been challenged more than 13 years ago by Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, one of the council's main participants, then-president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The cardinal pointed out that, in the earlier draft of the conciliar text, the verb was "is." Thus: "This Church ... is the Catholic Church ...". The council fathers deliberately changed the verb from "is" to "subsists in" to broaden the scope of the church to include churches and ecclesial communities other than the Catholic Church.

Therefore, while it is true that, for the council, the "fullness" of the church is to be found in the Catholic Church, "it would seriously misrepresent the thought of the council to see this 'fullness' as deriving solely from juridical and canonical communion with the Bishop of Rome" (see *Origins*, 5/28/87, pp. 27-33).

In the end, with a different tone and a greater breadth of vision, *Dominus Iesus* might not have provoked such a negative reaction — inside as well as outside the Catholic Church.

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

Jesus provides challenge and inspiration

28th Sunday of the Year (Oct. 15): (R3) Mark 10:17-30; (R1) Wisdom 7:7-11; (R2) Hebrews 4:12-13.

A young man came to Jesus. "Good Teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?" He asked the right question. How good it is when a young person is truly searching.

Jesus looked right into the young man's heart. Jesus knew what this young man needed. The prescription that Jesus gave him is not a prescription Jesus would give to everyone. Jesus looked on the young man and loved him. Jesus saw his sincerity, his humility, his obvious potential. But he also saw a gaping hole in his life. "You lack one thing," Jesus said. "Go and sell what you have and give to the poor and come, follow me."

Now, that's hard. What if Jesus came to you and told you to give everything away? Most of us would ask for a second opinion. Jesus saw that the young man lacked two things: a purpose that would challenge him and a person who would inspire him.

Father John Haughey, SJ, professor of religious ethics at Loyola University, conducts annual "Ministry of Money" retreats for the super rich (those worth



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

more than \$5 million). He finds the participants often lonely, burdened and perplexed about their wealth and eager to "talk God talk" about it. After their soul-searchings, at least two participants gave away all their money because they could no longer bear wealth's weight. Haughey reminds them of St. John Chrysostom, who argued: "Wealth is by its very nature ad extra — it is meant to go out from you, like a light that dispels darkness. Once wealth is locked up within the walls of our own spirit, it becomes evil."

The young man in the Gospel needed a cause, a mission, someone whose life he could improve. Jesus wasn't telling him to give away his money because the poor needed it. He was telling the young

man to give because the young man needed to.

Jesus saw that the young man had potential. He could be a leader. But he needed a mentor, a guide. He needed someone to give him a vision about life. He needed someone to plant within his heart a dream about how life could be for himself, his family, for his community, for his world. He needed to see someone living life eternal, life abundant, life triumphant — before he could live it himself. We all need someone to show us the way, don't we?

Our standard should be Jesus. What would Jesus do? That is what we must hunger to know. We should seek the wisdom and the compassion and the insight of Jesus. Then we will win eternal life, for he is life and light and hope and victory.

The young man came searching, but he turned away sadly. The Master diagnosed his need, but it was not the diagnosis the young man had hoped for. He wanted a cure that did not require him to change either his values or his way of living. Jesus asked him to do both. Doesn't that happen in real life? God gives a glimpse of how our lives might be, but we turn away. At the time it seems like too

much trouble, it would cost us some money, it would take up our Saturdays when we could be out on the golf course. So we turn away sad.

Like the young man in the Gospel, we need a challenge and one to inspire us. You know what challenges you. But I know who will inspire you. His name is Jesus.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, October 16
Galatians 4:22-24, 26-27, 31-5:1; Luke 11:29-32

Tuesday, October 17
Galatians 5:1-6; Luke 11:37-41

Wednesday, October 18
2 Timothy 4:10-17; Luke 10:1-9

Thursday, October 19
Ephesians 1:1-10; Luke 11:47-54

Friday, October 20
Ephesians 1:11-14; Luke 12:1-7

Saturday, October 21
Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 12:8-12

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