

COLUMNISTS

Catholics hunger for competent leadership

In November 1998, Cleveland's Bishop Anthony Pilla's delivered his final address as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

He complained about Catholics who "are unwilling to accept a role for authority in the Church. They endlessly debate the decisions of their pastors on issues great and small, extraordinary and routine. They appear to live either in a past or in a future of their own imagining but not in the present in which their pastors must make these decisions."

Like many others in the church today, Bishop Pilla implied that criticisms of the way certain figures in the hierarchy do their job are tantamount to challenges against the very idea of ecclesiastical authority. But such is not the case.

Of course, there are difficult people in many parishes and dioceses who contribute far more than their fair share of weight to the crosses that hard-working pastors and bishops must normally bear.

Such individuals seem never to be satisfied and act as if no one in authority can do anything right. But they are the exception, not the rule, among Catholics who have serious concerns about the exercise of authority in the church today.

No responsible critic of ecclesiastical authority — on the left, the right or in the



essays in theology

broad center — has any wish to replace authority with disorder and chaos. On the contrary, what critics want is a church that functions more effectively. They desire only the success of the mission originally received from the Lord himself.

Of course, there are differences of opinion within the church about the nature of its missionary priorities and the best ways to achieve them. Readers of *The Wanderer*, for example, have an outlook on a whole range of issues that differs sharply from that of most readers of the *National Catholic Reporter* (not that the *NCR* is the liberal equivalent of *The Wanderer*, as its critics sometimes charge).

The question is not whether authority has a role in the church. Rather, the pertinent questions are who exercises that authority, how do they exercise it and how

were they selected in the first place?

Who among the most pastorally active members of the church really believes that, over these past two decades, the best-qualified priests have consistently been appointed to the hierarchy? Or that bishops have been selected primarily for their pastoral aptitude and experience, reflected in the confidence and respect they enjoy from the pastoral ministers of their dioceses? Or that there has been no discernible change in the quality of membership in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in comparison with the conference bodies of the 1970s and 1980s?

There was so much good in Bishop Pilla's final address to his brother bishops, particularly his strong emphasis on the importance of developing and encouraging lay leadership in the church.

Those gifted lay ministers, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, have a right to the kind of pastoral leadership they can trust and respect and which is capable of trusting and respecting them and of acting justly toward them.

This is the type of leader who sees authority as a gift to be shared, rather than a power to be coveted and then wielded to control people's thinking and behavior by threats and punishments. Such a person

ministers collaboratively, welcomes real dialogue (not the kind that simply waits for the other person to stop talking so that he can give the "right" answer), is open to ideas that differ from his own, is not quick to censor or marginalize people who may oppose him on some issues, is comfortable with, and respectful of, competent, self-assured women, and is at ease with himself, and especially with his own sexuality.

This is not the profile of a perfect and, therefore, unattainable pastoral leader. It is the profile of a healthy human being who may also have the gift of leadership.

A church that consistently recruited its bishops from such a pool of talent would not be confronting the crisis of credibility it faces today. Pollster Peter Hart reports that he has never seen such a drastic erosion of support for a leadership body in all of his years in the business.

Catholics, like any other group of healthy people, hunger for genuine authority, but reject its counterfeit, authoritarianism.

In this current, terrible crisis, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the late archbishop of Chicago, is all the more sorely missed.

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

The family should be a reflection of the Trinity

Trinity Sunday (May 26): (R3) John 3:16-18; (R1) Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9; (R2) 2 Corinthians 13:11-13.

Plato once asked the Jews, "If your God is a one God, whom did he know? Whom did he love?" Plato got no answer. So he and the rest of the Greeks rejected Jewish monotheism. They reasoned that a one god is an alone god; an alone god is a lonely god; a lonely god is an unhappy god.

Our Lord answered Plato's question: God is a Trinity: three persons, one God!

There are many illustrations used to explain the Trinity. St. Patrick used the shamrock to teach the Druids: one shamrock and three leaves; one God and three persons.

Some use other analogies: one egg, three parts — shell, albumin, yolk; one index finger, three joints. And one man can be a son, father and grandfather.

Philosophy will help us as well as illustrations. God has a mind. He knew from all eternity. He knew himself and that knowledge generated a thought of himself so perfect that it had all the being of God. But the thought is distinct from the thinker. So God's eternal thought was a distinct divine being.

We express our thoughts by words. So



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

St. John called the eternal thought of God the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word." That is, when things began to be, the Word did not begin to be, he already was — "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Sometimes we speak of the Thinker as Father and his Eternal Thought as Son.

But God has a will as well as a mind, a love as well as a thought. Whom did God love from all eternity? The Father loved his Son; and the Son loved his Father. Love is something between two; it is distinct from both lover and beloved. Moreover, love gives totally of itself. The divine lovers, Father and Son, pour into their love all their being. So we have a distinct divine being, another person.

Shakespeare spoke of "young lovers

sighing like furnace." The Latin word for "sigh" is "spiritus." And because God's love is not carnal, we call the Love of Father and Son the "Holy Spirit."

Because our God is a personal God with a mind and a will, the One God has to be a Trinity: the Thinker, the Thought and the Love.

God made us to image himself. He gave us minds and wills, so that we, too, can know and love. Our knowing is meant to lead us to loving. Our loving is meant ordinarily to lead to unity and the family. The family is meant to reflect the Trinity. The family has one name to reflect the oneness of God. But it has many persons. The father of the family is meant to reflect the fatherhood of God: to be protective and supportive. The mother is to reflect the Holy Spirit of God: to be the heart of love and unity. And the children are to reflect the Son of God: being obedient and sacrificial.

The reaction to the totalitarianism of the last few generations has led to an excessive stress of individualism. However, unchecked individualism will breed anarchy. And anarchy will spawn that detestable destroyer of all human rights: dictatorship.

The antidote is to image God. The

Trinity is a family: a community of persons living in a relationship of love. We reflect God by living in a relationship of love with each other.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, May 27**
1 Peter 1:3-9; Psalms 111:1-2, 5-6, 9-10; Mark 10:17-27
- Tuesday, May 28**
1 Peter 1:10-16; Psalms 98:14; Mark 10:28-31
- Wednesday, May 29**
1 Peter 1:18-25; Psalms 147:12-15, 19-20; Mark 10:32-45
- Thursday, May 30**
1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-12; Psalms 100:2-5; Mark 10:46-52
- Friday, May 31**
Zephaniah 3:14-18 or Romans 12:9-16B; (Ps) Isaiah 12:2-3, 4BCD, 5-6; Luke 1:39-56
- Saturday, June 1**
Jude 17:20B-25; Psalms 63:2-6; Mark 11:27-33

Watch for the Retreats & Spirituality Centers Special Edition

Publication date: June 27
Advertising deadline: June 13

This issue will give retreat and spirituality centers ample opportunity to heighten awareness of their programs. It will discuss the benefits of participating in spiritual programs and retreats and help readers determine whether such programs are right for them. In addition to the opportunity for display advertising, this issue will include a variety of services that can be provided by the Diocese of Rochester.

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