

# Ecumenism has no alternative



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

deeply, until we reach the point at which they are comparable with the convictions of the faith of the other church."

"In order to achieve such progress, much serious theological work still needs to be done by laity, clergy and bishops alike. All must be "trained in the ecumenical spirit, not least because the preparatory work achieved in our various dialogues remain largely unknown."

The church as a whole must become more familiar with these extraordinary achievements. As an indication that it has not thus far, there are still many Catholics who believe that Catholics alone celebrate true and valid sacraments, believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist or have any sense of the importance of ordained ministries in the church.

Cardinal Kasper argues that more unity has been achieved in the past 40 years, since Vatican II, "than in the four and a half centuries since the Reformation." This should encourage us, he writes, "to look to the future with hope, rather than to abandon the path" toward unity.

"Ultimately," of course, "we ourselves cannot create unity. The unity of the churches is a gift of the Spirit of God: this is why prayer for unity is the heart of the ecumenical process."

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

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, shows up regularly as a possible successor to Pope John Paul II.

He served on the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission and later co-chaired the International Commission for Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue.

His most recent book, *Leadership in the Church*, is a collection of previously untranslated essays. One, "Ecumenical Perspectives on the Future," fits well with our annual observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25).

Cardinal Kasper reminds us of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that "one sign of the working of the Holy Spirit in our times is the new reaction of all the churches to their division: namely, repentance and a yearning, and positive search for unity."

He refers to the Second World War as an even earlier factor in changing the minds and hearts of separated Christians toward one another. The shared opposition of Christians on both sides of the conflict "to an inhuman and criminal regime revealed the depths of what they had in common and showed that this was greater than what divided them."

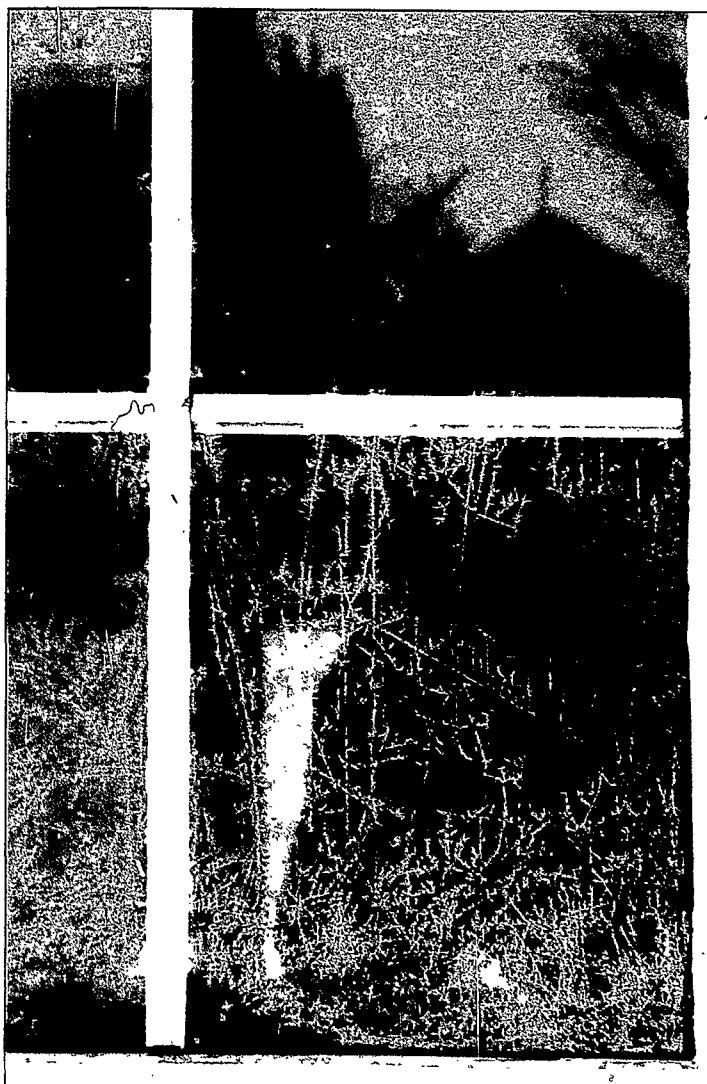
Post-war population movements also hastened the emergence of a new ec-

umenical mentality. Catholics and Protestants became neighbors and learned to understand and appreciate one another as human beings and as Christians.

Cardinal Kasper is convinced that it is now "impossible to reverse these sociological developments. ... There is no alternative to ecumenism! The question is not whether we wish to draw closer together; the only issue is how to do this in a correct and responsible manner."

He nevertheless attributes to Vatican II the greatest contributions to ecumenism. It was the council that set aside an earlier belief that the Catholic Church alone is the "one, true Church of Christ." The Body of Christ is larger than the Catholic Church, even though, according to the council, it possesses the doctrines, sacraments and ministries to be the Church of Christ.

"Ecumenical progress ... does not mean that we abandon the convictions of our own faith, but rather ... that we penetrate these more



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

very impressed with the religious practices that she has brought home from school. The second response is a sadder one, namely, the contrast between the values Monica Marsh (author of above mentioned letter) and I find in Catholic education, and the news of the impending closing of three more Catholic schools in our area. What are the priorities of our Diocese? Is Cathedral renovation and a seminary for graduate students more important than laying a firm foundation of Catholic teaching and belief for a generation of boys and girls? Sadly this appears to be the case.

Mary Ann Jensen  
Harvard Street  
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: Of the \$50 million Partners in Faith goal, \$7 million was earmarked for a Catholic-school endowment fund. By contrast, \$6 million was set aside for renovation of Sa-

cred Heart Cathedral and \$2.5 million for St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

## Which lives are valuable?

To the editor:

How can pro-life advocates commend our President for signing the "Partial Birth Abortion Ban," but remain silent about the war in Iraq? Is the death of an unborn child different from the death of a 19-year-old, or the death of a child in the streets of Baghdad? This President is using the war in Iraq as a tool for power and re-election. The President on judgment day will stand before the "Prince of Peace" with blood on his hands. All those who support him should get in line.

Brian Mulligan  
Sibley Road  
Honeoye Falls

The Catholic Courier provides space for readers to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624 or e-mail to [letters@catholiccourier.com](mailto:letters@catholiccourier.com). Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification.