

## **"One Christ: One Baptism"**

The night before Jesus died he prayed. Interestingly, however, he did not pray for himself. With his death imminent, his thoughts were with those who would remain behind. And so he prayed for his disciples. "Abba, may they be one even as we are one: You living in me and I living in you. May they be one in us."

Over the centuries we have drifted far from Jesus' dying prayer for a unified body of believers.

The Body has been torn apart by doctrinal disagreements, by self-righteousness, by hierarchical in-fighting. Caught in the middle have often been the faithful, who kept the Church alive by cooperating with the Holy Spirit when the institution had failed them.

In our time the Church is engaged in a mission: to seek the reunification of all those who profess faith in Jesus as Lord. This effort is predicated on our ability to agree, as believers, upon certain fundamental tenets. Some would feel that achieving this agreement is a simple matter. "Accept everything that I believe, and then we can have unity." These might opt for a naive fundamentalism which denies the historical development of doctrine under the guidance of the Spirit, or for a mindless traditionalism divorced from the sources. Others would feel that the issues which divide us are far too complex to allow a facile solution. Others still, like many televangelists, feel that ecumenism is a dirty word. For all their dedication to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures they reinterpret Jesus' dying call to unity.

This paper attempts to answer the question, "What must we profess if we are to maintain our Catholic identity?" It will examine areas where we might feel comfortable with compromise and others where the line must be drawn. It will be my suggestion that very few lines need to be drawn and that there are many areas for compromise.

In paragraph 92 of the Vatican Council document *The Church in the Modern World*, the Council Fathers stated, "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case."

Over the years, however, we have seen an attitude of belligerence developing toward anyone who strays from the narrow path. The line between dogmatic theology and speculative theology has disappeared. No longer do those in charge ask themselves "What can I learn from this new theological insight?" but rather,

"Where are the errors?" This has led to what some are calling a new Inquisition masterminded by people like Cardinal Ratzinger.

Church teaching changes. Of this there can be no doubt.

Jesus was Jewish; he spoke in a Jewish milieu. But the Jesuses of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and "Q" differ: they use different titles for Jesus and provide different emphases.

It is virtually undeniable that Jesus proclaimed the Reign of God and that he called God "Abba". It is likewise incontestable that the Apostles had a sense of Jesus alive beyond the grave in their own sense of forgiveness by, and solidarity with, him. Only this would account for the new-found courage which accompanied them to their deaths.

The gospels reveal, ultimately, more how Jesus was perceived than who he was. Details concerning Mary's perpetual virginity and Jesus' birth are presented and must be examined more for their intent than their content.

Paul had to translate this message for a Gentile world. Nicea and Chalcedon had to choose between varying Christologies.

Early Christian converts were told that they must be circumcised before they could become part of the community.

Infallibility and birth control were not even issues before this century, yet now they have become litmus tests of loyalty. In the past, usury was condemned and slavery defended.

I think we must ask ourselves today, "Can I adequately define myself as a Catholic Christian without this particular teaching?", and if our answer is "Yes" then we must be willing to re-examine the teaching honestly.

Morris West is not a theologian. However, in *Clowns of God* his characters suggest some serious theological questions. Many of West's characters are crying out for greater simplicity in their relationships with the Church and with their God. West's Cardinals are not able to accept a mystic for a Pope, so he is forced to abdicate. After his vision of humanity's destructive capabilities, the now-deposed Pope speaks to his friend and confidante Carl. "Everything else became petty and irrelevant: dogmatic disputes, some poor priest hopping into bed with a housemaid, whether a woman should

take a pill or carry a little card to count her lunar periods to avoid making gunfodder for the day of Armageddon..."

Later, in prayer, he speaks to God and says, "Now here's the thing I can't understand. You know it all, You made it all. But everyone sees You differently. You even let Your children kill each other; just because they each have a different description of Your face at the window!"

Avery Dulles in *A Church to Believe In* states, "It is generally recognized that not all doctrines are equally central to the faith. Not all are on the same level of importance, and not all those that may have been crucial at some time in the past are currently of crucial importance. If this is true, it behooves every church to try to distinguish between doctrines which by their very nature, or in the present historical juncture, are unconditionally binding on all members, and others which, although valid and official, are open to questioning or challenge from within the community of faith."

"An effort to simplify the doctrinal standards in force within each group could be very helpful in creating an atmosphere of freedom."

What is needed today is not theological complexity but greater simplicity. This might put a number of dogmatic theologians out of work, though undoubtedly this type of exercise will always appeal to some.

Erasmus (who could never be considered anti-intellectual) in *Hyperaspistes* (1526-7) pleads for a minimum theology: "In sacred literature there are certain sanctuaries into which God wills that we shall not penetrate further."

And it was Einstein who wrote, "I want to know how God created this world. I want to know his thoughts. The rest are details."

Some details (processions within the Trinity, the doctrine of the Assumption) may provide us with interesting thoughts for meditation, discussion or debate, but are these insights *essential*? Should they be?

Erasmus in *On the Sweet Concord of the Church* makes a plea for mutual toleration, radiant with meekness, goodwill and moderation.

In his work *Catholicism*, Richard McBrien proposes a valuable distinction between faith, theology and beliefs. He holds that faith is "personal knowledge of God," and that therefore "Christian faith...is personal knowledge of God in Christ." He defines theology as "that process by which we bring our knowledge and understanding

of God to the level of expression." And finally, "a belief is a formulation of the knowledge we have of God through faith." These three definitions may help us to clarify what is essential to our Catholic faith.

In all this, however, the fundamental norm remains: you may not contradict the intent of the Gospel. The problem is that someone must ultimately define the intent of the Gospel.

### THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUE

All honest searching for truth will converge ultimately on Jesus who is the Truth. But there are many roads to the truth. This means that the search itself is of critical importance.

Ladislaus Orsy in his *America* article "Reflections on the Text of a Canon" observed, "Non-infallible teaching is intimately connected with the church's search for a better understanding of the evangelical message. John the Evangelist reports that Jesus said at his last supper: 'I have yet many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth'(Jn.16:13). That is, the Lord did not give the full understanding of the truth to the apostles, or to the primitive Church. Rather, he set the believing community on the path toward it , where we have remained ever since, searching, struggling, articulating: faith seeking understanding."

"There is the paradox of the Church: It is endowed with divine gifts and it is subject to human limitations; it is in possession of the truth and it has to seek the truth." In this effort, the Word becomes the critique of the Church.

In his collection of talks first delivered at a Free University of Amsterdam lecture series, Edward Schillebeeckx states, "The consequence of the fact that God's creation is at the same time the beginning of the history of salvation and damnation is essentially that God has not revealed himself finally and exhaustively in Jesus Christ and therefore when it comes to talking about God, any man or woman has a right to his or her say." (On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical and Political Dimensions,1987)

### THE ECUMENICAL ISSUE

In the Broadway show, "The Music Man", Robert Preston sang, "We've got trouble right here in River City. And it starts with "T", which rhymes with "P", and that stands for POOL." Would that our problems today were so easy to define.

I believe we've got trouble right here, and it has nothing to do with pool or drugs or crime. It is not caused by drinking or racism, however bad all these evils might be. Our trouble is Division. And the worst thing about it is that there's no reason for it and that's a scandal.

What is it that is perpetuating the sin of division between the churches? One cause rests with institutions which are too large, slow moving and often unwilling to compromise. There is also a reluctance to admit the possibility that we might just be able to grow in faith and knowledge through dialogue with other denominations. Part of the problem is caused by ignorance: many don't even realize that the call to unity is a Gospel value. Others condone the separation based on some unwritten code which states, "We simply can not talk with them." And in some other cases, it is the result of a lack of motivation: the issue seems too insignificant--"After all, I have moved beyond such parochial concerns."

I believe there is a distinction between "division" and "difference". Difference suggests what is unique and individual, while Division creates a state of opposition or separation. The colors in a painting must not run together. They must remain distinct or the whole picture is blurred. The "Evanston Document" (1954) stated, "Disunity as diversity is a blessing." Differences are not the problem--division is!

The Church that has embraced such diverse people as Peter and Paul, Irenaeus and Augustine, Kung and Wojtyla, will endure. It has not, and will not, be made into a monolith.

Engaged couples used to ask the priest, "Father, how far can we go? Can we go ALL THE WAY?" Well, in our attempts to mend the wounds in the Body of Christ I believe that we *must* go all the way. Anything less perpetuates the scandal.

In 1970, The Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Church Unity said, "Before it can begin, all dialogue presupposes that an attitude of openness and sympathy between those who will take part has been brought about by more or less spontaneous contacts and exchanges in the details of ordinary daily life. Ecumenical dialogue will be conducted between participants as between equals. The most frequent form of dialogue is the one which springs up spontaneously when Christians meet one another. It is here

that the desire to get to know each other better emerges, and that necessary contacts are made for more organized meetings."

Pope John Paul II has invited reflection on the role of the papacy and its perceived status as an obstacle to the unification of the Christian Church. It seems clear from the reaction against those who have accepted this invitation that many want this to be a discussion about style rather than substance. I believe that John Paul should be taken at his word. He has asked for an honest dialogue. Let us enter in to that dialogue.

If Jesus' dying prayer was for the unity of his followers how can we continue to believe that we are really living and proclaiming the Gospel while we condone the sin of division? And if the Pope is holding out an olive branch to our Christian brothers and sisters in asking for a re-examination of the papacy, aren't we obliged to accept the invitation.

Let us consider for a moment those things which unite us.

Soderblom, a Lutheran Archbishop of Upsala in Sweden, established a "Life and Work Movement". He held that religion is what a person is and does, not so much what one believes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer seemed to echo these sentiments when he stated that service unites and doctrine divides. He felt that the Church's mission is universal and crosses denominational lines.

Father Ernst Larsen tells of one night when he was attending an A.A. meeting in Detroit. In the course of the meeting, the young man who was speaking noticed his collar and singled him out for special attention. He said to Father Larsen, "On that morning when I woke up in the gutter I knew that I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. So I cleaned myself up as best I could and went to the local Catholic Church. In Church after Church I was greeted with disgusted stares. No one seemed to care. Father," he continued, "if you're preaching in your church tomorrow, could you please tell your people to do one thing for me? Could you ask them to care? That's all, just to care!"

We Christians are united by a common call to care and to serve in the name of Jesus. And this is true in spite of our doctrinal differences. Within the Catholic Church itself there are a variety of liturgical rites (egs. the Byzantine, the Roman), and a deep respect for distinct disciplinary traditions (eg. the married clergy of the Catholic Eastern Rites). The important thing is that we maintain our unity at the same time as we celebrate our diversity.

There is a story told of a youngster who was lost in a vast corn field. Rescuers traversed the field randomly for hours without success. Finally someone suggested that the group start at one end of the field and, holding hands, cover the field systematically. They found the child eventually, but she was already dead.

The grief-stricken father cried out, "My God, why didn't we join hands sooner?"

Hopefully we as Church will not have to pay so dearly for our failure to join hands sooner.

Openness to the ecumenical movement comes through prayer, through constant reform and renewal, through studying the sources of faith and each other's traditions, through readiness to abandon our well-loved forms, through honest and patient dialogue, through the seriousness which avoids easy evasions, through love of the poorest and the least in one's own and other churches and communities, through cooperation in the service of humanity.

Dialogue, which is the essential element in our quest for unity begins with an appreciation of our differences. It ends around a table where we share the Word and break the bread as one family.

Hopefully we will join our hands soon enough.

## THE JOURNEY

It is the pilgrimage which is of ultimate significance, whether it is for truth, Jesus or communion. To stop and say "Now I have it", is, perhaps, the ultimate heresy: it is to stop short of God, and thus is a form of idolatry. And I believe this is true for an individual as well as for an institution. Neither the Church nor Scripture nor tradition can be made into an idol. They are useful only insofar as they faithfully reflect the ultimate reality which is God and lead us to God.

Augustine spoke of a restlessness which points to what is beyond. He described a loneliness which seeks resolution in communion with Another.

Psalm 62 declares that only in God will my soul be at rest, while Psalm 63 sings of the thirst we all experience for God.

The goal of life is communion, whether it be now or later, with God or others. An isolated existence, if such could even be imagined, would be a sorry state indeed. Sacraments and sacramental moments create that communion with Christ who is alive and present.

Paul declared, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." This is Communion. This is the Eucharistic presence, whether by Eucharist you mean the action, the assembly, the elements or any combination of these.

These Sacraments prefigure the eternal communion which awaits us in the Reign of God and even now determine our relationship to the body - the community. Baptism brings us into the body, the Eucharist both affirms and re-creates this relationship, Marriage is a figure of it, and Reconciliation restores it. Similarly, Orders and Confirmation establish a relationship of service to the body, and Anointing focuses the attention of the body on one who needs healing. All bespeak body and communion.

## GRACE

God loves us, and that allows us to love God. We love God because God has given us the power to love ( Rahner's supernatural existential) and therein we have finally lost ourselves in God.

If, as St. John contends, God is love, then communion (attraction) is fundamental to who we are. If the ultimate reality is love, then love, like Jesus, can be simultaneously comforting and terrifying.

True love is a decision to risk everything to be in relationship. Thus the Mystery of Trinity is considered a grace.

This Trinity is the relationship at the basis of our faith. It is source, it is model of what we are called to now and what we will eventually become.

It is the power of love between Father/Mother and Child that is so strong that it is able to radiate an Other: the Spirit. Our love is to be similarly fruitful.

The mystery of Trinity has another human dimension as well. We are one even as God, though many, is one. Jesus, who lives in all by virtue (power) of the Holy Spirit, makes us, collectively, the Offspring of God.

God has revealed himself to us as a Parent, as our Brother and as Spirit-Lord of life. Romans 8 acknowledges God as Abba, Creator and more. The implication of this is that we are all brothers and sisters.

Jesus, then, is the first of many siblings, who claims "God and I are One." There is unity here but also a distinction, because he is also son of Mary and therefore, a Child of Humanity.

This relationship of the Son of God with humanity dignifies the human being as the unique recipient of God's self-communication, and this in an ongoing fashion.

Jesus is the savior of sinful humanity. It is his life, death and resurrection which incorporates us into a community of faith and which supports our efforts at goodness. It is in this way that we are freed from that pervasive, original sin which infects our human society.

On one level it is easy to believe that Jesus died to save sinful humanity from the consequences of its sin. It is much more difficult to believe that he died for me. I need God to communicate himself to me as a loving presence to which I can then respond in love.

Ultimately, we are asked to believe that Reality is gracious.

## VIRTUE

If I let others see the Christ who is in me, then their response will strengthen my conviction that he is there. Love (and Justice, which we are told together sum up the Law) is the only true measure of my relationship with God. This is the way that others will see Jesus in me. This is the way that my life will radiate him.

In the first letter of John it is said, "To love each other is already to know and to love Christ."

Rahner affirms this when he states, "He who selflessly finds his neighbor has also found God."

This being so, I am constituted by my relationship to God, my fellows and the world.

## SIN

St. Paul stated, "I find myself doing the very things I know I shouldn't." What an excellent definition of the urge of sin within us all. We, in spite of our best intentions, often discover that it is easier to do what is wrong than to do what is right.

This can throw us into despair or it can help us realize that our salvation is God's free gift and not something we earn through our own efforts.

In Romans we hear, "God has imprisoned all in disobedience that God might have mercy on all." We must simply admit our need to allow God to surprise us with mercy.

St. Augustine proposed an even more inspiring view of our present situation when he observed, "Just as he (Christ) ascended without leaving us, so too we are already with him in heaven, although his promises have not yet been fulfilled in our bodies."(Sermon on Ascension, Mai 98)

Therefore, the question becomes, "Will anyone be condemned?" And ultimately the answer to that question has to be left in the hands of God. However, there is enough data to point us toward an answer.

Jesus reprimands those who worked in the vineyard through the heat of the day because they are envious of the owner's generosity. In Romans we are reminded that "All are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God..." These observations could legitimately lead one to conclude that we will be embarrassed by two things when we die: first, by our sinfulness, then, by the undeserved love of God which whisks away our sins in an instant.

Sin is an attitude or action of maliciousness toward God, self or others. It is a refusal to grow in relationship, or to continue on the journey. Eventually, all of us will be called to an attitude of absolute surrender to God's will. One day when we stand before the one who did not come to judge, we will be asked to judge ourselves over against the Word. And our judgement will be this: O Lord, I am not worthy!

However, if we are consistently choosing against God in this life, what make us think that we will choose for him in the next. It is possible that we could choose to condemn ourselves.

Purgation will involve the letting go of everything that is not God, of everything that separates us from him.

We will likewise not be judged by our theological precision or lack of it (except in book reviews); we will be compelled to judge ourselves on the basis of how well or how poorly we have loved.

## SERVICE

John 15 speaks of God's call and our response. The example of Jesus points us to a life lived for others. It was Adam who prayed, "It is my will, not yours," but it was Jesus, the second Adam, who said, "It is your will, not mine."

And what does this "Will" expect? That when I am hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or imprisoned, or sick, you will be there to minister to me: you will be there to be Sacrament for me.

Jesus was the One who came to serve and not to be served. Others like Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day have continued his ministry in marvelous ways. And though God himself transcends time, he has chosen to reveal himself within our history through people like this.

Cardinal Newman expresses the unique self-expression of God that each of us is in this way:

"God has created me to do him some definite service.  
He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another.  
I have my mission.  
I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.  
I am a link in a chain. A bond of connection between persons.  
He has not created me for naught.  
I shall do good - I shall do his work - I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher  
of truth in my own place while not intending it, if I do but keep his commandments.  
Therefore I will trust him.  
Whatever I am I can never be thrown away.  
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him.  
In perplexity, my perplexity may serve him  
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him.  
He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about.  
He may take away my friends.  
He may throw me among strangers.

He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me  
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still, he knows what he is about."

## CREATION

Rahner states that God and I are partners in my creation now.

Humanity is the pinnacle of creation as we know it.

Creation also has an end: a goal. This "towards-which-I-am" is God. Paul says that the end of creation is "that perfect being which is Christ come to full stature." So ultimately, we become one with Christ, then Christ becomes one with God. Who we are becoming will one day make up who God is.

So the clearest expression of the mystery of creation is that, at this very moment, we and God are involved together in an act of creation.

This is a matter of faith. It is confidence in a living presence who is "with you always until the end of the age." By becoming contemplatives in action we will develop a sensitivity to this presence based on an on-going prayer relationship (or a "listening from the heart").

## COMMUNITY

None of this happens in isolation. It happens as part of a prayer community. The Letter to the Romans speaks of the mutual help and support we owe each other (1:12). Further, that we are to be models of behavior for one another. In doing this we conquer that original, pervasive sin.

Community demands hierarchy for coordination. It points to a ministry of leadership in service to the Body. Rahner observes that "priests do not exist for the Church but for men's salvation."

This community structure is not carved in granite. It must remain flexible enough to meet changing needs, since the Church is a product of its history but is not limited by it.

The issue of Papal Primacy and succession in Apostolic Faith has been a major stumbling block on the road to unity and has been a divisive factor even within the Roman Catholic persuasion. This is by no means a new problem. Our early tradition speaks of a differentiation of roles in the Apostolic Church. Paul noted that there were "apostles, prophets and teachers", and went on to ask, "are all prophets, are all teachers?" The implicit answer is "No", for there is a distinction of roles.

Can there be legitimate disagreement over what form Papal Primacy must take: can it be a primacy of authority, or one of service, or one of honor?

It has been suggested that there are two forms of succession, both with validity. The Apostolic Succession of the hierarchy and the Didascalical Succession of the theologians.

In 1968 in Tübingen, 1360 theologians from 53 countries affirmed "a teaching office which is under the Word of God," and held that "this office must not impede the teaching office of theologians as scholars."

## THE TRUTH

There is no one interpretation that can exhaust the truth found in concepts like Father/Mother, Son, Spirit, Eucharist, Church, etc. Each interpretation tells us something of the truth but fails to exhaust it. In the end it is less important whether your Christology is ascending (man becomes God, according to Romans 1) or descending (God becomes man, according to John 1). What matters is what each theology tells us about ourselves, Jesus and the God.

In dealing with dissidents (whether they be theological or philosophical or ideological) it seems more productive to enter into dialogue with them and to ask ourselves, "What can I learn from them?", rather than to confront them in an effort to point out their errors.

Cardinal Suenens has observed that we must always be open to the criticism of the Gospel. He said, "By a strange paradox, the Church, precisely because of its insertion into the successive historical context of each age, always needs to be reformed and subjected to revision so as to remain in steadfast fidelity to its unique mission. The Church, by its nature, is completely relative to the Word of God, and this radical submission means that it must constantly return to its source. The Spirit must always free the Church from its narrowness, its compromises, and also its sins, for the Church

is made up of human beings who are always deficient and unfaithful to the ideal they are called to serve.

He continues, "Purifying criticism can come from without as well as within; it can even come from one's adversaries. The adage, 'It is right to learn from one's enemies,' applies to the Church. Criticism should...be able to come from within the Church. Moreover, criticism which is constructive in spirit, which is inspired by love of the Church and takes a form that respects the norms of the Gospel, has every right to exist in the Church...Authority owes it to itself to listen and to assume at times its proper responsibility when faced with necessary changes: it will thus avoid being relegated to rear-guard action...To accept and to foster critical examination is a part of the process of human endeavor that one ignores to one's peril."

I believe that what I believe is provisional. I, with Paul, "see now through a glass darkly." There are elements in our tradition which have been essential for a time, but must they remain so? Is the specific terminology of "transubstantiation" something to die for? Is "filioque" enough to justify our divorce from the Eastern Church? Is "Humanae Vitae" reason enough to alienate thousands of Catholics?

Presuming the good faith of those who will enter into theological dialogue, let's pursue the truth wherever it reveals itself.

I am not proposing something new here. This is something the Church has always professed, in its praxis if not in its words. Wasn't it a marvelous scene at the closing Mass of the Second Vatican Council to see men like John Courtney Murray, who had been a theological outcast, concelebrating with Pope Paul VI?

The Reign, which is central to the preaching of Jesus, is ahead of us. On our way, each is called to enter into the death-resurrection dynamic in our own lives. This involves a continuous call to growth, self-transcendence, re-evaluation, looking for the truth every step of the way.

Through prayer we are constantly reminded of our dependence on God, and through common liturgical prayer we affirm our need for each other. We do not pray for God's sake ("You have no need of our praise...") but for our own.

It is only through prayer that we can ever hope to achieve the mutual tolerance that will be necessary if reunion is to be more than a dream, for it is only in prayer that we will be able to focus on what is central and learn to tolerate disagreement in those issues which are peripheral. There is undoubtedly a hierarchy of truth. Let's be extraordinarily conservative in what we define as essential.

The last thing we need are Churches torn by doctrinal dissension. We need churches which can be signs of the unity of humanity with each other and with our God.

### MUST WE WAIT?

John Haughey, in his book *The Conspiracy of God*, speaks about the discrepancies we find in the four Gospels and observes, "...If these accounts were mere carbon copies of each other, that in itself would be proof that the Spirit had not inspired them. The mere repetition of another's understanding of Jesus hints at the absence of the Spirit, the same way that parroting the praises of another is not the same as praising."

Anthony Padovano wrote about the central doctrinal issues within Christianity and he included the following: "God is Father; Jesus is the only redeemer that man has; Jesus is God's only begotten Son; in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us in a real way as we break bread in memory of him and in fidelity to the community spirit essential to this celebration; Jesus lived again after his burial; no man is justified in giving up hope, even in the presence of death." Padovano said that this list is not meant to be exhaustive but that agreement on these issues is normative as a minimum for fidelity to the Christian message.

As Christians we all share "One Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God who is Father." After all this is said, what could be more important: do we quibble over where we disagree or do we rejoice over where we agree?

Within the Catholic Church there are already provisions for those with different liturgical (Byzantine) and disciplinary (celibacy) traditions. These are the different "rites" of the Catholic Church. So we are already one church with various expressions.

Why can't we treat our separated brothers and sisters the same way? What really stands in the way of us declaring ourselves to be a Catholic-Christian Church while at the same time making ritual provisions for those who choose to retain a Roman, Anglican, Lutheran or Methodist expression? This would effectively remove the scandal of separation and division while at the same time preserving the variety of flavors within Christianity. It would make room for the most traditional and progressive communities within one Church family. It would help to create a new reality born of the blending of differences rather than maintaining an atmosphere of competitiveness and hostility.

This would not be a sell-out nor a claim that one religion is as good as another. We all know that certain communities have retained a greater faithfulness to the Gospel and the traditions of the early Church. Therefore not all Churches express the fullness of Jesus' message with the same clarity and completeness. What this would provide is the opportunity to enter into a non-judgemental community of faith where doctrinal and sacramental unity might eventually be fully realized.

This proposal would encourage us to recognize what is right and good about other religious expressions, and would discourage us from focusing solely on what is incomplete or lacking.

Jesus prayed that his Church might be one, but showed his distaste for uniformity by leaving it open to everyone from Nicodemus the Pharisee right up to the prostitutes and tax-collectors. What bound these people together was not uniformity in customs, opinions or dress. These people were inseparably bound by their belief that Jesus was Lord of their lives. And Jesus responded by excluding none of them.

So what's stopping us?

### **A Common Baptism**

Revelation is not over. With every new person who enters the world the revelation of God continues. This makes the time of birth a moment of manifestation.

While the possibility of a common Eucharist seems remote at this time, what about the possibility of a common Baptism? There is already provision in the Revised Code of Canon Law for someone who is not Catholic to baptize a Catholic. Canon 861, paragraph 2, states, ‘...in a case of necessity, any person who has the requisite intention, may (lawfully confer baptism).’

Is not our present situation, denying Jesus's dying prayer for unity, a moment of necessity?