

# Conference president rebukes agents of fear

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

In an address before the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in early June, Archbishop John May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, assured the assembled theologians that the bishops of the United States appreciate all the theologians do on behalf of the church.

"You have assisted us so continually and in so many ways over the years," he said. "You must be able to count on our understanding, support and encouragement for your own inquiry, debates, research and explorations..."

"I am sure I speak with my brother bishops in offering you support, conscious as we are of the debt in which the whole church stands for your labors — and also keenly aware of the attacks to which you are exposed and the efforts being made to divide theologians from bishops and bishops from theologians."

And that constituted the central concern

of Archbishop May's talk.

"Very bluntly," he began, "I think that the church in the United States suffers from too many anxious, warning voices that would divide the bishops against theologians."

"There are too many sweeping accusations leveled at the theological soundness and credal fidelity of the theologians. There are too many vague but insistent attacks, telling bishops that the theologians will supplant them in their teaching office or ignore their pastoral guidance or lead the people of God into antagonism, division and virtual schism."

The archbishop suggested explicitly that some of these attacks on theologians are redolent of the ugly McCarthy period in U.S. history.

"Even more intimidating," he continued, "are the warnings that theologians as a group either directly or indirectly are assuming the position of the magisterium."

"Bishops are urged to take care lest their own teaching authority be undermined or

subsumed by theologians who would remove from the episcopal office its teaching authority and reduce it to coordinating pastoral activities."

Because this very warning has been voiced by the Vatican itself, and by Cardinal Ratzinger in particular, it is all the more remarkable that Archbishop May would have challenged it so specifically and so directly.

"I want to say very clearly that this has not been our experience in the United States," he said.

He cited with approval the various projects sponsored by the Catholic Theological Society to encourage cooperation between bishops and theologians.

"Bishop after bishop could tell of the collaboration he has received from men and women theologians as members of diocesan theological boards, faculty for his seminary, conciliar and curial experts, instructors in continuing education of the clergy and religious, and those involved in adult education, advisers and even vicars



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

for theological affairs, and as dogmatic, scriptural or moral consultants..." Archbishop May remarked.

The same is true at the national level. Theologians serve as consultants to the NCCB, where, for example, as many as 15 theologians assist the Committee on Doctrine. The recent pastoral letters on peace and the U.S. economy, Archbishop May acknowledged, could not have been written "without the dedicated and exacting work of the many theologians associated with the committees responsible for drafting these documents."

Despite all this assistance, do conflicts nonetheless exist between bishops and theologians? Of course, they do. But tensions also exist between bishop and bishop, he conceded, "as the recent public controversy about the AIDS document proved once more."

"Such tensions," the archbishop observed, "are part of life and often make for growth. In any event tensions, and even serious problems on occasion, constitute an inevitable dimension of the human element in the church."

Such tensions, however, are exacerbated and rendered seriously harmful to the church when they are exploited by forces that wish to divide theologians from bishops, he said, noting that the "wanton attacks" of these forces against theologians "come out of fear and they engender an atmosphere of greater fear."

In Archbishop May's opinion, "there is too much fear in the church today. Nameless accusations and groundless suspicions threaten to divide bishops from theologians and theologians from bishops, debilitating our attempts to support one another in our specific ministries for the good of the church."

Such a "climate of fear," he charged, "could come to stifle our collaborative initiatives under a pall of anxiety that will not dissipate — unless we determine that we have had enough of it. I believe we have."

A week-and-a-half later, the U.S. Catholic bishops approved by a vote of 214-9 a set of guidelines entitled, "Doctrinal Responsibilities: Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings Between Bishops and Theologians."

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# Journey requires detachment, vigilance, service

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 12:32-48; (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9; (R2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19.

According to St. Luke, Jesus took a long and circuitous journey to Jerusalem. This journey takes up fully nine chapters (9:5-19:27). More than half of the Sunday Gospels for ordinary time in year "C" are excerpted from Luke's journey narrative (13th to 31st Sunday).

Jesus speaks of this journey at the Transfiguration. On that occasion, Moses and Elijah talked about "His departure (*exodon* in Greek) which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31). Shortly after this beatific vision, the journey began: "When the days drew near for his ascension (*analepsis* in Greek), he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51).

Those two Greek words "departure" and "ascension" set the tone for the entire journey. Jesus is on a journey to death, resurrection and ascension to His Father. His journey is the pattern of ours. Our journey also is a road through death to resurrection and ascension to the Father.

The three requisites for the journey are: detachment from the things of this world, vigilance and the use of our God-given talents.

First, we ought to be detached from the world — a detachment evidenced by almsgiving. Jesus said, "Do not live in fear, little flock." He addressed us as "little flock," not because we are small in number or weak, but because we are dearly loved by our Father in heaven. "Little" is a term of endearment. We are told not to



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

fear because God has already given us a Kingdom — a Kingdom that far outweighs all earthly goods. Therefore we are not to be afraid to be charitable in giving, for in giving we shall receive treasures that thieves cannot steal nor moths destroy.

The Roman Crassus was one of the richest men of his day. He had 30,000 changes of raiment alone. Yet he was conquered and captured by the Persians. And His conqueror used him as a footstool to mount his chariot. Of what use was all his wealth. Mrs. Marcos has more than 3,000 pairs of slippers. Why? Are we not fools to refuse to part with things we cannot keep in order to win things we cannot lose?

The second requirement for the journey is vigilance. The motto of the Boy Scouts of America echoes the Gospel urging: "Be prepared." That is the gist of our Lord's parables.

Jesus begins the parable of the wedding with "Let your belts be fastened around your waists." In modern jargon, "Roll up your sleeves." His words recall the preparation for the Exodus (R1). On the night of the 10th plague, the Hebrews were to be ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice.

A wedding was a matter of great importance. The groom went to the bride's home. How long he would be there was

uncertain: it depended on the feasting, dowry arrangements, and so on. But it was certain it would end, perhaps late at night. The marriage concluded with the procession from the bride's home to the groom's home. His friends would be waiting with lighted torches. Woe to those whose torches were out or who were not ready (Matthew 25:1-13).

Likewise, nothing is so certain as death, and nothing so uncertain as the time of death. Therefore eternal vigilance is needed. Being prepared will not hasten the time of death, but it will only make it sweeter when it comes.

Lastly, one of the best preparations for death is to use our God-given talents here and now. Jesus was speaking especially of the leaders of the Church: "the steward whom the master will set over his servants." The best way to wait for the Lord is to serve one another.

God's judgment is not going to be a simple guilty or not guilty. He will mete out varying degrees of reward and punishment, determined by the use or non-use of God-given graces. Originally, Jesus' words were directed against the Scribes as more culpable for rejecting Him than the ordinary people, "the crowd which does not know the Law" (John 7:49).

No need to be anxious. Jesus is simply calling us to be less selfish and more aware of our need for God in our journey so as to be of greater service to others. We are to wait with a sense of urgency, to be always ready with our magnanimous response. Like floating on water, we are to be relaxed; if we are too tense, we sink.

## How to Make Your Arteries Cleanse Themselves

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Edwin Flatto, M.D.



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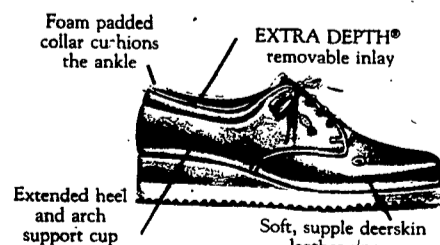
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