

New instruction creates mistrustful climate

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A brief article by Father Robert Myddleton in the July 14th issue of *The Tablet* in London deserves a wider audience. It is entitled, "A Theologian's Complaint," and is occasioned by the recent instruction from the Vatican in the role of the theologian in the church.

The essay is in the form of an open letter to the author's bishop, whom he addresses as "My Lord" because it "seems appropriate to revive the older style of address" in the present ecclesiastical climate.

Father Myddleton notes that the relationship between theologians and bishops in Britain has been hitherto trusting and charitable as it has been in the United States and Canada — something explicitly encouraged in the Vatican instruction.

"But the instruction," he argues, "puts that trusting relationship under considerable strain. For throughout this document theologians are treated suspiciously.

"The instruction turns on the fallacious presupposition that the magisterium ... and theologians are on opposite sides. It is in danger of creating the very same situation which it denounces."

The instruction also seems to assume that the magisterium's authority is "well-nigh absolute and unlimited," and that the pope and the bishops are "always right."

On the other hand, the instruction tends to stereotype "the theologian," as if all were alike.

"One cannot simply dismiss a whole category of people in the Church as though they were all saying the same thing."

"No responsible theologian," Father

Myddleton insists, "has said that Gallup polls should determine the content of Catholic faith."

"No responsible theologian has turned conscience into the sole and supreme norm of morality.

"No responsible theologian had made the 'human sciences' the norm of revelation.

"You know perfectly well," he continues, "that our theologians love the Church, consider themselves at your service, and have never dreamed of taking your place as the instruction fantasizes when it speaks of a 'parallel magisterium'.

"But the most distressing feature of the instruction is that ... it is clearly intended to have disciplinary consequences. In practice, that could mean a witch-hunt.

"The blank-cheque oath, the profession of faith, and the controverted universal catechism constitute a series of loyalty tests. They are like a net flung over theologians. The instruction completes this process, and hammers in the final peg.

"But the loyalty it asks for is not to the Catholic faith as such, but to the version of it propounded by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which sees itself as

the expression of the magisterium."

Father Myddleton suggests that if theologians were to take this new document to heart, the only prudent course for them to take would be for them to keep their heads down, not offer a target, and not say what they think.

The instruction concedes that "a theologian may ... raise questions regarding the timeliness, the form or even the contents of magisterial interventions." But, Father Myddleton asks his bishop, "how do I go about it?"

The instruction directs him to "make known to the magisterial authorities the difficulties and problems" he may find in official teachings. "But since they have already told me that almost all disagreement is dangerous, they are unlikely to heed my most earnest representations.

"If my private representation falls on stony ground, it is as if it never happened. And that, according to the instruction, is the end of the matter. Back to the pri-dieu."

The theologian's real adversaries are the forces of secularism, which deny and often militantly oppose any sense at all of the spiritual, the sacred and the holy.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

In last week's column I touched on the challenge facing the church to bring practice into conformity with preaching, to reconcile its domestic policy with its foreign policy, and to honor the principle of sacramentality.

Father Myddleton ends his essay on the same note: "The Church, which created an arena of freedom when it opposed Communism in Poland, appears as an instrument of tyranny when the creeping magisterium extends to cover not just Catholic doctrine but judgments of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well."

The key word here is "appears." We may insist that the charge is not true, that the church is no "instrument of tyranny." But if it "appears" to be so, we have an obligation to change the appearance.

That's what the principle of sacramentality is all about.

Jesus performs variety of miracles in Capernum

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Something must be wrong," Peter said to us as we entered his mother-in-law's house.

Although we had been invited there for dinner, the house looked deserted. "My Mother has taken ill," Peter's wife said to us as she came from one of the rooms. "It's a bad fever she has had for several days now."

All of us turned to Jesus. We did not even have to ask. He was already going to the sick woman's room.

I followed Peter and his wife. As soon as Jesus touched the hand of the woman lying in bed, she got up immediately.

Peter's mother-in-law looked directly at



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Jesus and said, "Come, you must be hungry and tired. I will prepare something for you to eat."

Capernum is not a big city. We hadn't even finished our meal when the people began arriving at the house. They had heard about the miracles that Jesus had performed all over the region.

Some people even came with victims of demons that had taken hold of their lives. Jesus healed them all.

We were still marveling over these things the next day when we got into Peter's boat to cross the lake. Jesus fell asleep before we were even half way across.

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