

# New document holds 'undetoned bombs'

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

The long-awaited Vatican document on Catholic universities was finally released several weeks ago. It is a much milder document than many feared (or hoped?) it would be, and so, generally, there has been relatively little controversy about it in the press or in Catholic academic circles.

Critics (including especially Catholic University and college presidents in the United States) had been concerned about the negative and legalistic tone of the earlier drafts and the too-detailed and too-restrictive practical norms proposed therein.

Some of us had been arguing all along that no Vatican document could have any legally-binding effect anywhere except in pontifical universities — such as Catholic University of America — or in seminaries

and other church-sponsored institutions.

The vast majority of Catholic Universities and colleges in the United States were not founded under official church auspices, are not financed by official church agencies, and are not governed by official church authorities.

Nonetheless, many administrators and scholars have been worried these past few years because of the possibly harmful effect such a document could have on Catholic higher education. At the very least, a narrowly legalistic text could have been an embarrassment, thereby making it more difficult to maintain the credibility of Catholic academic institutions alongside other peer institutions.

But now all that is moot, or almost all. The opening section of the new apostolic constitution is exhortative and encouraging in tone rather than legalistic and restric-

tive. And the practical norms in Part II have been drastically reduced in number and have been made substantially less detailed in content.

Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities speaks positively and supportively about the mission of a Catholic university and even about its need for institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

It acknowledges that the "future of Catholic universities depends to a great extent on the competent and dedicated service of lay Catholics," and encourages dialogue and collaboration across religious, cultural and scientific lines.

The General Norms make a distinction (which earlier drafts did not) between two kinds of Catholic universities: the ones established by the church and operating under some kind of ecclesiastical sponsor-



ship, and the other established by Catholics (religious or lay) independently of official ecclesiastical authority.

The distinction is important because the apostolic constitution recognizes that, while universities of the first type must have their statutes and governing documents approved by "competent ecclesiastical authority," universities of the second type do not.

Ideally, these universities should try to conform to the General Norms, but the document recognizes that their statutes and the civil law of the place have to be observed.

# Jesus tells his followers they must be servants

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"John, we have every right to make this request of Jesus," said my brother James. "After all, we gave up everything to become his followers."

James was right. We had a good fishing business going when Jesus came and asked us to follow Him. Both of us had left without a thought and we'd proven ourselves to Jesus. Now it was time to think about our future.

"Jesus, we've something to ask you," James began. He motioned for me to continue.

"What is it?" Jesus questioned when I hesitated.

"When you come into your kingdom, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left," I finally said.

"Those places are not mine to give," Jesus replied. Then seeing our expressions, he added, "Whoever wants to be truly great must become a servant."



## THE BIBLE CORNER

I said nothing more that day. What was Jesus talking about? James and I had both worked very hard for him. Now he seemed to be telling us to be slaves to other people.

Not until much later, when we had gathered for the Passover feast, did I finally understand Jesus' words.

All 12 of us apostles sat together in the upper room of a friend's house in Jerusalem. We had been traveling all day. Our sandaled feet were covered with the road dust of the long journey.

Before the meal was served, we waited. It was the job of the lowliest servant in the household to wash the feet of the guests. No servant arrived. As we all continued

to wait, we were surprised at what occurred next.

Suddenly Jesus stood up from the table and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he took the basin of water and went around the table washing and drying our feet.

We were embarrassed that Jesus had chosen such a menial job. When Jesus came to where Peter was sitting, he told Jesus: "Lord, this isn't right. I can't let you wash my feet!"

"Unless I wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you shall have no part of me."

When Jesus had finished, he returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have done for you?"

"You all call me Teacher," Jesus continued. "That is what I am. I have shown you what to do if you really want to be my followers. You must be humble enough to wash each other's feet. Take care of one another. Be servant to all."


Being a follower of Jesus has nothing to do with working for a place of glory and honor for yourself. That's for people who want to be a part of the world. And Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

Scripture reference: Mark 10:35-45; John 13:1-17.

Meditation: "Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my followers" (John: 13:34-35).

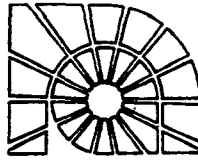
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