

COLUMNISTS

Academia lies beyond bishops' powers

Some Catholics have a difficult time understanding the difference between the pastoral and the academic spheres.

Bishops, for example, have an important and distinctive responsibility for the pastoral care of a diocese. They are charged with preaching the Gospel, presiding at the Eucharist, ministering to those in need and seeing to it that these pastoral tasks are properly fulfilled by all the priests, religious and laity of their local church.

The distinctively pastoral authority of a bishop is a major component of the life, structure and mission of the church.

However, that authority, like all authority except God's, has limits. The bishop cannot issue civil decrees. He cannot impose prison sentences on convicted criminals. He cannot raise or lower the price of gasoline. He cannot issue executive orders to prevent the use of governmental funds for abortions or for birth control.

And neither can he appoint individuals to, or remove individuals from, university faculties, nor determine who can be promoted in faculty rank and who cannot. Not even in Catholic universities located in his own diocese.

Does this mean that a bishop cannot express his opinion or his concerns about what is being said or done within or by a



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Catholic university? Of course not. He is free to express himself on any subject about which he feels competent to express himself. And the more the issue touches upon the pastoral well-being of the local church, the greater his responsibility to speak his mind.

Of course, he also has the responsibility of seeing to it that he knows what he is talking about, that he has all the relevant facts and that he has consulted with people closest to the scene. If after all that, he still feels he should say something, then by all means he should say something.

But the effect of what he says about a matter affecting the academic life of a Catholic university will be no different from the effect of what he might say about a civil matter affecting his city, his state, or his country.

He has a right, even a duty, to speak, but he has no right to expect that his word will have a direct, juridical impact in the academic or governmental spheres. These spheres are distinct from the pastoral. They are beyond his canonical reach. His influence in these spheres is moral, not legal. He can hope to persuade, but he cannot order.

When administrators and faculty (including theologians) in Catholic universities make this point clear, they are sometimes chastised by Catholics outside the academic sphere for being inconsistent.

Theologians like myself urge a decentralization of ecclesiastical authority, from Rome to the local churches, more consistent with the practice of the universal church of the First Christian Millennium and with that of the Eastern Church in the Second Millennium as well.

Well, isn't the involvement of a bishop in the internal academic life of a university just such an example of a local bishop's having more authority? No.

First, the issue has nothing to do with a local bishop's regaining pastoral authority that had been preempted by the Vatican. Second, the local bishop in fact doesn't have pastoral authority over the academic life of a university, not even over a Catholic university. Indeed, bishops have

never had such authority over Catholic universities, going all the way back to the 13th century.

But it seems difficult for many outside of a university setting to understand why a Catholic university needs institutional autonomy and academic freedom to function as a true university, as opposed, for example, to a catechetical institute.

Significantly, some of the most outspoken critics of this arrangement have themselves never gone through the process of obtaining a doctoral degree involving doctoral-level seminars, 10-hour written candidacy or comprehensive exams and two-hour orals, apprentice teaching and then a dissertation and a dissertation defense.

They have never been subject to a tenure review by peers in their own institution and by scholars in other universities. They have never been reviewed for promotion from associate to full professor.

When bishops get the power to raise and lower the price of gasoline, perhaps then the academic "guild" might reconsider whether bishops should also have the authority to intervene in the internal academic affairs of a university.

But don't hang by your thumbs waiting.

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

Jesus offers us mercy through reconciliation

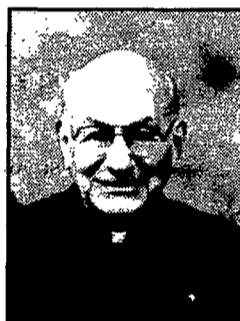
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 24:35-48. (R1) Acts 3:13-15, 17-19. (R2) 1 John 2:1-5.

There are seven Sundays between Easter and Pentecost. The Gospels for Easter and for the two Sundays following were selected to prove the reality of Christ's resurrection. The fourth Sunday explains why he died: "I am the Good Shepherd." The fifth Sunday urges us to cling to him if we too would rise with him: "I am the Vine." The sixth and seventh Sundays prepare us for the Holy Spirit.

Next Sunday's Gospel (the third Sunday) proves beyond the shadow of a doubt the reality of Christ's resurrection. Some people in Luke's day were saying that Jesus had not truly risen, but that the Apostles had seen only a ghost.

That is why Luke in the Gospel presents Christ as appealing to the five senses of his Apostles. To their hearing: He said, "Peace to you." To their seeing: "Look at my hands and my feet; it is really I." To their feeling: "Touch me and see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I do." To their smell and taste: "Have you anything to eat? ... He took a piece of cooked fish and ate it in their presence."

These fishermen were outdoor men, used to the open sea, to hard manual labor; their five senses had never been



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

abused, dulled by overindulgence in food or drink or idleness; they were not daydreamers, nor visionaries. Yet Jesus convinced these hardest of all people that he was no ghost, that he was truly risen from the dead.

And then to remove all doubt he opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures.

Having convinced them of his resurrection, Jesus commissioned them to preach the resurrection of sinners.

In the first reading Peter does exactly that. Speaking to those who had killed Jesus, he said: "Reform your lives! Turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away!"

The Easter message is peace: peace through the forgiveness of sins. Thus the Easter sacrament is the sacrament of reconciliation. Last Sunday's Gospel told of

the institution of the sacrament of reconciliation — and of mercy.

Jesus has made his move. It remains for us to make our move. Remember the three parables of God's mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. The shepherd looked for the lost sheep; the lady looked for her lost coin; but the father did not look for the prodigal. For sheep and coins do not have brains — they have to be sought. But the lost son had brains. The father did not go out looking for him. He waited until the son came to his senses and started home. So Jesus waits for us in the sacrament of mercy. He expects us to have enough sense to use it.

Our Lady said that confession is the medicine we need; that monthly confession is the remedy for the church in the West. Imagine. Yet a survey conducted by Drew University showed that only 37 percent of priests and 11 percent of the laity go to confession once a month; that 3 percent of the priests and 22 percent of the laity never go! We are sick and we refuse to take the medicine.

In her Code of Canon Law the church commands that the faithful are "bound to confess serious sins at least once a year." (Canon 989)

Catherine Emmerich once saw the devil around a line of people going to confes-

sion. She asked the devil what he was doing there. The devil answered, "I'm trying to give them back something that I stole from them."

Catherine asked what that was.

"Shame," the devil answered. "I took away their shame so that they would sin. Now I want to give it back to them so that they will not confess their sin."

Catherine told the devil to keep what he had stolen and leave these people alone.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, April 14

Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29

Tuesday, April 15

Acts 7:51-8:1; John 6:30-35

Wednesday, April 16

Acts 8:1-8; John 6:35-40

Thursday, April 17

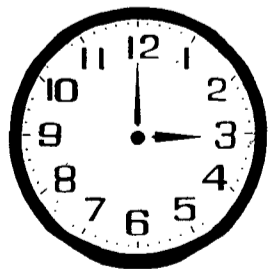
Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-51

Friday, April 18

Acts 9:1-20; John 6:52-59

Saturday, April 19

Acts 9:31-42; John 6:60-69



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CHERRY RHODES

concert organist

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of

Fleury: Variations sur in Noel bourguignon

Bach: Pastoral in F Major, BWV 590

Franck: Fantasia en la majeur

Bonnet: Deuxieme Legende

Vierne: Impromptu

Ropek: Variations on Victimae Paschali Laudes

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