

COLUMNISTS

Recognition for Father Curran is long overdue

One of these years a courageous, self-respecting Catholic university or college is going to confer on Father Charles Curran, a distinguished moral theologian and Rochester diocesan priest, his first honorary degree from a Catholic institution of higher learning. Until then, however, their grumbling about the imposition of mandates on Catholic theologians who teach therein will continue to ring a bit hollow.

Indeed, there is no form of censorship more insidious than self-censorship. It leaves the real censor with clean hands and deniability. A diocesan program committee decides not to invite a particular speaker because it assumes that the bishop will not approve. The editor of a diocesan newspaper decides against carrying a weekly columnist for the same reason.

The bishop's will prevails and he can honestly deny any part in the decision.

The case of honorary degrees is similar but not identical. It is similar because the institution worries about alienating the local bishop and others in the hierarchy. Without explicitly being told not to select a certain individual, he or she is passed over to avoid the potential flak.

It is different because neither the local bishop nor anyone else in the hierarchy has the authority to override the institution's decision, unless it is a diocesan col-



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

lege or a pontifical university.

Conferring an honorary degree on a distinguished Catholic who otherwise would not be approved as a speaker at an official church event or as a contributor to a diocesan publication is what universities and colleges should be all about.

Catholic universities and colleges are neither parishes nor catechetical centers. They are academic institutions in which active, unimpeded pursuit of truth (which can never be at odds with genuine faith) is the prime directive. Any question can be raised; any answer can be considered.

As Catholicism's leading educator, Father Theodore Hesburgh, once said, "A Catholic university is the place where the Church does its thinking."

But who decides whether the pursuit of truth therein remains within the broad pa-

rameters of Catholic faith, on the one hand, and the canons of scholarly research, writing, and teaching, on the other? Those who are qualified by reason of scholarly credentials and standing, namely, the individual's academic peers.

This is not to say that others can have no voice at all. If bishops or the Vatican itself wish to pronounce judgment on the work of a theologian within a Catholic university or college, that is clearly their right and may even be their duty to do so. However, the dictates of moral theology require that such judgments be rendered openly, with great care, and with specific arguments supported by specific references.

At the Catholic University of America, Father Curran was adjudged by his theological peers to be a sound scholar and teacher, without prejudice to the integrity of the Catholic faith. He was removed from his teaching position in theology by a juridical act, not by an act of his peers.

Given the pontifical status of the institution, he was always vulnerable to such action. Some argued, at least by implication, that the usual norms of academic freedom and institutional autonomy do not apply in a pontifical university.

What is of central importance is that Father Charles Curran was never judged by his peers at CUA or in the Catholic Theo-

logical Society of America to be anything but a faithful and orthodox Catholic theologian, with impeccable credentials as a scholar, writer and teacher.

All of the foregoing needed to be said because it underscores the point that there is no academic reason why a Catholic university or college could not now offer Father Charles Curran an honorary degree in recognition of his many years of service to the field of Catholic moral theology and, through that, to thousands of the church's priests, religious, teachers and pastoral ministers throughout this country and beyond.

An honorary degree would not imply that the institution supports everything that Father Curran has ever written.

In conferring an honorary degree, a university like Notre Dame, Boston College, or Villanova would only be stipulating to its graduates, its faculty and its larger public, that Father Curran's scholarly achievements and contributions as a Catholic theologian represent to an eminent degree the kind and quality of work the institution would like to see duplicated in its own department of theology.

The ball, as we say, is in their court.

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

Be open to Holy Spirit, one another and the world

Pentecost Sunday (June 3): (R3) John 20:19-23; (R1) Acts 2:1-11; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13.

A traveler stopped at a gas station. "What do you folks do around here for excitement?" the motorist asked.

"Well," the attendant said, "around here, folks don't get excited."

Do we get excited about our church? We should. For it is the church that gives us the Holy Spirit who empowers us to do the impossible as the Apostles did after the first Pentecost.

It is embarrassing sometimes how little our churches resemble the church of the first Pentecost. Winds, tongues of fire, disciples speaking in different languages, thousands being added to the church and lots of excitement.

The first Christians opened themselves up to the Holy Spirit, and they changed the world. That is what we are called to do — to open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit.

Wilma Rudolph was born crippled. She wondered why she could not play like other children. One day, her mother said "Honey, believe, and God will make it happen." She began to believe that God could heal her. And he did. At the age 16, she was one of the best young runners in the country. She went to the Olympics in Aus-



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

tralia and won a bronze medal. Four years later in Rome, she won the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash and anchored the winning 400-meter relay team — all in world-record times. That year she received the Sullivan Award as the most outstanding amateur athlete in America. Her faith and hard work paid off.

That's the first message of Pentecost. It reminds us that if people open themselves up to the Holy Spirit, they will be empowered to do things they never dreamed possible. As St. Paul said: "In him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything" (Phil. 4:13).

Pentecost also taught the early Christians that they were empowered by their association with one another. They ate, prayed, and sang together and had all

things in common (Acts 2:42-47). They built each other up in the faith. One of our most helpful roles in other's lives is to praise one another, encourage one another, pray for one another.

Marines were taught in digging a fox-hole to make it big enough for two. There's nothing quite like fighting a battle all alone. There is something strengthening about having a buddy with you who can keep you from panicking. We all need someone to lean on.

There is no limit to what we might accomplish if we were empowered by God and also empowered by one another.

Finally, the church on Pentecost was empowered by a willingness to serve others. Had the Apostles kept the Good News to themselves, their excitement would have withered quickly.

At the end of World War II, Robert Woodruff, president of Coca Cola, declared, "In my generation it is my desire that everyone in the world have a taste of Coca Cola." Today Coca Cola is sold from the deserts of Africa to the interior of China because Woodruff motivated his colleagues to reach all peoples around the world for Coke.

Any healthy organization reaches out. If it does not, it dies. That is true of the

church. The church of Jesus Christ must reach out as it did after the first Pentecost.

As someone said, "There are many churches but their outreach is nil. They are sound, but they are sound asleep." On the day of Pentecost, the church understood that its mission was to reach out to the world, to make disciples of all nations.

So Pentecost tells us to be open to the Holy Spirit, to be open to one another, and finally to be open to the world.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, June 4

Tobit 1:1, 3, 2:1A-8; Mark 12:1-12

Tuesday, June 5

Tobit 2:9-14; Mark 12:13-17

Wednesday, June 6

Tobit 3:1-11A, 16-17A; Mark 12:18-27

Thursday, June 7

Tobit 6:10-11, 7:1, 9-17, 8:4-9A;

Mark 12:28B-34

Friday, June 8

Tobit 11:5-17; Mark 12:35-37

Saturday, June 9

Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20; Mark 12:38-44

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2001



GREGORIAN CHANT MASS

at 11:30 am

— and —

CHORAL VESPERS

at 5:00 pm

ORGAN CONCERT

at 5:30 pm

— featuring —

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performing works of

Bovet, Darke, DeGringny, Parry, Vierne

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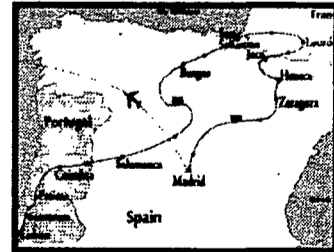
PILGRIMAGE/TOUR

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