

COLUMNISTS

Mandatum requirement remains unenforceable

In their recent vote to require Catholic theologians teaching in Catholic universities and colleges to seek a mandatum from their local bishops, the bishops of the United States have taken the only realistic course open to them.

The mandatum is a bishop's formal certification that a Catholic theologian teaching within his diocese is, in fact, teaching in communion with the church.

The requirement of a mandatum was first stipulated in canon 812 of the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law. This was followed in 1990 by a papal document on Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* ("From the Heart of the Church"). Thereafter, a committee of bishops and Catholic university and college presidents tried to work out a practical application that would respect the pope's concern and the nature of higher education in the United States.

The committee was so successful in its efforts that the bishops voted overwhelmingly (224-6) in 1996 to approve the committee's proposal. The approach was to encourage regular dialogue and cooperation between local bishops and Catholic universities and colleges within their dioceses, on the well-founded assumption that the bishops and the Catholic academic community have the same



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

interests at heart, namely, maintaining and strengthening the Catholic character of Catholic universities and colleges, without prejudice to the highest standards of teaching and scholarship.

Unfortunately, forces in the Vatican and the United States brought pressure on the bishops to reconsider. A new committee was formed with the mandate (no pun intended) to produce a more juridical document than the one approved by the bishops in 1996. Notwithstanding the strong opposition of the university and college presidents and Catholic theologians generally, the bishops reversed field and approved a new application in 1999, with only 31 negative votes.

Dialogue between the bishops and the Catholic academic community has continued, with selected theologians as well

as presidents. Meetings have also been held between local bishops and Catholic theologians teaching in their dioceses.

With few exceptions, these meetings have been described as remarkably friendly and conciliatory. Bishops have assured the theologians that they have no desire or intention to interfere in internal academic life and that they fully expect to grant the mandatum to whichever theologians request it. Moreover, they will not publicize the names of those who do not seek the mandatum or, in rare instances, are denied it.

A theologian described the meeting in which he was involved as an exercise in mutual hypocrisy. The bishop pretended that he respected Catholic theologians and the theologians pretended that they believed him. Refreshments were served and there was joint prayer.

The purpose here is not to make a cynical point. The bishops are understandably concerned that they show themselves to be fully cooperative with the Vatican, and at the same time not raise this matter to a level of greater public controversy than it already is. The bishops recognize that the media are deeply interested in this story and that its continuation can only harm the reputation of both the hierarchy and of Catholic

higher education.

The happiest outcome from the bishops' point of view is that great numbers of theologians will request and receive the mandatum, showing that the process has worked. If, however, the majority of theologians do not seek the mandatum, the bishops can always put the media off by appealing to confidentiality. The Vatican will be a bit more demanding and will not be pleased if those are the results.

Perhaps anticipating this possibility, the bishops voted unanimously last month at their semi-annual meeting that all Catholic theologians teaching in Catholic universities and colleges seek the mandatum from their local bishop. The vote covers them with the Vatican.

In the end, the requirement is unenforceable without a change in the statutes of each Catholic university and college. Theologians choosing not to seek the mandatum will do so without fear of penalty. The cloak of confidentiality should keep media and ultra-right Catholics at bay, though highly frustrated.

It's as good a solution as any, given the circumstances.

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

Allow time for prayer in each day's agenda

16th Sunday of the Year (July 22): (R3) Luke 10:38-42; (R1) Genesis 18:1-10; (R2) Colossians 1:24-28.

Mary and her sister Martha were close friends of Jesus. Like their brother Lazarus, all three were single persons. In their home Jesus felt that he could kick off his sandals, put his tired feet up and relax.

Martha, the fastidious housekeeper, opened her home to Jesus and his 12 disciples at a moment's notice. She was excited to see Jesus. He was a visitor in their home on more than one occasion. And it was always a pleasure. Jesus was the kind of person anyone would want to have for dinner. He was so loving, so accepting. There is evidence that he had a great sense of humor. This was a happy occasion. So, it was something of a downer when Martha made her cryptic remark to Jesus, "Lord, are you not concerned that my sister has left me all alone to do the household tasks? Tell her to help me."

Of course Jesus loved and valued both sisters equally. His reply, "Martha, Martha, you are upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it." Jesus did not



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

mean this as a put down of Martha. After all, assuming Jesus and the Twelve were all there, plus Mary, Martha and Lazarus, there were at least 17 hungry people to be fed. No wonder Martha was distracted with much serving.

Every church needs a Martha. Yes, a hundred Marthas. Because of the Marthas, the church budgets get balanced, church buildings get repaired and cleaned, babies get bounced on loving knees in the nursery. We generally don't appreciate Marthas until a Martha is missing.

In 1997 we lost a great saint in Mother Teresa. The key to her commitment and tenacity was found in the fact that she prayed at least one hour a day — usually in the morning — before she at-

tempted to do anything for God. If Mother Teresa had not been so connected to God, she would have burned out long ago. She knew that prayer and devotion are the keys to unlocking the doors of success, the source of power. All her programs flowed from that reservoir of devotion.

The greatest mistake anyone in ministry can make is to get so busy doing good works that they forget the Source of their high calling. The greatest mistake anyone can make is to get so busy earning a living that they neglect spending time in the presence of the One who is the Life. No wonder people often find work so unfulfilling and tedious. They have no great purpose, no connection with God.

That happens in our daily lives. So often we lose sight of what really matters.

Martha wanted to be the perfect hostess and that is well and good. But the Master was in her home. He only had a short time to spend there. Martha had the opportunity to soak up words that would enrich her life immeasurably. Certainly the needs of her guests were important but this was not the time. We ought always try to keep life in its proper perspective.

There is only one priority necessary: Spend some time each day with the Master. Learn from Mary's example. Sit at the feet of Jesus in daily prayer. This is essential.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, July 23**
Exodus 14:5-18; (Ps) Exodus 15:1-5; Matthew 12:38-42
- Tuesday, July 24**
Exodus 14:21-15:1; (Ps) Exodus 15:8-10, 12-17; Matthew 12:46-50
- Wednesday, July 25**
2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Psalms 126:1-6; Matthew 20:20-28
- Thursday, July 26**
Exodus 19:1-2, 9-11, 16-20B; (Ps) Daniel 3:52-56; Matthew 13:10-17
- Friday, July 27**
Exodus 20:1-17; Psalms 19:8-11; Matthew 13:18-23
- Saturday, July 28**
Exodus 24:3-8; Psalms 50:1-2, 5-6, 14-15; Matthew 13:24-30

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