

COLUMNISTS

Hierarchy's failures have historical precedent

Saturday, May 10, is the "feast day" of Matteo Ricci (d. 1610), the great Italian Jesuit missionary to China. Not yet formally recognized by the church as a saint, he may have greater claim to that title than many who have been accorded it.

Ten years after joining the Jesuits, Ricci, a scientist, began studying Chinese language and culture to a degree unheard of by a foreigner of that time. A year later (1583) he went to China and attracted the interest of the local scientific community.

Arriving at the imperial court in 1601, he soon became a favorite of the emperor. His reputation as a scientific and literary figure grew steadily, having published a catechism in Chinese and a book on friendship in 1595. In 1604 he published a small book on ethics, a translation of Euclid and *Twenty-Five Sayings*.

Ricci's method of evangelization was based on what is now known as the principle of inculturation. He adapted the Gospel message to the prevailing culture, referring to God, for example, as the "Lord of Heaven," promoting the use of Chinese rites in the liturgy, and assuming the status and dress of a mandarin.

Father Ricci encouraged his fellow Jesuit missionaries to allow their new converts to continue practicing popular Confucian and ancestral rites. These included rituals for deceased relatives at



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

cemeteries and at shrines in the home. Ricci was convinced that such rituals were not idolatrous, but were simply civil and social customs.

Problems arose some time after Ricci's death, when Spanish missionaries, chiefly Dominicans and Franciscans, arrived from the Philippines in the 1630s. They were appalled by what they found, dismissing the Jesuits' methods as syncretistic, that is, the blending of diverse elements from various religious traditions into a single form. The Dominicans and Franciscans made clear to their own converts that these accommodations were not allowed.

In 1645 Pope Innocent X decreed that Chinese rites were no longer to be used in the liturgy. However, a decade later, in 1656, Pope Alexander VII reversed that decision, and once again the use of Chi-

nese rites was permitted in the church's worship. Three years later the same pope dispensed the Chinese clergy from having to pray the Divine Office in Latin.

But then in 1704 Pope Clement XI voided his predecessor's liberal rulings and reinstated the restrictive policy of Innocent X, forbidding the use of Chinese rites. The consequences proved to be disastrous for Chinese Catholicism. Chinese Catholics were subsequently persecuted and many of the missions were closed.

Clement was succeeded by Pope Innocent XIII, who harbored a long-standing personal bias against the Jesuits. He even thought seriously of suppressing the order because of their lack of compliance with his predecessor's ban against the use of Chinese rites, and actually did prohibit the Jesuits from accepting novices until he had satisfactory proof that they were obeying the papal decree.

The ban against Chinese rites was renewed in 1735 by Pope Clement XII and again in 1742 by his successor, Benedict XIV, who required all missionaries to take an oath to observe it and also extended the prohibition to the Malabar rites in India.

The ban was finally lifted in 1939 by Pope Pius XII, who declared that the Confucian and ancestral rituals were essentially social in nature and therefore a

"licit and commendable" practice. By then, however, China had been decisively closed off from any meaningful Catholic influence.

Although their numbers are dwindling under the weight of the current crisis in the church, many Catholics to this day continue to think that their membership in the church gives them the assurance — certitude, in fact — that whatever their pastoral leaders instruct them to believe or to do is what God wants them to believe or to do.

In the case of the Chinese rites controversy, however, the papacy blew a false trumpet sound. Every pope until Pius XII (except Pope Alexander VII) who ruled on the matter of Chinese rites ruled in the wrong way, with the result that Catholicism was deprived of any hope of being truly enriched by Chinese culture and of bringing Christ's universal word of love and redemption to fully one-quarter of the world's population.

The failures of high-level pastoral leadership in the Catholic Church's current crisis are unfortunately not without ample historical precedent.

Matteo Ricci could tell us a thing or two about that.

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

A loving mother: A child's greatest blessing

7th Sunday of Easter (Mother's Day, May 12); (R3) John 17:1-11; (R1) Acts 1:12-14; (R2) 1 Peter 4:13-16.

Anna Jarvis began the modern custom of Mother's Day in 1907 in honor of her own mother. In 1915 she convinced President Wilson and Congress to set aside the second Sunday of May to honor all mothers, both living and deceased.

Despite what others may say, motherhood is one of the greatest careers any woman can aspire to.

Erma Bombeck wrote a cute, but true, article on mothers, something like this:

When the Lord was creating mothers, in his sixth day of "overtime," his angel said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one." The Lord said, "Have you read the specs on this order? She has to have 180 moveable parts ... all replaceable; run on black coffee and left-overs; have a lap that disappears when she stands up; a kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointing love affair; and six pairs of hands."

The angel shook his head slowly and said: "Six pairs of hands ... no way."

"It's not the hands that are causing me problems," said the Lord. "It's the three pairs of eyes. One pair to see through closed doors. Another that sees what she shouldn't but has to; and, of course, the



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ones here in front that can look at a child when he goofs up and say, 'I understand and I love' — without uttering a word."

Touching his sleeve gently, the angel said, "Lord, come to bed. Tomorrow ..."

"I can't," replied the Lord. "I'm so close to creating something close to myself. Already I have one who heals herself when she is sick ... can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger ... and get a 9-year-old to stand under a shower."

The angel circled the model of a mother slowly. "It's too soft," he sighed.

"But tough!" said the Lord excitedly. "You cannot imagine what this mother can do or endure."

"Can it think?" asked the angel.

"Not only think, it can reason and compromise," said the Creator.

The angel ran his finger across the

cheek. "There's a leak," he pronounced. "It's not a leak," said the Lord. "It's a tear."

"What's it for?" "It's for joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness and pride."

"You're a genius," said the angel. The Lord looked somber. "I didn't put it there."

No greater blessing can a child have than a loving mother. John Bannister Tabb wrote:

*Long, long before the Babe could speak
When he would kiss his Mother's cheek
And to her bosom press,
The brightest angels, standing near
Would turn away to hide a tear,
For they are motherless.*

Theodore Roosevelt, in an address at the White House on March 10, 1908, stated: "Unless devoted motherhood is true of the average woman, no brilliancy of genius, no material prosperity, no triumphs of science and industry, will avail to save the race from ruin and death. The mother is the one supreme asset of national life; she is more important by far than the successful statesman or business man or artist or scientist."

Christian mothers should ask themselves: "Is Christ the center of my life and my home?" "Do I often recall that my

marriage lasts 'until death do us part?'" "Do the members of my family pray grace before and after meals?" "Can I say to my children, 'Never say anything that mother wouldn't say?'" "Am I convinced that the world is what mothers are, that my home is what I am?"

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 13
Acts 19:1-8; Psalms 68:2-5AC, 6-7AB; John 16:29-33
Tuesday, May 14
Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalms 113:1-8; John 15:9-17
Wednesday, May 15
Acts 20:28-38; Psalms 68:29-30, 33-36C; John 17:11B-19
Thursday, May 16
Acts 22:30, 23:6-11; Psalms 16:1-2A, 5, 7-11; John 17:20-26
Friday, May 17
Acts 25:13B-21; Psalms 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20AB; John 21:15-19
Saturday, May 18
Acts 28:16-20, 30-31; Psalms 11:4-5, 7; John 21:20-25

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