

Is Celibacy 'Impossible'?

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

I can understand why discussions of celibacy will deepen our theological understanding of it. I can understand how sociological surveys will reveal to some limited extent the growing worldliness of the clergy. I am persuaded, however, that pastoral research can never give us wisdom, but only information.

An answer given as a check on a survey is never the same as one for which one is personally responsible. What a difference there is between responding to a questionnaire received by thousands, and answering the same question into a tape recorder! Such surveys tell nothing of the faith of the anonymous respondent who answers anonymously. Would a survey on honesty among the Mafia yield the same results as a survey on honesty among the Peace Corps? A priest whose monthly reading is the *Playboy* magazine will not answer in the same spirit as one who reads *Emmanuel*.

It would be interesting to know the prayer life, the study life and the spiritual depth of each respondent. The faith and the morals of the respondent will, to a great extent, determine his answer. Suppose Demas received a query from St. Paul. Would the response be identical when he was doing apostolic work with Luke (Col. 4/14), as at a little later time when "the love of this life caught up with him" (2 Tim. 4/10)?

Celibacy is not a thing which can be isolated from the totality of priestly piety, any more than juvenile delinquency can be isolated from parental background. Faith will make the difference in answers. Paul, still sorrowing from the collapse of Demas, told the young priest, Timothy, "Some people have put conscience aside and wrecked their faith in consequence" (1 Tim. 1/19).

Faith and Celibacy

If we limit celibacy to the present mood of the world, or to history, or to its relation with the instinctual drives of the clerical id, or to its shaky beginnings in ecclesiastical law — celibacy is impossible! It is almost as impossible as walking on water. Just as one ought to sink trying to tread the sea, so one ought to develop neuroses trying to be a celibate.

The stronger the case against celibacy on the grounds that it is odd, aberrant and preposterous, the stronger the case for it once one moves from nature to grace. What is faith but making the impossible possible and the non-natural supernatural? Faith is finding the incomprehensible totally acceptable and discovering in the boundless abyss a solid foundation.

As faith makes celibacy a crucifix with life conquering death, so the loss of faith makes celibacy a cross and a contradiction.

Static must have developed in the heart of Judas when he found his Divine Master "impossible" by talking about Heavenly Bread instead of the Eucharist. What an intolerable bore the Lord became when instead of using some of the "ointment" and wealth of the Christian community for the poor, he "wasted" it on the liturgy of the anticipated Resurrection. A light went out somewhere in the heart of Judas.

Judas began to crack, not when he talked about the "poor", but over a year before when Our Lord announced the Eucharist (John 6/61). His faith was quite different when he rejoiced in his power to cast out devils from what it was when a devil took possession of him.

Little faith questions celibacy more than strong faith. Five times in the Gospel of Matthew Our Lord rebuked "little faith." The fight of faith is not with metaphysics, but with fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2/1). Celibacy touches faith, and faith touches celibacy, not in speculation, but in action. The relation between the two is not accidental, but intrinsic. As Coleridge wrote: "Faith is an affirmation and an act / That bids eternal truth be fact".

The question often asked by priests and laity about a priest or religious who lapses is: "What happened?" It is the same question that could be asked a convert, or anyone turning from vice to virtue, or of St. Paul who made the Church suffer, and then suffered for it.

Somewhere in the Great Divide is the case of celibacy. Before the tacit or the overt break with vows, something cracks. It is not just morals. Moral weakness in a man of faith creates an emptiness: he suffers far more for hurting one he loves than a man without faith. But when egotism and pride destroy faith, there is much less remorse for moral decline.

However much it be denied, and regardless of the angry snorts it provokes, the breaking of the vows is always preceded by a decline of faith, by less time on knees, by a sneering at the Holy Father, by a looking away from the Cross and by a repudiation of the faith of the apostles and martyrs of the Church.

Faith makes the impossible possible, while lack of faith negates the Cross and turns it into a double cross, or a swastika. A young artist once complained to William Blake that his creative power had forsaken him. To his surprise, Blake turned to his wife, and said: "It is just so with us, is it not, for weeks together when the visions forsake us? What do we do then?" She answered: "We kneel down and pray".

Two Impossibles

The New Testament reveals two impossibles: one relates to worldly comfort, the other to sex. The first impossible is to get men to surrender riches for the Kingdom of God; the second impossible is to induce them to surrender sex for the Kingdom of God.

The Impossibility of Poverty

A young man who had a considerable bank account and excellent prospects for economic security, offered himself to Our Lord. The Savior asked him to give up his stocks and bonds, his fine houses — in fact, everything. But the young man not only possessed wealth; wealth possessed him. Despite the fact that he was promised "treasures

in heaven", the young man "went away sad for he was a man of great wealth" (Matt. 19/22). Our Lord then spoke of how hard or even impossible it is for those who have security to enter heaven: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 19/23).

This was a sly bit of Semite humor of exaggeration. The Talmud had already spoken of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle. It was the kind of lightness which makes children laugh. He was saying wealth would shackle a man to earth; the more keys he has to safety deposit vaults, the more he would be apt to equate immortality with security. The disciples had already heard the Lord say something like this before: "Where your treasure is, there will be your heart" (Matt. 6/21). But to them, not to be attached to wealth is like having your heart torn out, without benefit of a transplant.

Asking the young man to do the impossible "astonished" the disciples as it astonishes us: "What! Give up savings? Lay up nothing for children? Sell all the stocks that are going up on the Dow Jones Averages? Crazy! Is not man made to extend his personality by ownership? Are not things the external guarantee of human freedom, as the soul is its spiritual guarantee? What would Christ do — separate man from his money, or money from the man?"

No wonder the disciples began talking among themselves, and taking a poll. They decided then to ask Our Lord the question: "Who then can be saved"? How many Christians will you ever get, Lord, to take a vow of poverty? Don't be silly! Men are men, and Americans are affluent! It is unnatural to be so detached from property. Make it "optional" for those who follow You. If a man wants to work for Your Kingdom, let him keep his security. That's the way all normal men live anyway.

Jesus gazed at them if to shame them out of their conceit, then flashed the answer: "For men this is impossible; for God everything is possible".

Certainly, given man's own inner poverty and nudity which he seeks to cover up with riches and luxury; given the American way of judging others by what they have, rather than what they are, this idea of Our Lord is impossible. But His answer was: What man cannot do, God can do. God can make the impossible possible.

God has done this throughout history. When Moses found it impossible to feed his 600,000 foot soldiers, God asked: "Is the arm of God so short? You shall see whether the promise I made to you comes true or not" (Numbers 11/23). When Job sat on a manure pile with leprosy, shingles, or whatever his affliction was, he looked to the Impossible God: "I know that Thou canst do everything" (Job 6/2/2). Gideon was asked to do the impossible and meet a vast army with 300 men, but God would be with him. The answer that God makes to the impossible is "the possible".

So they asked, "What does the man who becomes poor for Christ's sake get out of it"? Sure, the young man refused to empty his pockets, but the Apostles had — and for what? Peter had left his boats; James and John had given up their substantial income at the Zebedee Fishing Corporation; Matthew had abandoned his job of chief of staff of the Galilee-Jericho Income Tax Bureau, with all the "cuts" that came with it. There had to be a quid pro quo somewhere.

Peter, ever the spokesman of the Apostles, retorted to the Lord: "What about us? We have left everything and followed You". The Lord offered him the same reward that He gave to the rich young man: "Eternal life". It was the same reward promised to the man who would leave his wife for His sake (Luke 18/29).

Faith in God makes the impossible. Faith saves every soul post-purpled with the Blood of Christ. Faith means that He who gave a cross, will give the strength to bear it.

"I never saw a moon,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks
And what a wave must be.
I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given."
(Emily Dickinson)

The Second Impossible—Celibacy

Affluence and sex so often go together, because they are basic body wants. It was to be expected that the total love the Lord demanded of His disciples would one day conflict with their sex life. Eros and Agape, eroticism and celibacy are not the most companionable of creatures.

As leaving riches was "impossible", so is celibacy. What assurance does God give that it can be borne?

Scripture records in the erotic zone three incidents in which God acted beyond the power of nature. One was in the case of Sarah when she was ninety years old, and Abraham had already lost his virility. The other was Elizabeth who already was in "old age". The third was the conception of the human nature of Our Lord by the Virgin Mary. Each involved the "impossible".

When God told Sarah that Abraham, almost a hundred, was to have a son after whom Israel would be named, Sarah laughed. God retorted: "Is anything too wonderful for God?" (Gen. 18/15). Do you think it impossible? Well, she had her son.

Elizabeth too was barren, and Zachary was an "old man", but she brought forth John the Baptist, for as the angel told Mary about the conception: "Nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1/37).

When the Blessed Mother was told that she was to be the spokeswoman of Israel and all humanity, she immediately brought up the subject of sex relations. She was a Virgin; she "knew not man" (Luke 1/34). (The word "know" in Scripture means sexual relations for example, "Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4/1). Mary is anxious to retain her virginity. But how can Divine Love supply for human love?

Mary is told that there is never any conception
(Continued on Page 14)

ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

By Father Richard McBrien

Michael Novak's recent Commonweal article ("Where Did All the Spirit Go?") has attracted some favorable comment in the Catholic press. A philosopher of liberal and reformist persuasion, Novak argues that too many of his colleagues in the struggle for change have become preoccupied with institutional and political tagging-and-pulling.

They assume that the whole problem with the Church is structural, and that, once the old walls have come down and a new scaffolding erected under more amiable auspices, nearly all the annoyances now besetting us will have disappeared.

What the liberal and radical Catholic today seems to lack, Novak suggests, is "a sense of participation in a life divine as well as human." They do not see that institutional reform is for the sake of a Christian life of higher quality and of deeper roots. The present structure of Roman Catholicism must be altered, but in a virtually total way.

That means that the reform must

Letters

Sisters in Brazil Thank Diocese

Editor:

We wish to thank the good people of the Rochester Diocese for their generous contribution to the special "Mission Collection" for the three diocesan Latin-American missions. We in Brazil are most appreciative of their generosity and support and desire to communicate our gratitude through the medium of the COURIER-JOURNAL.

This collection will enable us to continue for another year our various apostolates in the three areas of the interior of Brazil in which the twelve of us work.

Some of us are engaged in formal education in the state elementary and secondary schools, others in a less formal type of education with adults and teenagers, several in health education and assistance for the poor, and also, all of us to some degree in parish work, such as liturgy, catechesis, and Baptism orientation courses.

In all these areas we have the support and cooperation of a group of Irish priests, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, with whom we work.

Our work is rather flexible since we think of ourselves as initiators, animators and supporters in the creation of living Christian communities, and specifically in forming Brazilian leaders, who with our support and encouragement, will assume their rightful responsibilities in these Christian communities. The majority of the beneficiaries with whom we work range from the very poor to the ordinary poor class, although we do have contact with the more educated and wealthier group who are associated with the Christian Family Movement.

In all these activities, there are many pressing needs which require money to carry them on, whether it be catechetical material, current theological literature, school supplies, educational material, or courses in special areas which are needed to update our apostolate and competency.

May we ask you to continue your prayerful support for our small endeavors, and be assured of sharing in these endeavors as well as in our prayers.

—The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Brazil.

Word for Sunday

Let's Dream the Impossible Dream

By Father Albert Shannon

Sunday's Gospel tells of the cure of the paralytic. Four men carried the paralytic to Christ (Mk. 2/4). Who were these men? Probably they were just friendly neighbors — unnamed, unhonored, doing good like neighbors, out of love, not for reward.

But they were different from others, for these four were men of faith. They had faith in Christ. They believed He could do something for the paralytic. This belief spurred their action. When the crowd got in their way — often those who purport to be listening to Jesus can prevent others from getting to Him — these four clambered to the roof, tore it open, and lowered the paralytic to Christ.

It seems almost providential in this decade which proliferates skeptics and cynics who question even the noblest human motives, that there should appear the magnificent and successful Broadway musical, *Man of La Mancha*.

The play dramatizes in an electrifying experience man's need to be possessed by an ideal and to be obsessed with a dream. In the play, Don Quixote's ideal is Dulcinea — but she is an illusory ideal "naught but flame and air" for in reality she is a kitchen slut, Aldonza. The lovely song "To Each His Dulcinea" emphasizes the soul's need for an ideal (not for a drug) "to light this secret flame" — the flame that burns in every man's breast to ride forth on a noble quest.

For with his Dulcinea beside him so to stand, a man can do quite anything. Outfly the bird upon the wing, Hold moonlight in his hand.

The song "The Quest" embodies man's need to strive for an unreachable goal — "an impossible dream." Love for the ideal spurs him to strive for the stars — "no matter how hopeless, no matter how far, to fight for

reach even into those areas where the secularist will not tread. Reform must be concerned as much with prayer and contemplation, with joy and thanksgiving, with celebration of God's presence in the world, as with collegiality and constitutionalism.

There also is some criticism of those at the opposite end of the Catholic spectrum, particularly those who reduce the whole crisis in the Church today to one of faith, or the lack thereof. Novak wonders what they have in mind with their appeal to faith.

"They seem to mean a resolve of will to think about things (or at least to speak about things) in a special way, in a special language, structuring all their perceptions accordingly," he writes. "Or else they seem to mean an undisturbed, unquestioned, simple way of life."

Both are properly rejected. Faith is not ideology (i.e., a body of "truths" and principles whose primary function and intent is the preservation of the institution which issues them), nor is it blind and uncritical thinking.

Thus far, Novak's arguments are on the mark. He has managed to hit some slow moving targets on both left and right. The heart of the problem, however, is not what's wrong with certain liberals and conservatives, but what is the positive alternative to their attitudes and views? In other words, what does it mean to be a Catholic? It is at this point that Novak's forward thrust begins to falter.

"I conclude that they are Catholic who think of themselves as Catholic, and who shape their lives (in quite personally and culturally distinct ways) around reflection on the Word, the celebration of the eucharist, and a universal sense of peoplehood."

If the word "eucharist" is taken in

a wider sense (embracing the Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant liturgies), then this definition of catholicity is too broad. It could apply to any Christian. Nor is it enough to say that one is a Catholic who thinks of himself as a Catholic (no more than one could say that he is open-minded and tolerant because he thinks of himself as open-minded and tolerant).

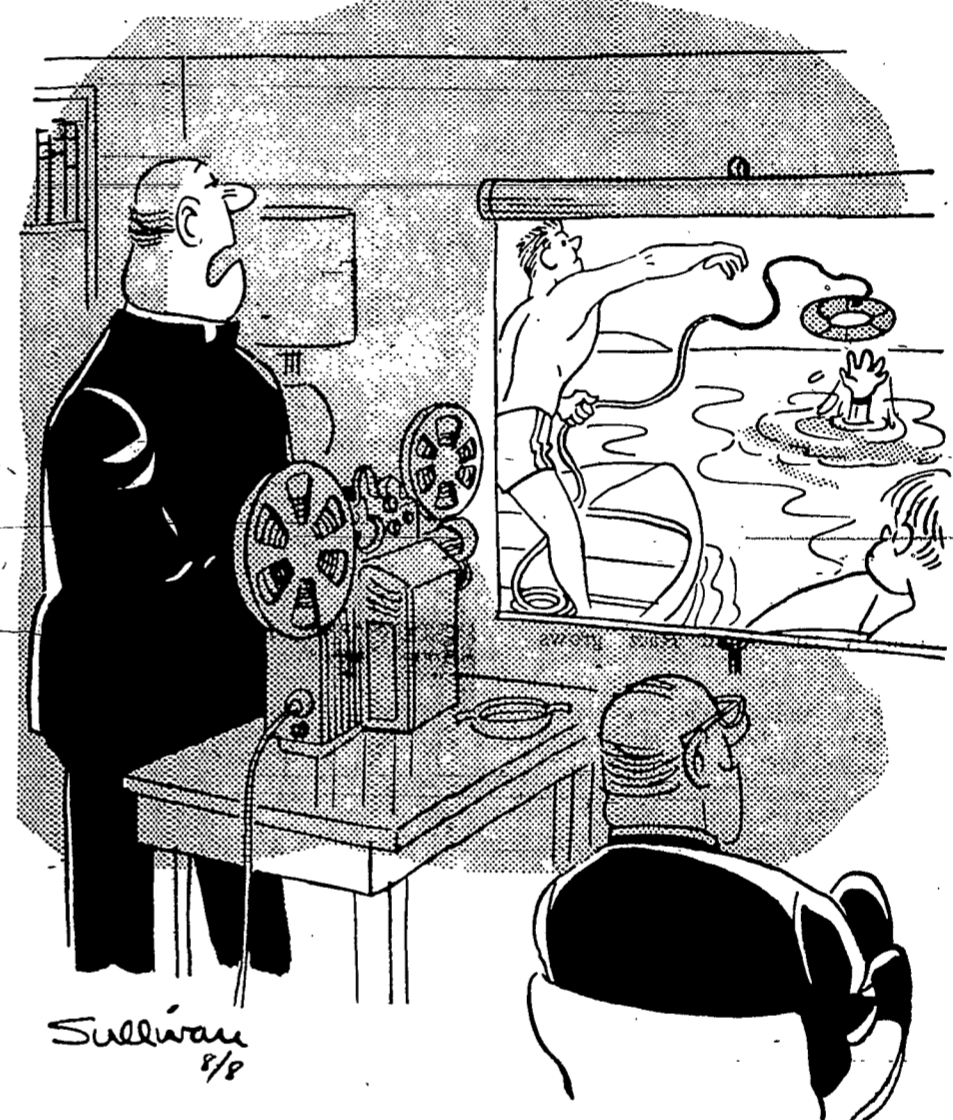
Novak rejects a caricature of the idea that Catholicism is distinguished by its affirmation of papacy and episcopacy within the context of collegiality: "The centralized structure around Pope and Curia, and the use of Rome as a symbol for universal peoplehood, now seem inadequately Catholic, neither true enough nor human enough nor close enough to the Gospels." But he seems to reject more than the caricature.

The specific nature of Catholicism seems, in this view, to be a matter of cultural rather than theological or doctrinal reality.

"Catholic faith is more adequately placed in a people, with all the faults — personal, social, cultural, and institutional — of peoples." Catholics are those who have been shaped by a special history and who could not erase that network of memories, sentiments, and images even if they tried. Presumably, therefore, Charles Davis is still a Catholic, even though he insists that he is not.

A more doctrinal and theological approach is provided in the second chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution. Catholicism is more than a cultural mentality; it is a matter of perceiving a special relationship among revelation, faith, Sacred Scripture, tradition, magisterium, and theology, and of structuring ecclesiastical life (however loosely) around this perception.

The essays over the next several weeks will address themselves to this issue.



"IF I NEVER GET ASSIGNED AS CAMP COUNSELOR AGAIN, IT'LL BE TOO SOON!"

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the right without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause. So that in the end the world will be better . . ."

When the realist in the play, the man of science, Dr. Carrasco, shatters Quixote's dream with mirrors, he reduces the Don to an old man who lays himself down to die. But Dulcinea (Aldonza) comes to his bedside, reminds him of his quest, and gives living proof that his faith was not in vain — for she was changed! The ideal and the dream return and transform Quixote once again, and he dies singing, "Onward to glory — I . . . go . . ."

Today the world is palsied with fear and paralyzed in the face of evil. It needs Don Quixotes to ride across its face again. Dons, fired, not with illusions and impossible dreams, but with the faith of the four — a burning faith in Christ. Men possessed and obsessed by that faith. A faith that embodies an ideal that is not illusional, for Christ, "scored and covered with scars," bore with

unbearable sorrow and fought the unbeatable foe and reached the unreachable stars — victory over death. A faith that conjures a dream, a dream of making all men saints, of changing the world, a dream not impossible for nothing is impossible with God — or have we forgotten?

As the realists in the play thought Quixote mad, so many say the fire Christ came to enkindle upon earth is madness.

"Beauty," said Quixote, "is in the eyes of the beholder." Thus to him the windmill was a giant, the barber's basin the golden helmet of Mambrino, the inn a castle, and the tart a lady of purest beauty. The world said he was mad, just as it said Christ was. But both believed in the things that were not, and made them be.

As Poet O'Shaughnessy put it, "The dreamers of dreams . . . we are the movers and shakers of the world forever it seems" — men of the faith of the four.

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Arrangements for Salome's Church Father Walter Fl

Bishop New S

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen will celebrate the new St. Salome Church, with celebration at 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5.

The Bishop will confer with Father Walter E. Flannery and Father William J. Flannery, assistant Bishop James Flannery will be in the sanctuary.

The new edifice, set in a small frame it was destroyed by a lightning fire on June 17, 1967. It has been in use since May.

Dr. R

By JOHN D. Suddenly Dr. David

He draws three so from a bureau. They in his hands. Slowly, and passes you the are photographs, black barracks, railroad train under a sour lead sky.

Over one gateway is built Macht Frei". Wo Free.

Then a picture of things stamped "RF" Fat. "Soap," Racis say the photographs back crude numbers dug in

Today, the numbers Dachau.

Born Zoltanus Racis Hungary, Dr. Racis attended schools in Budapest, studied at the Peter Paul Seminary in Rochester.

A convert from Judaism, former chief rabbi of synagogue in Budapest teaches Judaic history, and Hebrew grammar at Seminary in Rochester.

He is also presently a dogmatic in the hierarchy of the diocese.

David Racis's pilgrimage and St. Bernard spans wars, nations, and centuries.

Shortly after his Dachau, Dr. Racis assumed office of Chief Rabbi of Synagogue in Budapest.

It is a beautiful building, built in 1820 of holding more than 1,000 persons. German architect it the Alt-Ofen. They that the Nazi Army

Liturgi

A restructuring of Commission of the Diocese to help all parishes move their liturgical renewal

ed this week by Msgr. Shannon, chairman of the

An immediate goal is to prepare clergy and parishes for the new liturgy of the Mass, monies, and the Sacraments and Matrimony.

These new steps in renewal of parish liturgy next Spring.

Establishment of a committee, whose task will be research and planning the three vicariates of the main tools for liturgical changes, Msgr.

Each Regional Council divided into a number