

U.S. Bishops' Statement on Celibacy

(Last of a two-part series.)

Like the Christian faith itself, the ministerial priesthood exists only as embodied in men of a given era and within a given cultural environment. It is not only faith in its doctrinal aspects which needs to be articulated in contemporary idioms. The challenge today is to manifest that the Gospel as an integral way of life is viable and dynamic in the new age which is now opening up in man's life on earth.

It must also be acknowledged that despite recent changes there are still many factors in the daily lives of priests which lead to the frustration of their human and priestly aspirations. For many, perhaps for most, the key problem is not celibacy, but rather a joyful and fruitful style of life and work. The priest, for example, remains fully a man, and his faithful response to the gift of celibacy must be simultaneously a valid realization of his manhood.

Basic human rights and responsibilities must find appropriate realization in the lives of priests. Customs which isolate the priest from the people he serves tend to retard his growth in pastoral identity. Likewise, policies which unduly delay his assumption of major pastoral responsibilities can be corrosive of the zeal of the priest eager to work in freedom and trust.

We pledge ourselves, therefore, to strive for those conditions which permit priests to live fully for the sake of God's People, to bring them the Good News.

PASTORAL APPLICATIONS

We turn to the more directly-pastoral aspects of the question: what is to be done regarding the present complex of problems?

In historical and theological perspective it is not realistic to expect that a change in the Church's general discipline regarding celibacy is forthcoming. An abandonment of the law of celibacy would clearly raise cultural, economic, educational and pastoral problems of the gravest kind without proportionate gain.

And therefore, we again affirm our witness to priestly celibacy. We remind all priests, our brothers and co-workers, of the sacredness of our commitment to a celibate life.

We are convinced that the problem of celibacy is often a symptom of deeper problems. In our rapidly changing culture many priests have become confused as to the nature of

their priestly service. Some lack a sense of accomplishment. Others feel that they have been inadequately prepared for the new forms of ministry expected of them.

In order to improve the preparation of future priests, this National Conference of Catholic Bishops is issuing its new Program of Priestly Formation. To assist those who are already priests adjust to new problems, we are also preparing programs of continuing education and sponsoring a research program on priestly life and ministry in collaboration with experts from such fields as theology, history and the behavioral sciences.

With regard to the vast majority of priests, secure in their commitment to celibacy, we wish to express our joy in the Lord. We believe that their understanding of this commitment and their faithful perseverance in it are an important service to the People of God.

With regard to our brother priests who are suffering trials and doubts in their celibate commitment, we are ready to render every assistance possible to help them resolve these doubts. We are aware that in the life of every man, especially if he has professional responsibilities, there are

times of self-doubt with its consequent dangers. The young frequently have worries about their adequacy for tasks whose difficulties they did not anticipate. Those in middle life often suffer from a sense of failure, disillusionment and low self-esteem.

During a period of trial it may be advisable to relieve a man of undue pressures — for example, through a suitable change of work, a period of spiritual renewal, or in some cases a leave of absence from active priestly ministry. It is of fundamental importance that the deeper causes of disturbance be investigated, to determine whether problems about celibacy are basically symptomatic.

It is possible that some of those asking to be laicized are actually seeking to escape from problems of personal adjustment, which would be better faced within the context of their priestly commitment.

In any case, priests should not judge the value of their work according to the more measurable standards of other walks of life; Jesus Himself appeared to be a failure, yet effected the salvation of the world.

With regard to those priests who have made a final decision to ask for

a dispensation from their priestly obligations, and those who have taken the unfortunate step of entering marriage without a dispensation, certain things should be said.

Contrary to a rather widespread impression, bishops have shown compassion in their efforts to help these priests secure dispensations without undue delay or anguish; nor is it necessary for a priest to enter into an invalid marriage in order to obtain a dispensation.

Certain traditional provisions, aimed at reducing scandal and discouraging hasty withdrawal from the priesthood and celibacy, today often prove ineffective. We favor greater consistency in such procedures.

In addition to continuous improvement of juridical procedures, other ways must be sought to help priests during and after the period of their transition to the lay state. Although they are outside the priestly ministry, their talents and education should not be lost to the Church and the human community.

With regard to seminarians, who we hope someday to welcome as co-workers in our ministry, we ask them to present themselves for or-

dination only if they feel ready and willing, in full honesty and freedom, to commit themselves to a life-long celibate priesthood.

Through our forthcoming Program of Priestly Formation, we intend to continue our efforts to improve the quality and circumstances of training young men for the priesthood, so that ordination takes place only with that degree of psychological and spiritual maturity called for in priestly life and ministry today.

CONCLUSION

This statement on the heritage of priestly celibacy will obviously not be the last word spoken on the subject. We do not anticipate universal agreement with all its positions. Some will find it unduly concessive, others excessively restrictive.

We welcome every constructive criticism which may contribute in any way to a better understanding of the gift of priestly celibacy in the life of the Church. We are united in our concern both that the tradition of priestly celibacy should be maintained in its integrity and that this tradition should find, within the currents of contemporary life, fresh understanding and new supports.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

There's a Place for Everything

By Sarah Child

How does a happily-married mother of two get a room of her own? In my case I acquired my own patterned place simply because nobody else wanted it.

The idea for a family room in our already partially finished walk-out basement was my idea. The intention was that if we moved the television set downstairs with the chair and couch left over from my bachelor days, the living room would be subject to less wear and tear.

A small cozy set up within the larger boundaries of what we euphemistically called the playroom might induce the family downstairs, I reasoned.

So after some prodding, my husband whose work-a-day tools are words borrowed a power saw and got out his hammer. He put up some studs and then some paneling and then a ceiling although the existing one only had a few holes in it.

By then it was Spring and he decided the heating vent could wait until the following fall. The door, too, still had to be hung.

Neither of these omissions kept me from enjoying the room all summer. When the heat grew unbearable in

the basement to the cool loneliness of the "family room."

Nobody else wanted to go downstairs.

More over, said my husband, the television was staying in the living room, when I finally discussed that move with him. He didn't seem to care at all that not placing the set elsewhere would definitely label us lower middle class.

Not too long after we acquired a new TV set we did place the old one downstairs. Then, I discovered that no one, not even me, went downstairs to watch it.

So we moved the old set in our bedroom along with everything else that I use from time to time. There was the early Salvation Army desk I'd bought, the typewriter, the styrofoam Wise-men I was working on, wooden ornaments, decoupage plaques, the sewing machine and tons of newspaper clippings, all of which I was going to file some day in the cardboard filing cabinet next to my dresser.

Then one morning I stumbled out of bed and had trouble getting to the doorway. Something had to be done about the paraphernalia.

My husband thought, "I could move

some of it to the "family room."

Then, the idea hit. I'd move all my precious treasures — a quiet place to write, a comfortable place to read, paint and putter. The one thing I wouldn't move would be the television. Now I was making sure that nobody else would want to use the room.

With standards, brackets and two long boards I found in the garage I had some room shelves for my jars of ornament paints, cooking crystals, wicker baskets and an antique mustache cup full of brushes.

I retrieved my painting of an orange guitar from behind the furnace and on top of a crude blanket chest made by my cousin I stationed my art balanced by the ersatz pewter candlestick I fashioned from a plastic salad bowl, peanut butter container and a grated cheese jar.

A pipe turn-off which my husband hadn't been able to cover was the perfect place to hang some bells he given me.

A radio, a high school graduation gift, and my Georgeje Hoyer books plus an assortment of women's magazines added the finishing touches.

It's messy, but it's mine, all mine.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Peace, With Liberty and Justice

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Recently a man asked me to sign a petition "against this unjust, immoral war." He wore a peace button. His request is worth considering in the light of history and of today's realities.

Some facts: Poland's freedom was given away to the Communist Party of Russia at Yalta. Hungary's almost successful coup for freedom failed in 1956. Czechoslovakia became another Russian captive in 1968 while the West talked about peace and cooperation with Russian Communists. "Drag me not away with the wicked, with those who do wrong, who talk of peace to their neighbors, while malice is in their hearts." (Ps.27/28)

It may be part of our guilt consciousness that we have never accepted Mao Tse-tung's Communist rule. A reliable statistic seems to be that six million Chinese were murdered, plus the national enslavement of 800,000 living victims of systematic death or imprisonment. The same kinds of people the Communists systematically seal; sincere democrats, non-Communist oriented intellectuals, Catholic people and their priests, especially Legionnaires of Mary, Protestant Christians and their pastors, non-Christian religious people, propertyed people, whether crooks or benefactors, are the prospective victims of Hanoi.

That South Vietnam should gradually assume the war within their own country seems to make sense. That the U.S. and other allies should abruptly and unilaterally withdraw does not seem to me to be even quixotic. Rather it would be giving to death and enslavement hundreds of thousands of our brothers.

To think that the pressure from world opinion would deter the Viet Cong from murdering and enslaving the men and women of South Vietnam is sheer poetry. The poem would not be recited by 1,200,000 North Vietnam Catholics who fled the VC — so movingly described by Dr. Tom Dooley. It would not be sung by South Viets who fought with Americans and who would surely be branded as "collaborators and enemies of the Free Republic." The poem would make an unusual duet sung by Red China and Red Russia.

Peace at the price of death and enslavement of our brothers is hardly the peace of Pope Paul who said:

"... Never again one against another, never, never again! ... Will the world ever succeed in changing the exclusive and warring state of mind which up to now has woven so much of its history? This is hard to foresee. So long as man remains

the weak, changeable and even wicked being that he often shows himself to be, defensive arms will, alas! be necessary." (Address to U.N. Art. 5)

Is the war of the South Vietnamese an aggressive war against the North?

No one wants war. But who has the solution for peace in liberty and justice? The 3,000 dead men, women and children of Hue give no hopeful answer. The history of China, Poland, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia is no hopeful answer. Can the doves bring us peace without awful injustice and murder of our brothers? If they have the answer the whole world will be grateful.


Peaceeniks, with rare exceptions, are comfortable martyrs. A few go to jail, and some in the peace of their jails, write profitable books. A few are harassed and willingly suffer in the spirit of a Dorothy Day. But most of them suffer a rather gay martyrdom, traipsing the country for exciting get-togethers.

Will these same martyrs give a couple of their years as volunteers for Hanoi to dig the graves and aid the survivors of our brothers whom they, Platonically, would hand over to slavery and death in the name of a false peace?

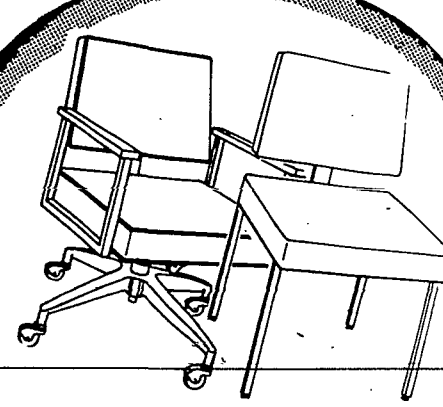


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