

The Synod

Celibacy Continues as Top Issue; U.S. Bishops to Stress Justice Stance

In an atmosphere of unmistakable freedom to say what they think, delegates to the Bishops' Synod got down in the second week to what they called the practical questions. This means what to do about the "priest crisis" and in particular whether the Church of the Latin Rite should now permit the ordination of men already married.

This all seemed simple and businesslike and had the advantage of seeming to sweep under the carpet complex questions of theory and doctrine. But how do you take practical steps when there is yet no agreement on the famous "identity of the priest"?

Among the deeper questions emerging almost spontaneously from the many addresses are:

- Is the Church to allow the ordination of married men only because of an urgent and temporary shortage of priests in some remote area of Africa, Asia or Latin America, or also on general principles without reference to need?

- If recruitment is the sole real problem, will the ordaining of married men contribute to ending it or rather to undermining the celibate clergy?

- What relationship does the ordaining of married men have to do with the theoretical position of some advanced Euro-

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Suenens

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Bishop Anthony Galvin, speaking for Malaysia and Singapore, made an impassioned plea for the possibility of remedying the shortage of priests by ordaining men married and already steeped in the culture of the people. For him it was a question of sheer urgency particularly in view of the ever possible expulsion of Western missionaries.

A different note, however, was sounded by some bishops from developed countries where there is no similar urgent shortage. Dutch Cardinal Bernard Alfrink gave voice, as was to be expected, in favor of ordaining married priests, at least for his country. Bishop Alexander Carter of Sault Sainte Marie put it in more explicit terms. He told the synod that, when queried, the Canadian bishops replied with near unanimity in favor of ordaining mature married men "where there is need."

Bishop Carter said that a small majority, on the other hand, are in favor of changing the present legislation "independently of the need."

"When we in Canada speak of this," he said, "we do not restrict it to shortage. There are forms of ministry which could use married priests, not because there are not enough celibate priests but because of the nature of the ministry itself, for example, university chaplaincies, family apostolates, catechetics and so forth."

The Canadian bishops declar-

ed through Bishop Carter that they are not ready to reintegrate priests who have left the ministry to marry — this is not because of any difficulty in principle but only until the people are accustomed to the sight of married priests. This is to sponsor a kind of open-ended celibacy for which, to put it mildly, the present Synod is not yet ready.

The diversity of attitudes hinges obviously on different conceptions of the future role of the priest. Meanwhile, Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, the Belgian primate, espoused the idea of ordaining married men. He said the Church's need to ordain priests "is of a divine nature that goes before an ecclesiastic legislation" which limits candidates by demanding qualities not required by Scripture.

While Cardinal Suenens' view was characterized by Vatican Radio as a summation of arguments favoring ordination of married men, its counterpoint was found in a speech by Cardinal Antonio Poma of Bologna, president of the Italian bishops' conference.

Cardinal Poma, stressing the importance of the preaching of the Gospel by priests, invited synod delegates to meditate on the fact that "celibacy is not only a human and religious but an evangelical offering rooted in the example of Christ who

The studies also showed, he said, that 87 per cent of American priests felt that celibacy aided their work, but 56 per cent are in favor of optional celibacy, even though only 18 per cent thought they might marry if given the option. Three per cent of priests indicated that they are certainly or probably going to leave the priesthood for marriage.

The national (U.S.) Federation of Priests Councils quickly reacted to Cardinal Krol's intervention. Father Frank Bonnike, president of the federation, said that only average figures were used and therefore did not show the really pressing problems of the younger priests.

"For example," he said, "three fifths of the priests under 35 strongly support optional celibacy, and an additional 23 per cent agree with it somewhat. It is the younger priests the bishops have to respond to if we are to have sufficient younger priests for the future."

While discussion of celibacy occupied center stage, there were other issues stirring in the wings.

The American bishops cited four key areas of concern for the Church — racial discrimination, the arms race, government repression of clergy and the crisis of faith.

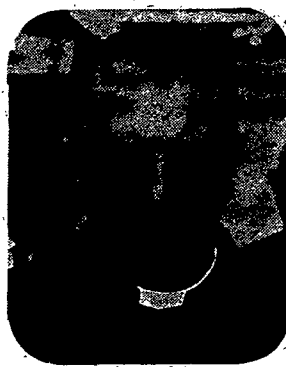
They were responding to an "overview" given by Archbishop Enrico Bartoletti. The archbishop's presentation was made at the request of several episcopal conferences which wanted an outline of positive and negative developments in the Church on which they could base their deliberations.

In criticizing the report, the American delegates said some conditions would inevitably be omitted or given scant attention but cited four areas which they thought required more serious consideration.

In a development which is certain to have repercussions in the United States, a delegation of American black Catholics met with Archbishop Giovanni Benelli of the Vatican Secretariat of State, and said they were told the appointment of black bishops and the institution of a black Catholic rite in the U.S. depends on the American hierarchy, not on Rome.

Joseph Dulin of Detroit, president of the National Black Catholic Lay Caucus, said at a news conference that Archbishop Benelli was open to their views and "took a wise position" insofar as he said he would study the black demands further.

Father Lawrence Lucas of New York City, who heads the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, charged that the American bishops "have been playing games with us." He said that 70 per cent of the inhabitants of Washington are black and "there is a need of a black man as bishop."



Suenens

"... too many limits on ordinations."



Alfrink

"... favors ordaining of married men."

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Cardinal's figures
"misleading."

invited the Apostles to leave everything and follow Him."

"Celibacy has been the subject of discussions at different times in the history of the Church and always for motives which can be synthesized in the decadence of customs, in the devaluation of the priestly ministry, and for humanistic reasons," said the Italian prelate.

Adding fuel to the fire, Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, told the assembled prelates "that the priesthood is not in a state of collapse — or even close to it."

Speaking for the U.S. bishops on the practical aspects of the priestly ministry, Cardinal Krol said:

"We should not minimize or exaggerate the tensions and problems that have been brought to light by our studies. Nevertheless there is no consolation to be found in the evidence collected from the priests themselves. The priesthood is not in a state of collapse or even close to it."

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