

The Priesthood in Crisis

Part V; Last of a Series

The question: should there be married priests? should not in any sense prejudice the question: is celibacy an important witness to the Gospel in the life of the Church?



It is important that these two questions be distinguished. For all too often the heated discussions on the celibacy issue (fanned by the seeming unwillingness on the part of the authorities in the Church even to discuss the issue openly) have tended to reduce the question to these terms: Shall we have bachelor priests or married priests? Until we see the difference between bachelorhood and celibacy, the issues will necessarily remain blurred.

A man may choose bachelorhood for a number of reasons; none of them may have anything to do with his commitment to God.

Guest Columnist

We are one of eight parishes in the diocese taking part in a new program of deacon internship. Bishop Hogan has assigned Father Vasile to us for a year. It is the mind of our bishops that in the long run it is best for the Church to provide an extra year of seasoning for those who are in turn to become the "salt of the earth."



We all know some of the decisions being made by men so quickly after they enter the priesthood and in some cases some of the sadness it brings. It is clearer all the time that however enlightened our seminaries are, they are still nestlike and the emergence into full duty may be too sudden.

A year of internship then, as in other professional fields, can be an invaluable time. It provides a clear separation from the seminary protectiveness, and the sheltering academic

Celibacy, on the other hand, is a radical decision for the kingdom of God. It is a radical decision to be "God's man" for the spread of the kingdom of God.

Celibacy is not a negation of love; it is the choice of a freedom to love in a unique way. In the decree on "The Renewal of Religious Life," Vatican II has this description of celibacy (chastity): "It liberates the human heart in a unique way and causes it to burn with greater love of God and for all mankind." (Art. 12)

It is good to be told that celibacy has something to do with the human heart: that it liberates it and causes it to burn. Experience shows us the tremendous capacity of the human heart; yet this capacity can only be realized when the heart is free (liberated) to "do its thing," and "its thing," men of all ages have testified, is "love." The unique witness of celibacy in the Church makes sense only when it is understood as this unique liberation of the human heart which causes it to burn with greater love for God and men.

In liberating the human heart celibacy also liberates the human person. In a culture

that has become so very self-conscious of sexuality, celibacy may be seen as a witness to the primacy of person as person rather than person as either male or female. It points to a unique liberation of the heart, to a form of love that finds fulfillment and expression, not in sexual involvement, but in the service of persons.

Studies and surveys have amassed a great deal of data on the question of celibacy and on attitudes toward celibacy. These studies have their value; and what they have to say to us must be listened to. Reflection on them and on the present needs of the Church may well point to future changes in the Church's choice of those who will carry on the priestly ministry on behalf of the people of God.

At the same time it must be pointed out that celibacy for the kingdom of God cannot be reduced to sociological or psychological categories. It is a gift of the Spirit to the Church. Whatever disciplinary changes the Church may see fit to make in accepting candidates for priestly ministry must not prejudice the importance of this gift of the Spirit given for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

By Father Robert MacNamara

A Program for Deacons

Father Robert MacNamara is pastor of St. Ann's Church in Hornell.

atmosphere, without the full responsibility of the cultic priest. There is no question of the willingness of these men to be "all things to all men". This is rather, a chance to know in a different dimension the commitment they make to the people as the Church understands it.

This program has been the prayerful decision of our diocesan bishops, and has been authored in part by Father Joseph Brennan, rector of St. Bernard's Seminary, who has a responsibility for the spiritual maturity of these men that few others want to share.

The bishop has consistently referred to "the good people of Hornell" as a natural home to bring out the best in a candidate for the priesthood. We, on the other hand, are blessed for a year. Our people see already a "man of God" who cares for them especially in our hospitals, and for their children in our schools of religion.

The program seems to have come from the same wisdom as that great Christian existential Pope John XXIII who saw the situation in the Church as it really was — heading for a cold winter, and called Vatican II to sow the seeds for a new spring. In the meantime, it may not seem the most useful step for crisis living.

Father Vasile could be more "useful" if he could preside at Mass or administer the Sacrament of the Sick. The one reservation I had about the diaconate program was while tip-toeing past his room recently at 3 a.m. on the way to St. James Mercy Hospital to care for a dying man. Oh, for a dray horse then to share "full" load. A dray horse, however, can only help pull what is already in the dray. A shepherd, if a romantic figure, is the one Christ chose, and he does go after the lost sheep. A bright young shepherd apprentice can indeed bring back many a sheep to within range of the shepherd's staff. Thank God our chief shepherd has taken the lead and that we have benefited as a parish.

Editorial

Anti-Abortion a Most Modern Viewpoint

All of those people involved in the pro-life movement who have felt dismayed and frustrated in the fight against liberalized abortion because they were shunted off as "conservatives" or as "religious nuts" will be gratified to hear of a new development in the issue.

Many pro-lifers have been trying to get the message across that theirs is not merely a religious viewpoint but one that has legal and medical as well as moral overtones.

Now the United States Supreme Court is considering the legality of abortion and has received an "amicus curiae" brief supporting the contention that an unborn fetus is an autonomous human being entitled to full protection of law.

And it did not come from any religious organization but was signed by 220 physicians, including many fellows of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Many signatories took the pro-life stand against abortion on demand for the first time.

What are their arguments based on? One of the modern medical specialties — fetology — has provided numerous techniques for the examination and treatment

of the fetus, including x-ray fluoroscopy, ultrasound, miniature fiberoptic cameras and endoscopes that are inserted through the cervix. A technique known as amniocentesis taps the fluid environment of the fetus to make cell studies to determine fetal health or genetic damage.

The physicians' brief states:

"Modern obstetrics has discarded as unscientific the concept that the child in the womb is but tissue of the mother."

The brief says that "review of the current medical status of the unborn shows conclusively the humanity of the fetus by showing that human life is a continuum which commences in the womb."

As for the premise that a woman can do whatever she wishes with her own body, the brief declares that the child is as much a patient as the mother and that "in all the literature opting for permissive abortion, this simple truth is ignored."

"Another medical fallacy that modern obstetrics discards is the idea that the pregnant woman can be treated as a patient alone. No problem in fetal health or disease can any longer be considered in isolation. At the very least, two people are involved, the mother and the child."

The brief provided detailed medical account of the development of the fetus from conception through six months to demonstrate why the doctors believe modern science has established the humanity of the unborn.

Among the signatories was Dr. A. W. Wiley of New Zealand, the first doctor to transfuse a child within the womb; Dr. Woodward Beacham, Tulane University, co-founder and first president of the American College of Obstetricians; and 30 physicians associated with the University of Minnesota including Dr. Fred Mecklenburg, clinical instructor of obstetrics and gynecology and director of a family planning program.

Such developments are heartening for pro-life people who have believed in their cause as one which can stand the scrutiny of modern techniques.

They also point out the worth and necessity of science — the more we learn the closer we come to infinite truths.

They also should give second thought to otherwise respectable legislators who rolled along with a faddish tide to approve liberalized abortion in New York State.