

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Celibacy Conflict

There is probably no one in the Church today who has not taken a firm and unalterable stance on the controversial issue that has surfaced often in recent years. The question before us is this: Shall we preserve the long tradition of clerical celibacy as a mandatory discipline in the Western Church or shall we make it optional to the exercise of the priesthood?

The thought of this subject as matter for pastoral reflection came forcefully to my mind on Sept. 24 as I ordained six young men to the diaconate in a ceremony which includes a commitment to celibacy as a permanent condition required for ordination to the diaconate and eventual ordination to the priesthood.

I am well aware of contradictory opinions which have received much publicity in recent years. Among those who have vigorously defended an unmarried clergy is a man of the stature of Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president of Notre Dame University. He insists that married priests "could not be the shock troops that will carry the day against the monumental powers of darkness that presently threaten the People of God."

On the other side are those who say that optional celibacy is more in line with the American way which emphasizes freedom and pluralism.

As director of students preparing for the priesthood, I have always been honest about the present discipline and never offered hope of its alteration in my lifetime. I tried to challenge the seminarians to accept the values inherent in the discipline. I am most grateful for the positive insights on the value of celibacy offered by Father Peter G. Van Breeman, SJ, in his recent book, *Called by Name*, Chapter XIX, "Unmarriageable for God's Sake." It assured me of a gift that I have been given and have always treasured despite the pain which accompanies its possession.

The Old Testament offers us nothing that would suggest celibacy as God's gift. In fact, the role of father and mother becomes sacred in a heightened sense. Even as late as the prophetic

days the celibacy of Jeremiah comes as a shock to people who rejected those who had the power of life within them and did not transmit it for the Messiah had been promised as the prized transmission of human generation.

It is only in the New Testament that personal celibacy becomes a blessed factor in human life. The real mystery of consecrated celibacy lies in the reason for it, expressed by Christ in these words, "for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven." Celibacy for the kingdom becomes possible because it can find inspiration and impetus from contemplation of the kingdom as shaped in Jesus Christ.

In its final analysis, celibacy means being captured by Christ. He is our life, fascinating us so completely that we become unmarriageable. It means that we can gradually become incapable of marriage. When a person takes his first or even final step of commitment, he is not saying anything more than this: "I am accepting an ideal and I am willing to put forth every effort to achieve this goal." If optional celibacy were offered to me tomorrow and I had to make a decision, it would mean that I had not achieved maturity and had accepted celibacy mostly because of a law which had said that I was unmarriageable.

It is a long and difficult road to become unmarriageable for the sake of the Kingdom. It can take years to become so fascinated by the Person of Jesus Christ. Celibacy never means the loss of something but rather the finding of SOMEONE. It is a pilgrimage. Unless this pilgrimage is based on a deep attraction for the Person of Christ, celibacy can be irresponsible. It can lead to a coldness of heart, a lack of affection and possibly even to laziness.

Celibacy needs the support of the Christian community. A cold community which isolates the celibate can do great harm. The people in the parish are partly responsible for the celibacy of their priests, and members of a religious community are responsible for one another's celibacy.

Recent studies by Father James Gill in *Medical Insight* bears this out:

"Priests who are leaving and marrying are very often depressed. The priest dropout is most often a man who found himself taken for granted in a crowded system that sometimes denies

the human need for approval. This discovery has caused some of the Church's most dedicated and talented priests and religious to become sad, lonely, disillusioned and resentful."

From many studies that have been made on the present vocation crisis and on the exodus of those who seemed so promising in their roles as priests and religious, and who gave so many of their years so generously to the service of the Church, I have concluded:

Physical sex does not seem to be the principal problem.

The lack of recognition and approval has led to today's emotional problems.

The lack of expressed support by Community or by parish has made priests and religious prey to anyone who has entered their lives and is sensitive to their needs.

With Father Richard McCormick, SJ, theologian and Associate Editor of *America*, I am inclined to agree: "What seems to become increasingly clear is that a fairly good number of people have received ordination or made religious profession but have either never received the gift of celibacy or have never personalized it by choice when it was offered by the Spirit. Such celibacy becomes nothing more than an external conformity to a law."

I have written these reflections not to raise the question as to whether we should have mandatory or optional celibacy, but rather to stress the fact that celibacy is a gift and it requires a constant growth in personal holiness to preserve it. Its greatest service to people is to show them that God is so real that He can truly fill a human heart and can bring a human life to fulfillment. Cardinal Suhard once remarked that "it means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist."

Above all, I have written to seek your prayerful support and encouragement for those who are striving each day to reach maturity in their pilgrimage of becoming "unmarriageable for God's sake." We cannot come to God completely by ourselves. We need your inspiration and affection. We cannot demand it but we can hope for it.

Churches Show New Interest in Indians

By Religious News Service

"Even the white man, whose God walks and talks with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all; we shall see. One thing we know, which the white man may know some day — our God is the same God. You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. He is the God of man, and His compassion is equal for the red man and the white."

So spoke Chief Seattle, leader of the Suquamish tribe, in an 1854 speech marking the transfer of ancestral Indian lands to the federal government. It has taken some time for whites in general to accept the chief's vision. Some would question if they have, even today.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that religious consciousness of American Indians' plight and problems has been raised by recent events.

Chief Seattle himself, who became a Roman Catholic in the 1830s, is included on the liturgical calendar proposed for use by North American Lutherans. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship says that "unlike many of his time, he rejected war and chose the path of peace" living "in such a way that he earned the respect of both Indians and white men."

During the Roman Catholic Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in August, a special "native heritage liturgy" was celebrated by Father John Hascall, a Chippewa. The planning committee included Indians from nearly a dozen tribes. The service incorporated "native rituals which have nourished their Christian conversion."

At this Spring's General Conference of the United Methodist Church, Dennis Banks, leader of the controversial American Indian Movement, praised the denomination for standing "first among a few in the battle for oppressed people."

Banks, a member of the Indian Sundance religion, himself benefited from United Methodist concern: \$10,000 in bail money was put up for him by the denomination's Iowa Conference and Board of Church and Society. (Both lost their money when Banks jumped bail. Banks said he did so because he feared for his life if he went back to prison.)

In April 1975, the Roman Catholic bishops of Minnesota urged the faithful to "join the struggle to secure equitable resolution of past injustices inflicted on Indian people by the U.S. government and other public and private institutions."

Calling for a "new beginning" the bishops said, "our (past) deeds, although done in good faith, were sometimes, in fact, a disservice to Indian people," often communicating a "feeling that Native American cultural institutions were inferior."

This summer, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Roach of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, pledged personal support, about \$40,000 in archdiocesan funds in 1976, and the support of archdiocesan agencies in implementing all but two of 64 recommendations from a 42-member task force of Indian and archdiocesan representatives.

In Idaho last fall, Roman Catholic Bishop Sylvester Treinen of the Diocese of Boise entrusted to the Coeur d'Alene Indians a restored mission church near Cataldo, said to be the oldest standing building in the state.

Bishop Treinen said he took the action "at least partially to redress the injustices done" to the tribe when it was forced to move from its home near the mission to a reservation in 1877.

"I do this to assure myself that there is no racism in my own heart,"

Bishop Treinen said, "and perhaps to help others to do the same."

Early this Spring, an ancient Indian naming ceremony, including a prayer to the Great Spirit, drums, dancing, and the smoking of a peace pipe, was conducted for an infant member of the Wampanoag tribe in the Roman Catholic Chapel of Our Savior in Brockton, Mass.

Father William Lewis, SA, a member of the chapel staff, said the Franciscan Atonement friars who run it "welcome and respect this sharing of an esteemed cultural heritage and tradition." He added that the "undeniably religious foundation of the traditional Indian culture which the Algonquin Association is preserving ought to be strengthened and supported."

But if things are getting better, there remains much to be done in the eyes of some Indian representatives.

Speaking before a dozen Roman Catholic bishops during their 1975 regional Bicentennial hearings, Leon Cook, a Chippewa who is past president of the National Congress of American Indians, praised Roman Catholic schools on Indian reservations as places where Indian customs and values are not undermined.

Nonetheless, he said, "It's high time that the churches stop playing games with us and saying that these (problems) are political issues and the church is a political." He urged the bishops to launch a "new crusade" for a revised sense of values toward Indians.

Last February, Nelson Small Legs, Jr., addressed a group of Canadian Lutherans at a workshop in Calgary.

"All we're asking is 'Give us a chance to govern our own selves; give us a place in Canadian society where we belong. My life means a lot to me, but if I have to give it up to protect my children, to protect my wife, to protect my grandfather, to protect the old people, I'll give it up. No second thoughts about it. If I have to protect myself, if I have to protect them and it means I'm going to die in the process, well so be it, I am. This is the way the conscience thinks. The dominating society — all they think about is the money. With us, it's our lives."

"Indian people have a lot to offer to society. I only wish I could help if I was given a chance," he added.

In mid-May, Small Legs, 23, father of two, was dead. He killed himself, said one of his suicide notes, "to open the eyes of non-Indians into how much we have suffered."