

More Opinion

Celibacy: An Explanation

Editor:

In his recent letter to the Courier-Journal (11/10/76), Father Gerald T. O'Connor raised the question of the justice of the Latin Church in holding to celibacy those priests who have not received the "gift of celibacy."

Church regulations on the matrimonial status of the clergy have varied from time to time and from Rite to Rite. The popular explanation of the Latin Church's practice has been that the Church calls her clerics to the priesthood and then imposes on them the obligation of celibacy. Presented in these terms, the policy might indeed seem unjust.

In more recent years, however, the Latin practice has been described from a wholly different angle which makes it less liable to this criticism. Here is a description of the process of calling to the clerical state according to the newer understanding.

1. The Latin Church does not pick candidates and then impose celibacy upon them. Rather, it picks candidates who have already received the gift of celibacy. As The Teaching of Christ puts it (Huntington, 1976), the Church selects for the priesthood "only those who judge they can willingly live celibate lives for the sake of the kingdom." (P. 452.)

2. Celibacy elected by Christian men and women "for the sake of the kingdom" is an honored, indeed, a Gospel tradition. History has proved its value as an "eschatological sign," that is, a reminder to mankind in this life that there is in our future an unchanging eternity in which men and women "neither marry nor are given in marriage but live like angels." (Mk. 12, 25.) By the nature of things, Christian celibates are perhaps less able than others to realize what an impact this sign has on others, especially on the married. The impact is no less strong among Christians of the Eastern Rites, which hold celibacy in such reverence that they choose bishops only from among the unmarried clergy.

3. How does the Latin Church reach the conclusion that a candidate for the clergy has the gift of celibacy? We at St. Bernard's Seminary point out to the candidate (perhaps with more emphasis than we thought necessary of old) the significance of clerical celibacy as a) a "sign of the kingdom," and b) as a spiritual and apostolic support. The student reads up on the subject carefully and prayerfully, asking himself with the counsel of his spiritual director, whether celibacy would in his case present any major problem. He is reminded, of course, that this commitment requires consistent self-discipline, but he is likewise reminded that Christ has promised both assistance and reward to those who give up family for his sake. (Mt. 19, 29). If, after this thorough consideration, the candidate feels able to reach a positive decision, he is judged to possess the "gift of celibacy." Should he have satisfied the other requirements, he is then called to the holy orders of diaconate and priesthood.

4. Some might say this is a blind decision, because it is made without knowledge of the stresses that time may bring. But it is surely no blinder than the judgment a young man and woman make at marriage when they promise to be faithful to each other until death. Granted, neither celibacy nor matrimonial fidelity are "cheap" graces. They are "costly" graces, in that they require constant self-mastery and sometimes (once or twice, perhaps, in a lifetime) an act of heroism. But few heroisms are easier, for Christ has assured us, "For men it is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Mt. 19, 26). It seems to me, therefore, that if a celibate person or a married person does not live up to the commitment made at the altar, it is not a case of their never having had the "gift of celibacy" or the "gift of fidelity." It is rather a case of having had those gifts placed in their hands, and then having allowed them, somehow, to slip through their fingers.

Explained in this manner, the policy of the Latin Church on celibacy in the clergy is much easier to understand.

Fr. Robert F. McNamara
Saint Bernard's Seminary

Double Standard Charged

Editor:

In your report on Barber Conable's stand on abortion I disagree with the statement that he supports his party's plank on abortion. If he stated this was his position, then he is taking another double standard as he does with other issues.

I have enclosed a documented petition which Conable signed in Kansas City which states:

"We, the undersigned members of the resolutions committee, strongly oppose the inclusion of the plank dealing with abortion in the national platform of the Republican Party. We feel that such a plank is not in the best interests of the Republican Party, its members, its officeholders, and candidates."

John E. Leary, Jr.
523 Black Walnut Drive
Rochester, N.Y. 14615

Column Commended

Editor:

I commend Nancy Murphy's recent column "The Unwanted Mother, Part II, How ideal it would be if local schools posted a copy of it on the bulletin boards inside faculty rooms. So often a teenager takes a teacher's quick word of encouragement or discouragement to make a major decision. More than anything else students learn the attitudes of teachers; that is why it is so important that teachers in a Catholic school reflect the teachings of Christ and his Church.

Margaret Finucane
284 Canterbury Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14607

Too Much Negativism

Editor:

My sincere apologies to Nancy Murphy. I'm afraid I did exactly what I accused her of doing — being self righteous. She was kind enough to correspond personally with me and enlightened me of her past efforts in offering alternative actions.

However, I still maintain that we (as a general group) spend a great deal more time criticizing other proposals, organizations, people that we do in affirming our own positive programs. That is not to say that acceptable alternatives do not exist, simply that they are not well publicized.

Why is it that Planned Parenthood is a name on everyone's lips but few know Brightlight exists? Why do we campaign to remove pornography instead of demanding good literature? Why is it we decry the proliferation of artificial birth control devices instead of demanding more and better information about natural family planning? Why do we have to read the Courier to find these alternatives when their counterparts are found in the secular press?

Our numbers are not so few, our buying power is not so small and our viewpoints are not so parochial. We must demand public exposure for these alternatives to modern secularism.

Judith Stewart
28 Ridge Meadows Dr.
Spencerport 14559

Christmas Prayer

A Child's Christmas Reflection. Listen to me, Jesus, listen to what I want for Christmas. Remember that twenty-dollar toy? Forget it! All I want is You, dear Jesus, all I really want — is You.

Peter R. Palmeri
CCD Instructor
St. Dominic's Parish
Shortsville, NY

SOME THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

By Ed Sulewski

Talking about death is often difficult. Yet a death in the family may create problems for survivors which can sometimes be alleviated by discussion and pre-planning. Funeral and burial arrangements are an important consideration and should be discussed openly and frankly. Pre-arranging and sometimes pre-financing a funeral is a method some people choose to assist their survivors after death occurs.

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