

Vatican Officer Sees Waning Of Priestly Celibacy Strife

Vatican City (RNS)—A Vatican prelate suggested here that a "state of agitation" which has surrounded the question of priestly celibacy for the past decade has subsided, but he emphasized that the basis of the problem still remains—a misunderstanding of the commitment between man and Christ.

Speaking on the 10th anniversary of the publication of Pope Paul's encyclical, "Sacerdotalis Celibatus," Cardinal Gabriel Marie Garrone, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, said that despite the "silence" on celibacy today, the circumstances are "so serious" and the pastoral necessities "so urgent" that reflection on the papal directive is worthwhile.

The cardinal stated that "apostolic necessity"—a shortage of priests—might "force the Church to modify" its position on celibacy, but said the Church could only act "in a climate of perfect clarity in which the motives for its behavior would be clear to everyone."

The Church remains, he added, "strong in the face of assaults from all sides, on its feet in spite of its wounds, hopeful...against all hope, faithful to God" on the question of priestly celibacy. "The very meaning of the priesthood is at stake, as well as the requirements for the love of Christ and service to the Church."

Noting that the most solemn interventions on the question of priestly celibacy have been the 1967 papal encyclical and the position of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Garrone said "given the ample liberty which many theologians still take today, much is written and spoken in different theories about celibacy."

"However, judging by appearances, the atmosphere has cooled down. The joint action of the episcopates has been effective. One can no longer speak about a state of agitation, as in the past," he said.

"But," he added, "this silence can have many meanings. Whatever it may be, the circumstances are so serious and the pastoral necessities are often so urgent that a reference to the encyclical...which may stimulate prayer and reflection" would appear valuable.

Regarding the vow of celibacy for priests, Cardinal Garrone said it is important "not to love oneself in various and marginal considerations, in motivations of unequal value. One would end...by imposing the least favorable conditions from dealing with difficulties which are all too real in the priesthood."

"Priestly celibacy—and this is the basis of the problem—is a commitment between man and Christ. A

man has been 'seized' by Christ, according to St. Paul. A man has loved Christ...to the extent of total donation," the cardinal stated.

Even those who challenge the Church's right to bind men by the law of priestly celibacy have recourse to the word "charism," he said. "One must rejoice that they use it, even if they are mistaken in their usage."

Stressing that the Church identifies priestly celibacy as a "charism" or special gift from God, Cardinal Garrone said that "if one forgets this, then the perfect chastity of the priest no longer has meaning."

He pointed to the unfortunate circumstance in which a priest is "taken by the whirlwind of the senses" and is "overcome" by human love to the point of no longer believing he can be faithful to the celibate life. "At such time he should go back to the moment at which he voluntarily undertook his commitment and be confronted by the fact that Christ asked everything of him."

Cardinal Garrone said the Church does not hesitate to "make its commitment to celibacy a law for the priest, and to reserve an essential place for those in the Oriental world (Eastern Rite churches) in particular with regard to the bishops." (In Eastern Churches in communion with Rome, bishops are chosen only from celibate priests.)

Protestant Churchmen See Neuman a Saint for All

Vatican City (RNS) — Protestant churchmen from Philadelphia who attended the canonization of St. John Neumann say the first male saint from the United States can provide an example for all Christians.

This observation, in varying ways, was made by retired United Methodist Bishop Fred Pierce Corson of Philadelphia and the chairman of the Metropolitan Christian Council in Philadelphia, Dr. John Shetler, a minister of the United Church of Christ.

With Dr. Rufus Cornelsen, the council's executive director, they attended the Vatican ceremony and

subsequent services as guests of Cardinal John Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia.

Former president of the World Methodist Council and a delegated observer at the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Corson said he would like to "see in the Protestant churches a very spiritual effect of the canonization of Bishop Neumann."

"Protestants should read about this great man," he said. "They should see the reasons why saints are named in the Catholic Church."

"We need an antidote to

our own overemphasis on organization to the detriment of the spiritual life. This celebration of the holiness of one man can be of great assistance in bringing back evangelism and spirituality in the church."

"We Protestants need you Roman Catholics," Bishop Corson said. "We were in danger of losing our soul, and you Roman Catholics are helping us to get it back. You're helping to stabilize us, and I would hope that we would have many more community gatherings to such subjects as sanctity and spirituality."

Dr. Shetler lauded Bishop Neumann as one all Christians might emulate through concern for the poor and for persons of all nations and all races.

"The full Christian Church has its heroes," he said, "and the Roman Catholic Church recognizes them through canonizations. Other denominations call them heroes of the faith without calling them saints."

Dr. Shetler said that reluctance to call such heroes "saints" could come from St. Paul's reference to all followers of Christ as saints.

He noted that his denomination, The United Church of Christ, holds the concept of the "communion of saints."

"The Christian life means," he said, "that we emulate Christ and His apostles and those who have been in the Church Militant and are now in the Church Triumphant."

Cardinal Speaks of Saint

Rome (RNS) — At a Mass in honor of St. John Neumann, celebrated in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia recalled the new American saint's life by reading his homily in four languages other than English — Czech, Slovak, German and Italian.

His message in Czech recalled the cities known to the young Neumann as he grew up in his mother's native land, and noted that the immigrant bishop was "the beautiful gift of Prachatitz, Bohemia, to the new world."

Speaking in German, Cardinal Krol recalled that through his father, John Neumann traced his ancestry to Bavaria and that the family had sought refuge from the political disturbances of Napoleon's time by settling in Czechoslovakia.

The cardinal related how Father Neumann had begun his priestly work among the Germans of Rochester and Buffalo, N.Y., and then had gone on to Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, attending to the needs of immigrants from Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Ireland.

In English, Cardinal Krol spoke of those who question "the practical value and relevance of Christians assembling for the Eucharist," and who look skeptically "at the spectacle of a canonization and especially at the emphasis within it on the priesthood and religious life."

"We live," he said, "in an age that is very action-oriented, where tangible and instant results appear to be the only measure of success. Members of the Church herself are frequently tempted by or even surrender to this action-above-all-else mentality. Many of us also want to gauge our success in spreading Christ's message only by tangible and instant results."

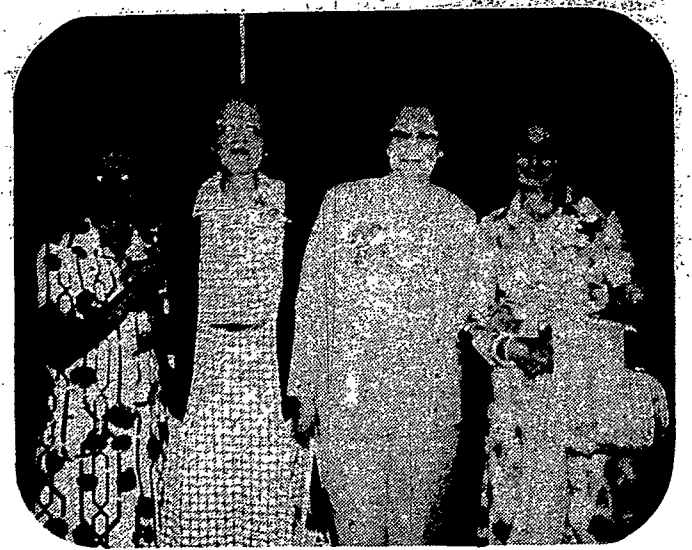
Cardinal Krol recalled how Bishop Neumann had been criticized as having only half the qualities necessary for a good superior— exemplary conduct and regularity. "He lacks the all-important qualities of force and authority," one critic said.

The prelates comment was: "This critic is known to us today only as a footnote in biographies of our new saint."

On Behalf of Chileans

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — An official of the U.S. Catholic Conference has urged the United Nations to give "most serious consideration" to a plea from the bishops of Chile that it investigate the disappearance of some 500 people in their country during the past few years.

In a telegram to U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, Father J. Bryan Hehir, secretary for International Justice and Peace, said his office had seen "convincing evidence" to back the Chilean bishops' charges.



50 Years in Nursing

Veronica Maxwell, Eloise Earl, Betty Briceland and Helen Chapman, recently were feted on the 50th anniversary of their entry into professional nursing at the bi-annual dinner and business meeting of the St. Mary's Hospital Alumni Association.

SHOW BIZ

Memorial Art Gallery's summer exhibition displays 325 examples of American art and artifacts generated by circuses, carnivals, the opera and related enterprises during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The show will run through Sept. 25.

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Hands Across the Sea

Father Nicodemus Kirima, rector of St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary in Langata Nairobi, Kenya, is greeted by Father Joseph Reinhart, center, Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and Father Frank Lioi, new rector of St. Bernard's Seminary. They celebrated Mass together Thursday noon at Father Reinhart's East Avenue office.