

Church Emphasizing Pastoral Care Of Homosexuals

By NC News Service

Three recent separate events highlighted an apparently growing emphasis on sensitive pastoral care and support for homosexuals in the Catholic Church.

The events also gave new attention to central Catholic teachings on the subject: that homosexual acts are immoral but homosexual orientation itself is not, and that no one should have his personal dignity or human and civil rights denied or infringed because of homosexual orientation.

In San Francisco on June 2 Archbishop John R. Quinn unveiled a new archdiocesan pastoral plan, developed by his priests' senate, for Catholic ministry to homosexual persons.

Two days later in Rome the influential Jesuit journal, *Civiltà Cattolica*, commented on a growth in Catholic homosexual organizations in Italy and denied a secular newspaper's assertions that the Church has "a violently negative attitude...toward homosexuality."

In Miami, a month earlier the Catholic archdiocesan weekly, *The Voice*, had prominently featured a two-part series on homosexual Catholics that emphasized the life stories of those who are committed to the Church and

trying to live up to the Church's moral teachings, and their needs for pastoral and spiritual support.

The *Voice's* series and the San Francisco plan both emphasized the need for a special pastoral ministry that is sensitive to and supportive of homosexuals while not condoning homosexual activity.

"Sensitive pastoral expertise is...called for to assist a homosexual person to respect his or her own individual 'secret core' while also being attentive to and responsive toward the norms of sexual and personal morality taught in the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church," said the San Francisco plan.

"We recognize among clergy and Religious the necessity of support groups if they're going to live a celibate life," said a Miami priest interviewed by *The Voice*. "And therefore if the Church indeed feels an obligation to teach the call of celibacy for anyone who is homosexual, the Church has a concurrent pastoral responsibility to assist them in living a celibate life."

The article in *Civiltà Cattolica*, while basically addressing an issue in Italy, quoted at length from the U.S. bishops' 1976 pastoral letter on moral values to

Acts Are Immoral But The Orientation Is Not

express the Church's doctrinal and pastoral stand toward homosexuality and homosexual persons.

It noted that, according to that pastoral, "the fundamental human rights of homosexuals must be respected" and "like heterosexuals, homosexuals are called to witness to chastity."

Addressing the tension between the Church's condemnation of homosexual activity and its recognition of the fundamental human dignity of homosexually oriented persons, the article commented that "the Church and the Christian community must make their own not only the understanding which charity demands, but also the active involvement of homosexuals in the Christian community, according to what prudence suggests, and the defense of their rights from every discriminatory attitude of society."

The 40-page pastoral plan in San Francisco dealt in depth with the doctrinal-pastoral issue, using the principle of gradualism as its focal point. According to that principle, as summarized by the document, "personal movement toward greater good and deeper personal integrity is gradual and progressive and is brought about only 'in steps.'"

"Homosexual men and women, authentically struggling with the difficult tension between orientation and

sexual behavior must always be met, then, with understanding, patience and love," the plan said.

Noting that homosexual people include "blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, rich, poor, educated, illiterate...Democrats, Republicans, independents," the plan stressed that the personality of those diverse individuals could not be "reduced merely to their sexual orientation." The document therefore refused to use the noun, "homosexual," saying that that usage in effect declares a person's homosexual orientation to be the sum of his or her personality.

Both the San Francisco plan and the *Voice's* series sought to debunk "myths" about homosexuals such as the ideas that they are more likely than heterosexuals to be child molesters, unstable or promiscuous, or the idea that homosexual orientation is the result of choice rather than an unchosen condition.

They stressed that lack of acceptance, misunderstanding, loneliness and the social stigma attached to homosexual orientation are among major obstacles to happiness faced by homosexuals.

In that light, they argued, the Church's ministry to homosexual persons must also include acceptance of homosexual Catholics into parish life and the elimination of prejudice against them by heterosexual Catholics.

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Reckless Abandon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 9/18-24. (R1) Zec. 12/10-11. (R2) Gal. 3/26-29.

The Sunday readings ask us to draw close to Christ through death — His death and our own. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, speaking of the following of Christ, titled his book "The Cost of Discipleship." The readings point out that to be a disciple of Christ, two things are necessary: (1) the cross and (2) the following of Christ.

The cross is so much a part of the Christian life that we sign ourselves with it. But what is this cross?

It is not necessarily dying for the faith. The martyr does. Without taking away from the great witness of the martyrs, Jesus did not mean martyrdom when He spoke of our taking up the cross. For Jesus spoke of taking up the cross "each day." The cross is an ongoing, everyday part of one's life, not only a once-for-all martyrdom.

Nor is the cross a passive submission to problems. Jesus spoke of action: following in His footsteps.

The cross is first of all a **repentance**: a dying to sin and selfishness (often as painful as the death of an only son) and rising to new life in Christ. "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self." When Peter denied Jesus, he said, "I do not know the man." To deny ourselves is to say, "I do not know myself." It is to treat self as if it did not exist; whereas, as a matter of fact, we treat ourselves as if self is the most important thing in the world.

Secondly, the cross is **obedience** to Christ and to the will of God. We are called, not so much to die for Christ as to live in obedience

to Him. In this obedience we will discover the cross. For such obedience will of necessity bring us into conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil.

Thirdly, the cross is **servanthood**: the suffering that comes because we are willing to serve our neighbor and the world.

The gospel text claims that besides taking up the cross, the disciple of Christ must follow Him.

One of the world's great spiritual classics is Thomas a Kempis' "The Following of Christ." Somehow it also got misnamed "The Imitation of Christ." Actually, Jesus did not say, "Imitate me." He said, "Follow in my steps. I am the way." Instead of following, we mimic. Instead of moving on, we stand still. He goes before us, leading us into the new way of life called the Kingdom of God. He asks us to follow the Leader just as Israel was told to follow the column of cloud and the pillar of fire in its exodus from Egypt.

In the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the conversion process is called "a journey of faith." Journey implies movement, progress, new sights, new sounds, new horizons, new possibilities, new excitement.

That is why the following of Christ has to be filled with a sense of great expectancy and joyful anticipation. For Christ does not lead us back to a past era, but to a new age inbreaking upon us now. To follow Him does not mean to bring back what once existed, but to let God create something totally new in us — a new heart. "See, I make all things new."

To be a disciple of Christ, therefore, means taking up the cross each day — the cross of repentance, obedience and service — and following Christ with, we might say, a bit of reckless abandon.

Sheas of Greece Honored by Villa

Greece, residents Michael and Anne Shea were honored with the Volunteer Service Award at the recent St. Joseph's Villa annual dinner.

The award was established to recognize persons or organizations who have been associated with the villa over a period of time and who

have voluntarily contributed their time and talents to the welfare of villa children.

"The Sheas have consistently given of themselves for the good of the children," said Jennifer Singer, director of communi-

Franciscan Order to Meet

St. Patrick's Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order will meet Sunday, June 19, at St. Anthony's Church, 60 Lorimer St., Rochester.

Novice instruction is scheduled for 1:15 p.m. with the rosary at 1:30 and Mass at 2 p.m., celebrated by Father Dennis Bonsignore, the fraternity's spiritual moderator. A short business session will take place.

Holy Cross

Children at Holy Cross School will celebrate their annual field day June 20. The pupils will participate in games for 16 teams, will have a sing-a-long, and will receive awards and refreshments provided by the Home School Association.

MEDAL WINNER

Robert Sobolewski, a junior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, has received the Rensselaer Medal for excellence in mathematics and science. Since 1916, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has awarded the medal to secondary school students who have distinguished themselves in math and science.

Sobolewski, a member of Guardian Angels parish, will be a counselor at the YMCA Camp Cory on Keuka Lake this summer.

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