

Columnists

Stingy stamps: a philatelist's peeve

By Father Paul Cuddy
To U.S. Postal Service
Philatelic Affairs Department
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, D.C. 20260-5700
Gentlemen:

Your 1987 Christmas stamp is a disappointment. Like last year's, it is a dinky little miniature. And while the stamp is a nice enough picture, that ultra-red gown does seem a bit garish. Why a Madonna with a year-old baby in arms year after year, instead of the historic occasion of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, with Mary, Joseph and the shepherd all part of that event?

I receive letters from several foreign countries, and always note with appreciation the beauty of the stamps, the colors and the size. And if the stamp's theme is an historical event, it is depicted historically. Last year, I remember receiving letters from Kenya, where the stamps were certainly of the Nativity and beautifully etched.

Doesn't it seem reasonable that if you made a stamp commemorating Moses or Abraham or Mohammed or Confucius or any great historical person, we should expect a picture relevant to that person and of a decent size? Your Johnny Appleseed is a beautiful stamp and of a decent size. The Social Security Act Stamp, made in 1985, has the figures of seven persons plus a baby carriage and a wheelchair, and is not crowded, but quite neat. The Christmas stamps of 1979, 1986 and 1987 are dinky miniatures, hardly fitting for so great an occasion.

I have studied the Christmas stamps from 1962 to 1987 using your *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*. Thirteen are Madonnas with chubby year-old babies instead of the Infant; three are of angels, one blowing a horn; one is of George Washington at prayer in Valley Forge, although I doubt that Christmas Day was very eventful in the colonies pervaded by Puritanism. The stamp of 1962 had a Christmas wreath; 1963 a fir tree in a winter setting; 1963 a poinsettia. At the time, the stamps were 5 cents, a price I think had nothing to do with the selection of the picture for Christmas.

Women's roles not a regional issue

By Father Richard P. McBrien
The most serious issue, facing the Catholic Church today is that of sexual equality. The recently concluded World Synod of Bishops seems to have made that clear. The synod exploded once and for all the myth that concern for women's rights is a peculiar interest of Catholics in the United States. Bishop after bishop from almost every region of the world called attention to the role of women in the Church.

This development should be a source of much encouragement for those Catholics, men as well as women, who have been speaking and acting on behalf of sexual equality these past several years. On the other hand, one also has the sense that time is running out. Even as the bishops of the world begin to address seriously the so-called women's issue, thousands of Catholic women are moving farther and farther away from the Church — in frustration, in anger, in disgust in pain and in sorrow.

Is the problem of concern only to a select few — the special-interest types who attend conventions like the recent Women-Church assembly in Cincinnati? Are those who worry about the women's issue out of touch with the real, day-to-day life of the Church?

I should say not, unless one would regard Archbishop Remberg Weakland of Milwaukee as an ivory-tower elitist. In a major address to Pope John Paul II in Los Angeles two months ago, delivered in the presence of all his brother bishops, Archbishop Weakland said the following:

"There are no words to explain so much pain on the part of so many competent women today who feel they are second-class citizens in a Church they love. That pain turns easily to anger and is often shared and transmitted to the younger generation of men and women."

"Women do not want to be treated as stereotypes of sexual inferiority," the archbishop continued, "but want to be seen as necessary to the full life of a Church that teaches and shows by example the co-discipleship of the sexes as instruments of God's Kingdom."

Those of us who might be tempted to say, "Things are a lot better in this respect than they used to be," need to understand why such an answer does not reassure or satisfy many Catholic women. These women aren't asking for added privileges for which they should be ex-

On the Right Side

Of the 20 or more Christmas stamps (described in the Guide to U.S. Stamps) only three are actually Nativity scenes. The issues of 1970 had Lorenzo Lotto's "Nativity;" 1971 is showed the "Adoration of the Shepherds;" The stamp in 1976 offered a beautiful "Nativity" by Copley.

May I earnestly request that future Christmas religious stamps be of the occasion — i.e. of the Nativity in Bethlehem — and of a decent size as befits the event? Millions of us would be grateful.

Respectfully yours,



Essays in Theology

pected to show gratitude; they're asking for what is rightfully theirs.

The male leadership of the Church doesn't have the option of deciding whether the time is appropriate to confer upon women what is already theirs by reason of their human and Christian dignity and their baptismal equality in Christ. Women are entitled to respect and to equal opportunity as a matter of justice, as a matter of right. This is not to make the argument in a roundabout way that women also have a right to the priesthood. Strictly speaking, no one has the right to be ordained.

But if the Church's present exclusion of women from ordination is not based on an unchangeable dogmatic principle — a debatable point — how can the Church continue to restrict the priesthood to men?

It is true that many women today and for many years past have exercised enormous authority in the Church. But the exercise of the kind of authority that really counts in the Church — episcopal and presbyteral — has eluded every woman simply because of her sex.

Eventually a time will come when Catholic women will be ordained as deacons, priests and bishops. When that day arrives, it will be evident that female candidates for ordination bring the same pluses and minuses to the ministry that male candidates bring. To deny that women clerics will probably demonstrate many of the same failings male clerics evidence — clericalism, authoritarianism — would be to lapse once again into the world of cute and cuddly stereotypes.

The admission of women to the full range of ministries will not solve all of the Church's problems, and it may even create a few new ones. But it will at least put us all on an even playing field where every baptized Catholic has an equal opportunity to participate in the life and mission of the Church.



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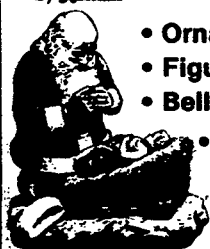
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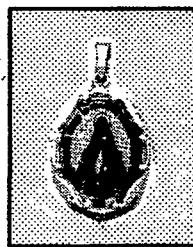
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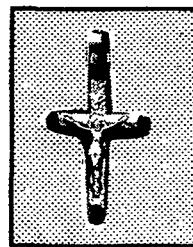
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