

## 'Arrogance' is telling God who is called to priesthood

To the editor:

When I first read the letter from Joanne Rowan in the November 2 edition of the *Courier* I told my husband that I hoped that nobody would answer it because that would be to give credence to an absolutely bizarre screed. But thinking and praying over the matter I decided that it should not be allowed to stand unchallenged. What is that quotation to the effect that all it takes for evil to win is for good people to do nothing?

When I look at the church of today and envision its future I am struck by the fact that there is a growing shortage of young, celibate males presenting themselves for ordination. Is that because God is not calling them? Or not calling them forcefully and irresistibly enough? Might it not be that God has something else in mind? This age of the church is beginning to be called the age of the laity. Lay people are taking on more and more of the leadership positions in the church — and furthermore, they're doing a good job of it.

In the early days of Christianity there was no central, monolithic church that governed all the communities that were forming as the Good News began to spread. Each community looked to see what its needs were and then called forth those of its members who had the God-given gifts to meet those needs. Thus the presiders, teachers, preachers, caregivers of the poor and the sick came from within the community and were ordained by the community. As the church grew and its need for speaking with a united voice became more obvious it was decided that a well-trained clergy (the presiders) needed to have an education that was consistent with the teachings that had become considered basic by Christians everywhere.

Standards of behavior for the clergy were instituted because abuses by individuals had sprung up. All of that was definitely necessary. And so developed the idea that the priests should be male and celibate and trained in central locations (seminaries).

But this is another age and the needs are different now. God could call in the same kind of people to God's service in more than sufficient number. But the fact that God doesn't compels me to believe that what is wanted is a different sort of priesthood. Women are feeling the call today and it cannot be denied that their call is deep and strong and almost even overwhelming to them. What is the difference from that same kind of call when it is felt by young, celibate males? We don't say to these young men that such sense of call is an "illusion of your own grandeur." We don't tell them "you may have been called by God the self or by God the Prince of Darkness." We take their word for the call and help them in discerning where it is leading. Why can't we believe that these women are hearing the call just as accurately?

I admit that it will take time for a priesthood that includes women to come about. But it will never happen if we don't start talking about it and planning for it now.

Should we tell God who should be called to priesthood? Wouldn't that be arrogance and excessive pride on our part? I recommend that my sister in Christ, Joanne, and all others who think like her prayerfully bring the matter to God and be fully open to the fact that they may hear an answer that is not the one they want.

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## Arguments that oppose ordination of women ignore historical context

To the editor:

I was deeply troubled when I read the editorial entitled "Women who seek priesthood misguided by arrogance" by Joanne Rowan, mainly because the author bases her conclusion on only one premise which is narrow-minded and questionable. She's not alone, in arguments against women's ordinations: Theology has often used selective "proof from Scripture" with very

little attention paid to historical context.

Her principle: Jesus Christ was a man, not a woman; therefore, priests should only be men. If this argument of historical fidelity were valid, then why shouldn't priests be not only male, but Jewish and Galilean, as Christ indeed was? There were many historical customs the church broke free from, like Judaism, which was the religion and culture of Jesus, and Ara-

maic, the language spoken by Jesus. If we must hold true to the historical Jesus, then why haven't we maintained these other precedents? This argument raises more questions than it solves.

If one reads the Bible and understands the essence of Jesus Christ, one understands that Jesus was all about liberation and justice. He himself created the ethical revolution which gave women license to become liberated as persons. Jesus' attitude toward women shows his reverence for their equality and dignity in the face of the oppressive discriminatory tradition. This is evidenced by Jesus's many parables where women appear in principal roles as Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well.

In ancient Jewish society, women were forbidden to study or speak about the Law, a woman had no legal credibility as a courtroom witness, she could not teach her children, or even pray at the table. Does it then surprise you, given the conditions that women lived in during those times, that Jesus chose 12 men instead of women to

represent him and his cause?

Does it appear then that Jesus meant us to take this as divine law that no women have apostolic authority? There certainly is no evidence of this.

In my opinion, the fact that the priestly ministry has been reserved for men seems to stem from historical and sociological factors. Jesus himself made no issue of gender.

As for arrogance and pride, I disagree that this is the driving force behind these wonderful women. These women who are challenging the Roman Catholic Church are unique leaders of our time. They preach, write, pray, fast, counsel, begin outreach programs, devote their entire lives to the study of the Bible and the human spirit, and give more to human needs than they will ever receive back in gratitude and recognition. They are only pleading for the truth and working as hard as they can toward it. Mostly they are driven by the Holy Spirit herself.

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## 'Scathing remarks' inspired passionate plea

To the editor:

I find myself in a curious position. On one hand, I feel compelled to write, once again, and challenge the *Catholic Courier* about its policy of printing only those letters which are written in a "spirit of fair play," ("Women who seek priesthood misguided by arrogance"). On the other hand, I am motivated to thank Joanne Rowan for further inspiring me to speak out strongly about women and oppression.

On November 2, I was scheduled to speak at one of the pre-Synod listening sessions on my topic of concern — woman and ministry. I was eager to present my proposal. I happened to read Ms. Rowan's scathing remarks just minutes before giving my talk. What she said filled me with a most creative burst of anger. Consequently, I delivered my plea with even more passion than I might have otherwise.

However, in the last few days I have reflected on the statements in the letter and now feel saddened. For I see Ms. Rowan in a new way. I see her as a woman who has been blinded by the pervasive sin of sexism. A woman who is not in touch with her personal experiences of oppression in our male-oriented church and society, cannot possibly be expected to support women being ordained. Hence, Ms. Rowan continues to spur me on, to join even more wholeheartedly with others who are working to root out the evils of sexism in society

and in the Roman Catholic Church.

I wonder if Ms. Rowan has ever talked with a woman who has a genuine call to ordained priestly ministry? The women I know who are called by God and a faith community to be priests are quite different from the ugly portrait rendered by Ms. Rowan. The truth is, women experience the call as a call to serve people with love and compassion. There are no "illusions of grandeur," no arrogance, not even pride — just a humble heartfelt desire to proclaim the Good News, as it's been experienced personally in their lives and as it's been learned in graduate theological education. It is because I am one of "those" women, that I can speak about the truth of the matter, Ms. Rowan.

In conclusion I offer four suggestions to Ms. Rowan and those who applaud her letter. First, try to open up your heart and mind enough to actually talk at length with a woman who believes she has a genuine call to be a priest. Visit her where she ministers and experience her ministry. Second, take a diocesan-sponsored or parish-run Bible study course. Third, learn about the social evil of sexism. Fourth, look up the definition of "arrogance"/"arrogant" and reflect on the meanings in prayer.

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