

# Women's ordination rules can change

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

The Church of England's recent decision to approve the ordination of women to the priesthood has provoked an expected backlash of opposition within the Anglican Communion itself.

A few Anglican bishops in Great Britain and an undetermined number of priests and lay people have made some threatening noises about bolting to the Catholic Church.

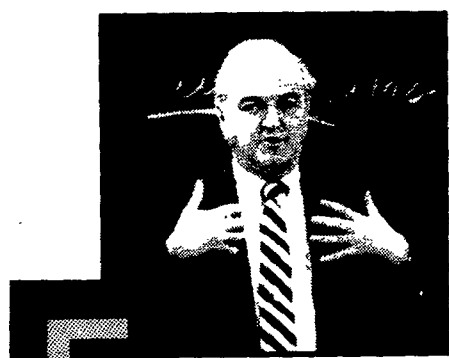
In interviews with Catholic News Service and an Italian Catholic magazine, *Il Sabato*, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the pontifical council for promoting Christian unity, said that the Vatican "obviously would have to take it seriously" if individuals or groups were to request membership in the Catholic Church.

Although the Vatican would follow a cautious course, he said, "it would be wrong to give the impression that we are not interested."

But what is it that these disaffected Anglicans would be looking for in the Catholic Church?

Bishop Graham Leonard, the retired Anglican bishop of London, has a specific proposal. He would like to see the pope establish a personal prelature for them, just as he already has done for Opus Dei.

This means that the ex-Anglican bishops, priests, and lay people would constitute a kind of church-



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

within-the-church.

Although they would live and minister in many different dioceses, they would not be subject to the bishops of those dioceses. Like Opus Dei, they would have their own special bishop unencumbered by boundaries (a mini-pope of sorts).

This bishop would be authorized to "erect a national or international seminary, to incardinate the students, and to promote them to orders under the title of service to the prelature" (canon 295, #1).

In the case of Opus Dei, for example, the personal prelature was established in spite of the opposition of the majority of the Spanish hierarchy. And these were the bishops, after all, who knew the group best since Opus

Dei was founded in Spain and is still largely Spanish in membership and structure.

Many bishops who might otherwise welcome the disaffected Anglicans into the Catholic Church and into their own respective dioceses as well would probably want to think twice about a personal-prelature arrangement.

But even if the personal-prelature proposal were not adopted, the situation still poses some questions.

Would the disaffected Anglican bishops be allowed to function in the Catholic Church as bishops? And if married, would they be allowed to function as married bishops?

Precedent prompts these questions. Several U.S. Episcopal priests have come over to the Catholic Church in recent years — on account of the same ordination issue — and have been allowed to function as married priests in their new ecclesiastical home.

If this precedent is to be followed in this instance as well, resentments will surely be intensified among two important, and increasingly restless, Catholic constituencies: active priests who are still required by canon law to remain celibate or to renounce their ministries, and women — lay and religious — who view special arrangements of this sort as an institutional reward for opposition to women priests.

Which raises yet another question: is agreement with the Catholic

Church on the matter of women's ordination sufficient grounds for entrance into the Catholic Church?

What about the historic opposition of Anglicans to papal primacy and papal infallibility? Does the Church of England's "apostasy" on the ordination issue automatically validate all papal claims to supreme ecclesiastical authority?

And, finally, what happens to these ex-Anglicans if the day should come, possibly even in the next pontificate, when the Catholic Church itself approves the ordination of women to the priesthood?

Will the ex-Anglicans then have to form yet another Christian sect within the universal church, joining forces this time with disaffected traditionalist Catholics who would be equally horrified by the new pope's "betrayal" of the historic faith?

During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we might ponder anew on what fundamentally unites and divides us as Christians.

According to the council's Decree on Ecumenism, not all of the church's teachings are equal in importance. There is a "hierarchy of truths" (n.11). Our redemption in Christ Jesus. The mandate to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. These are at the core of Christian faith. They are unchanging truths.

Determining who is eligible for ordination — what age, what gender and what marital status — is a matter of rules. Rules can be changed.

# CPA's promotion is creative, misleading

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

What's wrong with this picture?

Three people, looking somewhat dismayed, sit on a park bench reading newspapers with no print on them. The caption on the photo says, "Looking for a Catholic View in the Secular Press? YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PRAYER."

The picture, which is the 1993 Catholic Press Month poster put out by the Catholic Press Association, is being used to promote Catholic newspapers and magazines this February. It's cute, creative and may even encourage some people to read Catholic publications, which would be a good thing.

There is something wrong with the poster, however, and, though subtle, it is important. The implication is that there is no Catholic view in the secular press and that one can only be found in a specifically "Catholic"



## FAITH AND WORK

publication.

According to the current population survey of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 279,000 individuals in this country list their occupation as "editor" or "reporter." Only a

small percentage of these people work for the Catholic press. The rest work — day in and day out — for the secular media.

Assuming that journalists reflect the religious affiliations of the general population, approximately 25 percent of those writing for secular newspapers and magazines are Catholic and their views would, by definition, be Catholic.

Father Andrew Greeley, for example, writes a regular column for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Would this not be a "Catholic view in the secular press"? Of course it would, not because he is a priest (that would be a "priestly view"), but because he is a Catholic.

So I understand are Gary Wills, Anna Quindlen, Patrick Reardon, Peter Steinfeld, Tom Sheridan, Mary McGrory, Don Wycliff, Chris Ringwald, George Anne Geyer, William F. Buckley Jr., Erma Bombeck, Ken Woodward, E.J. Dionne, Jim Dwyer

and thousands upon thousands of other lay Catholics. They are a diverse group, to be sure, but, as Father Greeley once remarked, Catholicism means "here comes everybody!"

Perhaps my friends at the CPA would object that I am misinterpreting their poster. "The poster emphasizes the unique role of Catholic newspapers, magazines, books and newsletters in providing readers with 'a Catholic perspective,'" said Owen McGovern, CPA's executive director, in the December issue of *The Catholic Journalist*.

But to imply that you "haven't got a prayer" of finding a Catholic view in the secular press runs the risk of denigrating the good work of the many good Catholics who combine their religious faith with their important work in that media.

The Catholic press doesn't need to promote itself at the expense of fellow workers in the same vineyard.

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