

# Pope undaunted on clerical celibacy

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Pope John Paul II has the courage of his convictions. One can only admire the consistency of the stand that he has taken on screening for the ordained priesthood.

In an address last month to a group of U.S. bishops, in Rome for their "ad limina" visits, the pope urged them to be "demanding in the selection of candidates ... and not to compromise the standards required by the challenges facing priests today."

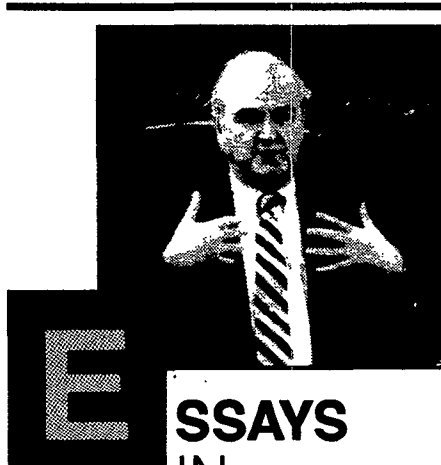
Referring to the recent scandals over sexual abuse and misconduct in the priesthood, the pope declared: "The failures of a small number of clerics make it all the more important that seminary formation discern scrupulously the charism of celibacy among candidates for the priesthood ..."

"By supporting their healthy psychosexual development, a sound human formation and growth in grace and virtue will enable seminarians to accept joyfully and live serenely this 'precious gift of God' ..."

The pope's words are courageous because their unintended effect — if taken to heart by the bishops — may be a further, precipitous decline in the number of candidates for the ordained priesthood.

Why so?

During the years before, during and immediately following Vatican II, there was only limited psychological testing of candidates applying for



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

admission to the seminary, and it was confined almost exclusively to seminaries run by religious orders or by communities such as Maryknoll.

Nor was there any realistic discussion in classes or in spiritual conferences of the nature and challenges of a lifelong commitment to celibacy — certainly not in accordance with the serious tone of the Holy Father's ad limina address.

Consequently, a well-worn retort one often hears from conservative lay people misses the mark; namely, that priests — including those ordained, let us say, before 1970 — knew what they were "getting into" when they accepted celibacy as a condition for ordination. It is very likely the case that most, even the overwhelming

majority, did not know what they were "getting into."

To be sure, many of those who have been successful (or who aspire to be successful) within the current clerical system will readily testify that they did indeed know what they were "getting into," and that they embraced celibacy willingly and have never regretted it. But no social scientist would regard them as a reliable control-group.

In fact, seminarians during the years in question were left pretty much to fend for themselves with regard to the matter of their own sexuality. They assumed that they could somehow "get through it" as celibates because most other priests seemed able to do so.

The number of "defections" from the priesthood in those years was still relatively small, and the departures that did occur were almost always cloaked in secrecy. At the same time, the psychological cost to those who lacked the charism of celibacy but who did not leave was rarely, if ever, spoken of, much less dealt with.

If seminaries, bishops and religious superiors are now to take the matter of "healthy psychosexual development" and the demands of celibacy more seriously than in the past, as Pope John Paul II is so courageously asking them to do, it is likely that many who would have been accepted into the seminary without such rigorous testing will fail to meet the new standards of admission and that oth-

ers who would not have been asked to leave the seminary will, in the light of closer scrutiny, be dropped.

One assumes here at the same time that most priests who have resigned from active ministry in order to marry are good men and were good priests, and that they left not because they had lacked the charism for lifelong ministry, but because they discovered, too late, that they lacked the charism for lifelong celibacy.

Had they been screened more "scrupulously" for signs of the charism of celibacy, they would either not have been admitted to the seminary in the first place or they would have been asked to leave, once the deficiency was noted.

Not to accept this assumption is to posit an even bleaker picture; namely, that over the years the church has ordained thousands of bad men who were bad priests and who perversely squandered the charism of celibacy they had at the time of ordination.

If that were the case, how could so many bishops, religious superiors and seminary faculty members have been so grievously wrong about so many candidates for the priesthood?

The fact is that they were not wrong; they simply never employed, or had at their disposal, the right means of testing and discerning.

The pope has asked them to do that hereafter. Will the bishops heed his call, even if that course of action should lead to an even sharper decline in numbers?

# Company gives employees practical help

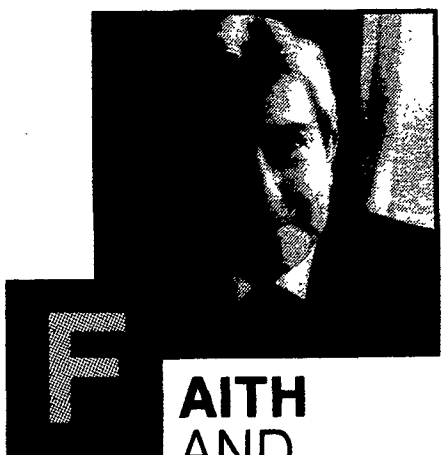
By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

Waste Management, Inc., in Oak Brook, Ill., wants to become "the world leader in providing total environmental services" and "one of the world's most important companies."

These are neither modest nor unworthy goals, and to accomplish them the company focuses on its ethics and business practices. "It's our reputation we are talking about," says Dean Buntrock, chief executive officer, in his introduction to the company's employee booklet, *Ethics in Our Workplace: Guidelines for Our People*. "Companies with shaky ethics and shabby standards simply will not be able to cut it when they're stacked against the competition."

According to the booklet, which is mandatory reading for every employee, ethics in the workplace means:

Being "downright upright" with customers, communities, regulators



## FAITH AND WORK

and each other. A commitment to do what is right, good and proper — especially when it's hard.

Treating values such as fairness, honesty, integrity and trust as ground rules — not "options" in making decisions.

Essential decency in dealings with peers, bosses and subordinates — and all those outside the company. "Earning the respect and regard of others for what we do and how we do it. Thinking through the implications of our actions, and our lack of action," the booklet states.

The company provides a checklist of ethical questions employees must ask themselves in situations where they are not sure about the right thing to do:

- Are my actions legal?
- Am I being fair and honest?
- Will my actions stand the test of time?
- How will I feel about myself afterwards?

Even though I'm doing nothing wrong, will someone get the wrong idea?

Will my actions or decisions embarrass others?

Waste Management does not just give its employees ethical guidelines,

it also provides a process for helping them make ethical decisions. The company encourages workers to "recognize a problem when you see it or feel in your gut." They are urged to discuss a problem privately with their immediate supervisor or manager — unless that person is personally involved in the issue or fails to act. In that case it is recommended that the person contact the human resources or the legal department.

The company also provides a confidential "helpline" that allows employees to go around their supervisors: "People in a position of authority can't stop you: if they try, they're subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal."

As the publication points out, "Talking a good ethical game is easy. Practicing it is another matter." But at least this company is taking the question seriously and is providing its employees with good, practical guidelines and help.

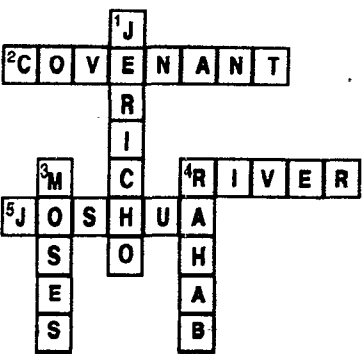
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