

Author sees priesthood sans celibacy

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

An important new book on the future of the Catholic priesthood by Richard Schoenherr, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, has been excerpted in the April 7 issue of *Commonweal* magazine in an article titled, "Numbers Don't Lie: A Priesthood in Irreversible Decline." (The book is "Goodbye Father," and is published by Oxford University Press.)

It should be emphasized at the outset that the "decline" to which the author refers is not qualitative, but quantitative. We are not talking about a priesthood that is less moral, less spiritual, or less pastorally effective, but a priesthood that is shrinking in numbers and, therefore, in its capacity to meet the needs of a burgeoning Catholic population.

Many church leaders, he points out, are content to take a wait-and-see attitude. In the meantime, some of them are trying to improve their recruitment techniques, launching prayer campaigns to increase vocations, and providing more intensive spiritual and in-service training programs for priests and seminarians.

Schoenherr calls these "bureaucratic solutions" that are designed to maintain the status quo.

"This approach," Schoenherr writes, "assumes that the challenge facing the Catholic church is to change the environment, not adapt to it. If the environment no longer yields enough committed male celibates to staff its growing parishes,



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then the church must mount an effort to make the environment more supportive of male celibate exclusivity."

Schoenherr doesn't believe this strategy will work because the current unpleasant trends are "propelled by a deep-seated dissatisfaction with mandatory celibacy. Study after study over the last three decades has concluded that the poor recruitment and retention of priests is caused, in great measure, by problems with mandatory celibacy ... The celibacy requirement is keeping young men who want to from entering the priesthood and driving out many of those who do get ordained."

The result is a pastoral crisis. The Catholic Church simply cannot continue its present "far-flung operations" without an ample supply of priests. Given a choice between priest-

less liturgical services (Scripture readings, prayers, and holy Communion) and parishes without pastors on the one hand, and the ending of mandatory celibacy, on the other, those guided by pastoral considerations will choose the latter.

The conservative coalition opposed to this choice, according to Schoenherr, "maneuvers to downplay the practical pastoral implications of maintaining a celibate priesthood," arguing that the priest shortage is temporary and that the church can hold out until the trends resume their upward turn.

The strategy is to prevent public discussion of the issue, with the result that the problem is kept unnamed and unaddressed. And when the problem is discussed, those who control the discussion insist that it is — in Schoenherr's terms — a bureaucratic rather than a pastoral problem.

In an ideological battle such as this, Schoenherr notes, "definitions imply solutions. That is, defining a problem determines who has the authority or responsibility for addressing, deciding, and acting on the issue. Thus, to be granted the right to reduce the complexity of an issue to its essence is a hotly debated political process."

"If celibacy is really a pastoral issue," he continues, "then it must be addressed immediately in those terms, for definitions imply solutions. If conservatives can keep the attention off the pastoral implications of the celibacy problem, and define the issue in other terms, then the status quo of the hegemonic priesthood remain in-

tact."

A key point, however, should not be lost. Celibacy as such is not the issue, but celibate exclusivity, that is, limiting the priesthood to celibates.

For those who are called to a life of celibacy, the celibate priesthood has always been and will continue to be a viable, respected path to personal sanctity and effective pastoral ministry.

But a call to priesthood need not imply a call to celibacy as well. Indeed, "when an interior, personal, religious calling becomes mandatory as an entrance requirement for a position of power, the dilemma of mixed motivation clouds the picture."

Schoenherr is confident that future Catholic priests will continue to exercise sacerdotal and sacramental power, but it will no longer be a priesthood governed by celibate exclusivity.

Once this change is achieved, he predicts, the issue will shift with new force to male exclusivity in the priesthood.

We are a longer way, he says, from addressing the issue of male exclusivity than we are from addressing the issue of celibate exclusivity. Indeed, those who veer even moderately from the present disciplinary policy regarding the former are subject to severe reprisals, as we have been reminded by the recent dismissal of a tenured faculty member at St. Meinrad's Seminary in Indiana because of her views on the ordination of women.

But suppressing discussion won't make the problem go away.

Teens at work can learn much about life

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

A recent issue of *OnFire*, a special publication for young people published by the Archdiocese of Chicago, contains the results of a survey on Catholic teenagers' job experience.

Some of the findings are heartening. Forty-four percent of the teenagers responding said they are currently working; 68 percent had held jobs in the past; and 84 percent planned to work this summer. So the work ethic is alive and well among Catholic youths.

Another interesting statistic is that nearly half of the students claim that their co-workers are the best thing about their jobs. "I really like the people I work with," says Scott Schneider, a junior at Marian High School. "We have a lot of fun."

Money, of course, is a major issue



FAITH AND WORK

for young people — just as it is for most adults. The great majority listed the desire or the need for money as their main reason for working. But,

like adults, these teenagers find that they struggle with balancing their jobs with school, extracurricular activities, family and their social lives.

They also experience racism (16 percent), sexual approaches (12 percent), and problems with bosses (23 percent) in their workplaces.

My reaction to all this is: wonderful! I believe that it is important for young people to get a real understanding of the workplace as early as possible for several reasons.

First, it demythologizes work for them. They understand that work is neither a glamorous source of unlimited funds, nor a horrible burden to be borne. Work has its positives and negatives, its ups and its downs. It is, in many ways, what you make of it.

Second, working as a teen can make one a better worker throughout life. Early lessons in responsibility, competence, compromise and self-reliance

serve a person well in every conceivable adult career. Experience in the kinds of low-paying, temporary, and long-houred jobs most teenagers hold (restaurants, supermarkets and clothing stores, for example) can also be an excellent motivator for young people to attend to their education and career training.

Third, working young people get an insight into the adult world that those who do not work miss. When teens have to learn how to balance their work with the rest of their lives, how to stand up to their bosses, fellow employees and customers on their basic values, how to deal with other people in a public setting, they begin to get a glimpse of what their parents and other adults must do every day.

It may make them more tolerant and understanding of the adults in their own lives.

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