

# COLUMNISTS

## 'Clericalism' denies our call to ministry

In his book, *An American Strategic Theology*, Father John Coleman, SJ, describes many strengths attributable to American Catholics. He tells us, for example, that we bring a high regard for rationality and the role of reason to public life, that we possess a sense of "mystic interiority" and a sense of the symbolic not found as readily in other denominations. We are also unique in our ability to generate loyalties to the transnational community and to appreciate the role of moral norms and principles over "moral intuition" in public and personal decisions.

While he praises traits like these and generally praises the richness of our Catholic life, Father Coleman also points out certain weaknesses that characterize American Catholics. Among these weaknesses is what he terms "clericalism." While Father Coleman does not explicitly define what he means by this term, I suppose he is referring to our tendency sometimes to equate "church" too exclusively with "clerics."

Indeed in many of our minds we often do measure how well "the church" is doing by how well our parish priest seems to be performing his role. Or we gauge the overall health and well-being of the



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

church according to the performance of the pope and other Roman officials.

In analyzing our "clericalism," it is important to state that for each of us our growth in faith has benefited enormously from the ministry of priests. We can all offer names of priests without whom our love of God and neighbor simply would not have developed as fruitfully as it has. So we surely need good priests to function in our communities, and we need to value the priests who minister so well among us now.

But Father Coleman's point is one we would do well to spend a few moments considering. Part of our "clericalism" (i.e., equating "church" only with those who are ordained) is the temptation to

look upon our own role as non-ordained in a way that denies our own ministry or even renders us as "passive members" being ministered to by those in orders (or sometimes even vows).

This stance is simply not in keeping with the most important sources of our faith. We often forget that Jesus himself worked as a layman — and he shook up a staid religious establishment by completely redefining the ministries of his times.

The Second Vatican Council also challenged our "hierarchalism" by firmly establishing baptism — not ordination — as the sacrament of ministry.

According to the council, we are all baptized into a community that is essentially and unavoidably ministerial. In the eyes of the council, which is the highest of all authorities in our church, genuine ministry is not just what happens close to the sanctuary or what serves church order. In fact, according to the council genuine ministry is what we all do to serve in the "secular" world — done as an outreach of the church.

For the council, as for Jesus, the church is the community of believers engaged in the mission of building the kingdom of God in the world. The

church is seen as "a cluster of people with a world to serve." Like Jesus, we should be about relieving suffering, proclaiming Good News, enhancing possibilities for humans to live fuller lives, liberating from sin and bondage, overcoming barriers and promoting unity.

In the Gospel and in the council, the church community itself is understood as minister to the world. Our interaction with our colleagues at work, with our families at home, with our neighbors and friends — all this is the church's ministry already underway.

In fact, the council fathers redefined the role of the hierarchy and the ordained as that of assisting and facilitating the ministry of the rest of us as we serve the coming of the kingdom in the world. Baptism is the real sacrament of ministry in our church.

We have been slow to recognize and appreciate the implications of this Gospel/council definition of the church and its ministries. We should strive now more than ever to move beyond our inappropriate and wrongly-focused clericalism to form communities actively taking on the mission of Jesus in and for the world — which has never had greater need for the One who sends us.

## The Lord wants us to be 'religious fanatics'

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 3:1-12. (R1) Isaiah 11:1-10. (R2) Romans 15:4-9.

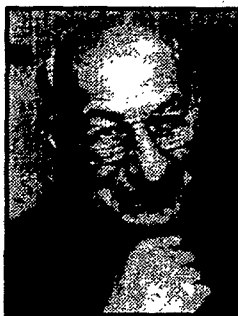
Again the two great figures of Advent appear: Isaiah and John the Baptist.

The first reading is Isaiah's famous Messianic prophecy. It begins with a magnificent alliterative line: "A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse."

Often when a tree is cut down, its stump has enough sap and grip of the earth to send forth a shoot, which in time will become a great tree. In Isaiah's lifetime, Assyria had destroyed the 10 northern tribes of Israel. Juda alone remained. Isaiah foretold that when Juda's royal house would be reduced to a stump, to obscurity, the Messiah would come.

Joseph and Mary were both of the royal house of David. But Joseph was only a carpenter and Mary a housewife. The proud tree of David's line had been leveled to the ground — a mere stump of what it had been. Yet from this stump, as Isaiah prophesied, a shoot sprouted — Jesus, Son of Mary, who restored the glory of the Davidic monarchy, for his kingdom would have no end.

At his baptism, Jesus received the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord, so that he could build a kingdom



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

on justice, not on appearances. "Not by appearance shall he judge."

The fruit of justice is peace. Thus the lamb, the goat, the calf, the cow and the baby shall become friends with their natural enemies: the wolf, the leopard, the lion, the bear, and the cobra. In this poetic way, Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would renew the face of the earth by bringing harmony and peace, even between natural enemies. "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever" (Response).

This peace man must first make with his God. John the Baptist called for reform: "Reform your lives!" Today, he would say, "Go to confession. Confess your sins to a priest." I cannot stress this enough. Go to confession at least

monthly. Jesus instituted this sacrament. He knew what he was doing.

Secondly, we must make peace with our neighbors, by being patient and accepting one another.

Patience is not weakness; it is not becoming a doormat. It is an expression of such great love that it wins over people. No person ever treated Abraham Lincoln with greater contempt than Edwin Stanton. He nicknamed Lincoln "the gorilla." Yet Lincoln appointed Stanton secretary of war, because he felt Stanton was the best man for the job. Lincoln treated Stanton with every courtesy.

When Lincoln was assassinated his body was brought to a little room. That night, Stanton looked down on the face of Lincoln in all its ruggedness; and, through tears, Stanton said: "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Patient love had conquered.

Then Paul said: "Accept one another as Christ accepted you." The Greek verb translated "accept" means "to welcome one into one's own home as a friend." It means being neighborly. One man said, "I don't believe your Christ has come, for I see no difference in your lives." Christ should make us different, make us neighborly, loving and serving others, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Lucy said to Charlie Brown, "Christmas is a time for kindness and good will, a time when we accept one another into our hearts and homes."

Charlie Brown asked, "Why just Christmas? Why can't we be kind and accepting and neighborly all through the year?"

Lucy glares at him and says, "What are you, some kind of a religious fanatic?"

Yes, our Lord wants us to be such a "religious fanatic."

### Daily Readings

**Monday, Dec. 11**  
Is 35:1-10; Lk 5:17-26  
**Tuesday, Dec. 12**  
Zec 2:14-17 or Rev 11:19, 12-16, 10; Lk 1:39-47  
**Wednesday, Dec. 13**  
Is 40:25-31; Mt 11:28-30  
**Thursday, Dec. 14**  
Is 41:13-20; Mt 11:11-15  
**Friday, Dec. 15**  
Is 48:17-19; Mt 11:16-19  
**Saturday, Dec. 16**  
Sir 48:1-4, 9-11; Mt 17:10-13

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