

# COLUMNISTS

## Women's statement only raises questions

Just before Thanksgiving a statement on the ordination of women was released to the media by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

What is of major interest in the statement is not what it says about the ordination of women. In that regard, the statement simply reiterates the teaching that women cannot be ordained to the priesthood in the Catholic Church.

The major issue raised by the statement is that of infallibility. The statement claims that the teaching against the ordination of women "has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium."

Significantly, the congregation doesn't claim that it is making a new infallible statement. Indeed, it couldn't make such a claim. Only an ecumenical council can do that, or the pope alone when acting as earthly head of the church, in defining a matter of faith or morals, with the clear intention of binding the whole church.

Those are the conditions laid down by the First Vatican Council, when it defined the dogma of papal infallibility 125 years ago.

This recent statement from the congregation, written in the form of a "response" (responsum) to a "doubt" (dubium), says only that it is repeating a



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

teaching that "has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium." It refers the reader to the Second Vatican Council's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," n. 25.

What does the council say about the matter?

"Although individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christian doctrine infallibly. This is so, even when they are dispersed around the world, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held definitively."

The words "ordinary and universal Magisterium" do not appear in the text, but what the text says is what is meant by

the expression "ordinary and universal Magisterium." It applies to a teaching that has not been defined formally by an ecumenical council or a pope, but which the worldwide episcopate unanimously teaches as belonging to the deposit of Catholic faith.

The burden of proof, of course, is always on those who claim that a particular teaching is one which the bishops of the world "concur in a single viewpoint ... must be held definitively."

There is no evidence of such unanimity in this instance. On the contrary, a minority of Catholic bishops in the United States alone have been positively disposed to the ordination of women; a larger minority regard it as an open question that should continue to be studied and discussed; and a still larger number (perhaps even a majority) would not have regarded the teaching—even if they agree with it—as part of the deposit of faith, equivalent to the teaching that Jesus Christ is divine as well as human, that he redeemed us by his death on the cross and his resurrection, that he is really present in the Eucharist, and so forth.

But the congregation's "response" goes even further than Vatican II's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church." It claims not only that the teaching on the ordination of women is

held by all the bishops of the world, but that it has been "held always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of faith."

This is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to establish because the ordination of women issue was not even a theological or doctrinal question in the church until the latter part of the 20th century.

The "response" also claims that the teaching is "founded on the written Word of God." However, in 1976 the Pontifical Biblical Commission, at the explicit request of Pope Paul VI, investigated the matter and found no support for the exclusion of women from the ordained priesthood on the basis of the biblical evidence alone.

But, when all is said and done, doesn't the pope have the authority to teach as he has on this question? Of course, he does. And doesn't he also have the right to prohibit any bishop from ordaining women? Yes, again.

But those aren't the real questions here. The only major questions raised by this latest statement are whether this teaching can really be considered infallible in the theological technical sense of the word, and, if so, what are the ecclesiastical consequences for the millions of Catholics who, until now at least, disagree with it?

## Ending to Christmas story is up to us

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Matthew 11:2-11. (R1) Isaiah 35:1-6, 10. (R2) James 5:7-10.

In the pre-Vatican liturgy, next Sunday used to be called "Gaudete Sunday"; that is, "Joy Sunday." The priest wore rose vestments. In the first reading, Isaiah speaks eight times of joy: rejoice, sing, exult, be glad, and so on. Joy is the hallmark of the Advent and Christmas seasons, because the great truths of these seasons fill us with joy.

The first truth is that God is with us.

Marc Connelly in his classic play, "Green Pastures," has the angel Gabriel walk on the stage with his horn under his arm, and approach the Lord who is in deep thought. God is troubled—because he has sent prophets and messengers to his people, but they refuse to listen to them. God is troubled about humanity's sinful ways. Gabriel offers to blow his horn—the final trumpet—and end the whole thing, but the Lord brushes the horn from Gabriel's lips saying, "I am not going to send anybody this time, I am going MYSELF."

And that's the first piece of good news about Christmas. God did not remain in heaven, receiving a computer printout on the world's sufferings. God did not form a committee to work on our dilemmas. No! God left his throne and came into the trenches. Even more: He became one of the wounded—the



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

wounded healer. That is what makes Christmas like no other holiday in the world. God is with us!

But more, God speaks to us through the most unlikely people. Certainly John the Baptist was an unlikely person to prepare the way for the Messiah. Clothes made of camel's hair; a diet of locusts and wild honey. No wonder Jesus chided the crowd: "What did you go out to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes?" If that was what the crowd went out to see, they were in for a shock. Then Jesus answered his own question: "A prophet? Yes, I tell you and more than a prophet."

A little boy and his father were admiring Holman Hunt's famous picture of Christ knocking at the door. The little boy said, "Daddy, Daddy, why don't they just answer the door?" The father

said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know why." Then the young boy said, "Perhaps they are making too much noise to hear him knocking." Wisdom from babes.

We might all pray: "Grant, dear Lord, that when Christmas breaks for us this year, we may have something more to show for our much running about than tired feet, unwrapped presents, and regrets for cards not sent." If that is to happen, you and I will have to look for God and hear him speak through unexpected people.

Still more, you cannot isolate the Christmas story from the rest of God's activity in human history. Advent and Christmas are part of an unfolding drama: God is seeking the redemption of his creation. Much still remains to be fulfilled: The eyes of the blind need to be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame to leap like the deer and the tongue of the mute to shout for joy.

How will the Christmas story end for us? Will we keep it fenced in by Thanksgiving and New Year, and keep the babe of Bethlehem in the cradle forever, or will we let him grow up and heed his call to follow him? The choice is ours.

A little girl named Nancy was 4 years old when her baby brother was born. Nancy asked her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried

because they felt that Nancy, like most 4-year-olds, might hit the baby or shake him up out of jealousy. Over time, however, Nancy showed no signs of jealousy. So they let Nancy have her private conference with the baby. Elated, Nancy went into the baby's room. The curious parents peeked in. They saw Nancy walk to her baby brother, put her face close to his and say, "Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget."

So we come to Advent and Christmas each year to ask the baby Jesus what is God like.

### Daily Readings

- Monday, Dec. 18**  
Jer 23:5-8; Mt 1:18-24
- Tuesday, Dec. 19**  
Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25; Lk 1:5-25
- Wednesday, Dec. 20**  
Is 7:10-14; Lk 1:26-38
- Thursday, Dec. 21**  
Song(Sg)2:8-14 or Zep 3:14-18;  
Lk 1:39-45
- Friday, Dec. 22**  
1 Sm 1:24-28; Lk 1:46-56
- Saturday, Dec. 23**  
Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; Lk 1:57-66

# BINGO!

DeSales High School • 90 Pulteney St. in Geneva  
On Beautiful Seneca Lake  
315-789-5111

Monday - 7:30 pm  
1-\$400 Jackpot • 1-\$500  
Jackpot • (going up to \$1000  
with 80 players) • Prizes  
up to \$2200  
Saturday - 7:30 pm  
1-\$200 Jackpot • 1-\$500  
Jackpot • 1-\$1000 Jackpot  
Prizes up to \$3000  
Closed Dec. 30 & Jan 1

PLUS... \$9000 Total Prizes  
New Year's Eve - Sunday, Dec. 31

5 Split Pot Games • 3-75%, 2-50%

3 Face Special.....\$60.00	Extra 3 Face Specials.....\$10.00
9 Face Special.....\$80.00	All Split Pot Specials.....\$1.00
18 Face Special.....\$100.00	

Doors Open 1pm - Games Start 3pm - Tuxedo Optional!