

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

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Letters Policy

The Catholic Courier wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

Prayer, not change, key to shortage

To the editors:

Question: If a congregation, gathered together for the celebration of Mass, has no priest to preside, would it be possible for one of the unordained worshippers to consecrate the bread and wine?

It seems that whenever in Christian history priests have been scarce, certain earnest believers have asked this question. Today, some Americans, unduly alarmed by what Pope John Paul II has termed a "temporary" decline in priestly vocations, wonder if such proxy celebrants might not be a conceivable way of preserving our Mass schedules. Your correspondent Mr. Richard B. Blankfield is so persuaded, although he views the abolition of clerical celibacy as the final solution of the shortfall (*Catholic Courier*, August 8: "Church must consider alternatives").

What is the answer? Could a non-priest ever substitute for a priest as consecrator in a liturgical crisis?

Only the Teaching Church could respond to so complex an inquiry. But wait: If the question has been asked before, maybe it has been answered before.

The Church has indeed already addressed the issue. When proposed in the early 13th century it was answered in the Fourth Lateran Council, our 12th general council (1215), by the Council Fathers united with Pope Innocent III. Referring to the Holy Eucharist, they incorporated the following words in their initial profession of faith: "We firmly believe and openly confess (that) no one can effect this sacrament except the priest who has been duly ordained, in accordance with



the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the Apostles and their successors" (Canon 1).

This is a solemn statement with all the earmarks, it seems, of a dogmatic definition. So the answer to our question, "Would it be possible?" is "No, it would not."

But are we not by baptism a "priestly people?" Yes, but God has conferred on certain members of that royal priesthood (bishops, priests) another priesthood differing from it "in essence and not only in degree." Consecrated by another sacrament, Holy Orders, these "ministerial priests" alone are qualified to preside at and effect the Eucharistic Sacrifice "in the person of Christ the Head" (see Vatican II: *Lumen gentium*, 10; *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 2.)

Why has God permitted our clerical vocations to dwindle so much? My own guess is to show his displeasure at the way so many of us — laity, religious, and clergy alike — have of late been trivializing the Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders. One does not trifle with God's sacraments.

Is there anything we can do to multiply priestly — and religious — vocations?

Nothing directly, for sure. God alone makes personal choices. Indirectly, as Mr. Blankfield acknowledges, we can speak in public praise of religious callings, and we can pray for their increase. Actually, Jesus assigned us only one duty in this area: "Beg the harvest master (the Father) to send out laborers to gather his harvest" (Mt 9:38). Not just "ask" but "beg." Whether individually or in groups — especially in the family groups that normally provide "harvesters" — are we "begging?" And at the same time begging patiently? God does not use clocks.

What, finally, about Mr. Blankfield's chagrin at the Pope's "insistence on a celibate priesthood?" He is mistaken if he thinks that clerical celibacy can be repealed by the simple stroke of a papal pen. To indicate the complexity of the issue let me simply point out that contemporary historians are persuaded that our rules of celibacy in the Eastern as well as the Latin Church quite likely stem from regulations on clerical continence laid down by the Apostles themselves.

Father Robert F. McNamara
Irondequoit

Questions variance in children's Bible story

To the editors:

I would like to comment on an article appearing in the August 8 edition of the *Catholic Courier*. On the back page is an article titled "Jesus marvels at a woman's faith."

At the end of the article we are invited to read more about this story in Matthew 15. I read more about it in my Catholic edition of the New American Bible. But what I found was surprisingly different from your article. The difference lies in one key phrase which changes the entire meaning of the story.

Your article: "It is only the lost sheep of

my people Israel who need to be saved."

My Bible: "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Obviously the difference is significant. In your account Jesus denies the woman because her people did not "need" to be saved. But in the quote taken from the Bible the woman is denied not because she is without need, but because she is not one of the "...lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The quote taken from the Bible is at best less flattering than your version, at worst a concession to those that would argue that Jesus was not the savior of

mankind, but simply the claimed savior of the Israelites. Whether intentional or not, the revision is understandable. With this revision the image of Jesus is kept within the bounds of common Christian beliefs. But to promote the Biblical account means that we would also need to question Jesus' true role and its implications to the foundations of Christianity.

As we read further in the story Jesus asked the woman if he should take the food prepared for the children and give it to the dogs. Your version is softened somewhat from the Biblical quote, but the meaning is essentially unchanged. Given the change in the meaning of the preceding quote, the meaning of this exchange is more evident. Instead of a curious rhetorical question, we see that Jesus is calling the woman a "dog" not worthy of his attention.

The story as told in the Bible is not consistent with the image of a benevolent savior of mankind, but it is one step closer to the truth. To revise the Biblical record is to further complicate the search for an accurate historical record of Jesus. For all those adults and children who are reading your articles, please don't revise the record to suit your own purposes. The facts must speak for themselves. If the facts do not confirm our perceptions, then we cannot change the facts, but we can change our perceptions!

Daniel T. Courtney

Liberty Street, Palmyra

EDITORS' NOTE: As we hope is evident from its large "Kids' Chronicle" heading, the page in question is intended for children. The simple vocabulary and style of each Kids' Chronicle component are geared to the reading levels of children between the ages of 6 and 12. Due to such simplification, it is inevitable that these articles will vary somewhat from the Scriptures on which they are based.

'Good old days' are gone forever

To the editors:

After reading Father McBrien's column for the last few weeks I have decided to audit the activities of the Catholic Church from the "good old days" until "now days."

Good Old Days

- Tabernacle was on the main altar of the church. People genuflected and prayed before it.
- People knelt during the consecration.
- People went to confession regularly.
- Many-Catholic schools, priests, nuns and brothers.
- Over 75 percent of the Catholics attended Mass and made their Easter Duty.
- Mass was in Latin. Music was good, usually sung by the choir.
- Baptism effected through sprinkling of the water.
- Pope ran the Church.
- Now Days
- Tabernacle is hidden in some obscure nave in the church. People nod at the altar table.

- People stand at the consecration.
- People don't go to confession. They have a penance service periodically.
- Not so many Catholic schools, priests, nuns or brothers but we have some deacons, lectors and Eucharistic Ministers.
- Less than 50 percent go to Mass regularly. What's the Easter Duty?
- Mass is in the vernacular. Music is varied. Choir still does most of the singing, people don't.
- Big drive on to go to dunking a la the Baptists.
- Pope still runs the Church but many theologians don't know it — a la Martin Luther.
- We could go on and on in our analytical audit but we must remember that the "good old days" are gone forever. We have to effectively settle our differences and go forth like good Catholics to have better days ahead. God bless.

Jim Myers
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Rochester