

Let's go back to continuing ed

I read a strange sentence in a book the other day. It said: "Theology is too important to be left to the clergy."

At first I was puzzled about the meaning behind it, but as I reflected a little, its meaning became clearer.

For a very long time, most churches have provided terrific theological educations for those of its members who are preparing for ordination. More recently, denominations are adding some support for theological studies for lay people preparing for full-time church ministry. But only rarely do we find churches promoting theological education for "the rest" of the People of God.

In fact, sometimes we get the notion that theology "belongs to" the 1 percent of Christians who prepare to work in the church in some capacity. We might even get the impression sometimes that there are two classes of Christians: those called to work in our churches, and those whose "calling," by implication, is a "lower" one because they work "in the world."

This is all wrong, of course, but its correction is a slow, arduous process. We need to develop and teach theologies that are appropriate to the proper vocation of Christians: our vocations in the world. We all have to realize that sound theology is basic to the church's witness in the world, and not just to the work we do on our parish campuses.



the moral life

By Patricia Schottles, SSJ

In this country, especially, we've been fairly content to exclude the majority of God's people from the opportunity of studying theology. This is doing a great disservice to the church. We're seeing the effects of this deprivation all the time.

On the one hand, we witness in our newspapers, in our churches and gatherings, among our fellow parishioners attitudes that are thoroughly unbiblical and almost anti-Gospel. I think here of the hateful attitudes that have surfaced concerning attempts to reach out to gay and lesbian Catholics. I think here of the ridiculous self-righteous "alarm" surrounding a non-Catholic receiving Communion. I think here of the exaggerated "fear" some Catholics seem to have of columns right here in this paper.

Rather than simply and maturely disagreeing with ideas expressed, some demand that the whole column be re-

moved. Rather than bringing the same intelligence and critical thinking that sustains them in every other area of their lives, some prefer ignorant bigotry and petty-mindedness when it comes to faith.

On the other hand, we also witness a kind of anti-intellectual outlook whereby we almost celebrate the lack of adequate preparation and training among those who take on important roles on behalf of the church. This leads to gross errors by those who interpret faith for us, and lets us all fall victim to the pragmatic, experience-oriented spirit of our age. In too many cases, the church and its activities appear less robust and less rigorous than secular efforts. Sloppy, compromised or careless statements, homilies, or efforts by our churches and their members are surely less than the Gospel requires.

The church belongs in the world, and its "ordinary" members are called to live out their vocations there. But in order to realize the truth of our secular occupations as Christ's ministry extended to the world, our members need to have a proper theological understanding of their mission. Catholics need to understand that they are not simply called to serve the church, but also the world.

We worship and glorify God in prayer and worship, but we also glorify God in our work, Monday through Friday, nine to five, everywhere we are and every-

where we go. And to do this adequately, we need good theology.

Biblical theology, systematic theology, church history, moral theology are not simply the province of priests, pastoral associates and religious education teachers. Without appropriate understandings of the Bible, we will continue to deny the Gospel when we consider the complicated issues of our society. Without considered, critical and informed thoughts about the doctrine of creation and God's covenant with humanity we will continue to be embarrassed by our own failure to grasp the importance of biblical stories like Luke 15:11-32.

The church needs more than ever ordinary lay women and men who are also theologians: people who can rethink the faith in terms that are contemporary and represent its teachings in a manner that reaches the hearts and touches the lives of secular men and women. We are currently hampered by incredible ignorance.

Over the summer months ahead, why not all of us make a decision to pursue some form of adult theological education come fall. Besides being necessary in all these ways, I know of no more satisfying experience than learning more about our faith.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

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