

COLUMNISTS

Celibacy is not church doctrine, can be changed

Certain issues that were once considered closed to public discussion in the Roman Catholic Church, such as obligatory celibacy for priests, are now "on the table," as acknowledged several weeks ago in the *Boston Pilot*, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston and, more recently, when Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles declared that such questions can legitimately be discussed.

Although 75 percent of American Catholics now favor the end of obligatory celibacy for their priests, many continue to question any linkage between celibacy and pedophilia (the abuse of prepubescent children) and ephebophilia (the abuse of postpubescent youths.)

While celibacy does not directly cause such behavior (there are sexual abusers among the married population), there is a connection between the two: obligatory celibacy limits the pool of potential candidates from which the church can draw for its most important ministry.

In that thinnest of slices of the Catholic male population there is a disproportionately high percentage of homosexuals and of the *sexually immature*. Pedophiles and ephebophiles are found in the latter group.

The fact that many in this group may also be homosexual does not mean that



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

homosexuality causes pedophilia or ephebophilia. Unfortunately, many homophobic Catholics, making precisely that connection, are now demanding a complete rooting-out of gays from the priesthood and from seminaries (an entirely impractical demand, even if it were ethically and pastorally responsible).

Clerical celibacy is difficult to address because its history is so cloudy. Historians do not even agree on when it became a universal obligation for Catholic clergy. Many place its origin within the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-85), who tried to deal all at once with clerical corruption, nepotism, simony and the interference of civil authorities in the internal affairs of the church (lay investiture). Clergy were leaving church property to their families and bishops were bestow-

ing church benefices (incoming-producing offices) on their sons.

That is one of the practical reasons for celibacy. The spiritual reasons have deeper historical roots. Because many New Testament Christians expected the world to come to an end in their own lifetimes, celibacy seemed an appropriate way to await the coming of the heavenly kingdom.

Even under those circumstances, however, celibacy was not expected of everyone (Matt 19:11-12). Although St. Paul advocated celibacy for those who could embrace it, he also acknowledged that the gift and grace of celibacy were not given to all (1 Cor 7:1-9, 27-28).

Celibacy as a lifetime commitment emerged in the late third century with the rise of monasticism (first with hermits, then with communities). But celibacy was only recommended for diocesan clergy. Indeed, the Council of Nicaea (325) rejected a formal proposal to make celibacy mandatory for priests.

Although the history of clerical celibacy is difficult to trace, several facts are clear. First, celibacy is not required of all Catholic priests today. There are thousands of married Eastern-rite priests. The only restrictions are that they cannot marry after ordination, they cannot

re-marry after the death of their spouse and they cannot be appointed a bishop.

Second, celibacy was not a universal requirement in the Roman Catholic Church for more than half of its history. At least some Apostles were married (the New Testament refers to Jesus' cure of Peter's mother-in-law, in Mark 1:29-31) and some popes were married as well.

Indeed, Pope Anastasius I (399-401) was succeeded by his son, Innocent I (401-17). And Pope Hormisdas (514-23) was succeeded 13 years after his death by his son, Silverius (536-37). All four are recognized by the church as saints.

Third, the Roman Catholic Church has married priests. Former Episcopal priests who became Roman Catholics (largely because of their dissatisfaction with the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church) were re-ordained and have been allowed to function as priests in good standing while remaining married in the fullest sense of the word.

Finally, the Council of Trent in the 16th century reaffirmed obligatory celibacy for Roman rite priests, acknowledging it to be church discipline, not doctrine. In other words, it can change.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

With faith in Christ, great things can be done

5th Sunday of Easter (April 28): (R3) John 14:1-12; (R1) Acts 6:1-7; (R2) 1 Peter 2:4-9.

Jesus once said to his disciples, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father."

Jesus was giving his disciples words of encouragement, saying that when they decided to do the works of God, nothing would be impossible!

Tom Dempsey was a young man born with half a right foot and a deformed right arm. In spite of his handicaps, Dempsey wanted to be a football player. He became a kicker for his high school team and his college team. He dreamt of professional football. Only one coach would accept him. Dempsey became the kicker for the New Orleans Saints and, in 1972, kicked the longest field goal ever — 63 yards! All because he had faith in Christ who gave him the strength to do what he dreamed. "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do."

If we dream great dreams for God's glory, not our own, you and I can have a part in the great things God is doing.

Russell H. Conwell wrote *Acres of Diamonds*, a book that has influenced millions. At the height of his ministry, he



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

preached to more than 4,000 people at his Sunday morning worship service.

However, the story of how he came to build his church is not well known.

Hattie Wyatt, a little girl, went to Sunday School in the old building behind the current church. Once when she went to Sunday School, the building was already full. Little Hattie went home disappointed, determined to do something about the problem. She began to save her pennies so a church building large enough for everyone could be built. Hattie saved until she had 57 cents. Then she became terminally ill. After she died, her mother took the 57 cents to Conwell and told him that Hattie had been saving for a new church building. Conwell shared Hattie's vision with the congregation the

next Sunday. That 57 cents became the seed money for raising thousands of dollars to build Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

While it was being built, people called it "Conwell's Folly" but quit saying that when it was filled to capacity week after week. But that's not the end of the story. From Grace Baptist Church came Temple University with its colleges of education, music and fine arts and its graduate programs in law, medicine and dentistry. Its tens of thousands of students and graduates owe their beginning to Hattie Wyatt and her 57 cents.

Gen. George Patton had great respect for Army chaplains and always had them at staff meetings when important decisions were to be made. He always called on them to "get a hotline to God!"

During the Battle of the Bulge when the weather was so terrible, Gen. Patton ordered the Catholic chaplain to write a prayer that would change the weather. The chaplain wrote:

"Retrain these immoderate storms, O Lord, grant us fair weather for battle, graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee, that armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory and establish Thy justice among

men and nations. Amen."

On Dec. 12, 1944, Patton ordered this prayer to be said by all his troops. Within a day the weather cleared and Patton's army advanced from victory to victory. "Ask and you will receive."

...
Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, April 29

Acts 14:5-18; Psalms 115:1-5, 15-16; John 14:21-26

Tuesday, April 30

Acts 14:19-28; Psalms 145:10-13AB, 21; John 14:27-31A

Wednesday, May 1

Acts 15:1-6; Psalms 122:1-5; John 15:1-8

Thursday, May 2

Acts 15:7-21; Psalms 96:1-3, 10; John 15:9-11

Friday, May 3

1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Psalms 19:2-5; John 14:6-14

Saturday, May 4

Acts 16:1-10; Psalms 100:2, 3, 5; John 15:18-21

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in thanksgiving to God
for the life of

FR. BENEDICT A. EHMANN

on Friday, May 3, 2002

at 7:30 pm

Celebrated with the Requiem Mass by Maurice Durufle
Sung by the University of Rochester Choir

Brett Scott, Director

Dessert Reception with piano obbligato in Social Hall afterwards

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