

COLUMNISTS

Celibacy a factor, not the cause, of abuse crisis

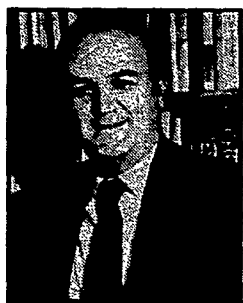
Those who insist that obligatory celibacy is not the cause of the sexual-abuse crisis that has so painfully afflicted the Catholic Church since January are right. But when they also claim that celibacy is not even a factor, they are wrong. Celibacy is a factor, and a highly significant one at that.

Because of the rule of obligatory celibacy, the Roman Catholic Church must draw from the thinnest slice of its own population for its most important ministry. That segment of the Catholic community consists entirely of males who are willing to promise, as a condition of their exercise of the priestly ministry, that they will not marry for their entire lives and that they will not have any relationships that might, under normal circumstances, lead to marriage.

Is it really any wonder, therefore, that the priesthood draws an inordinately high percentage of gay men and is, at the same time, an attractive vocation for those who are sexually immature, if not also dysfunctional — individuals who may enter the priesthood with the sincere hope of containing and resolving their inner sexual conflicts?

When did the Catholic Church begin to require celibacy for its priests? The question is not easy to answer.

An Irish Carmelite theologian, Christopher O'Donnell, put it this way:



essays in
theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

"Clerical celibacy is a complex issue with a history which is not yet fully agreed upon among scholars" (*Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church*, p. 82). Is there anything that we can agree upon?

What no one can deny is that the Catholic Church has had married priests from the very beginning of its existence. Indeed, at least some of the Apostles, including Peter himself, were married.

Paul once argued: "Do we not have the right to take along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the Apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephas [Peter]?" (1 Corinthians 9:5). Indeed, Matthew refers explicitly to the Lord's cure of Peter's mother-in-law (13:14-15).

In the Pastoral Letters, bishops, presbyters and deacons are enjoined to be "the husband of one wife," with the mandate that their children be well-behaved believers (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).

To be sure, Jesus himself was celibate, but he never imposed it on others, not even the Apostles. He acknowledged only that some had freely renounced marriage "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this," he said, "ought to accept it" (Matthew 19:12).

Although Paul recommended celibacy for all Christians because he expected the second coming of Christ and the end of the world to occur very soon, he nonetheless recognized that it would be better for those unable to live a celibate life to marry rather than to suffer eternal punishment (1 Corinthians 7:8).

Whether celibacy was practiced, much less imposed, on the clergy in the period leading up to the ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) is a matter of conjecture only. There is little or no evidence on which to base a firm judgment.

The earliest ecclesiastical legislation on the subject was given at the Council of Elvira in Spain (about 306). However, only a quarter of its 81 canons, or regulations, are regarded as genuine, and scholars even differ in their interpretation of those that seem authentic.

Significantly, a resolution to make celibacy obligatory for all clergy was formally proposed at the Council of Nicaea, and the council rejected it. A couple of decades later, the Synod of Gangra con-

demned those who refused to attend liturgies presided over by married clergy, and threatened bishops with excommunication if they abandoned their wives for the sake of their own spirituality.

In the East, meanwhile, a decision was rendered at the Council of Trullo in 692 that has remained in force ever since; namely, that priests and deacons may marry before their ordinations, but not afterwards, and that bishops were not to be married at all. The council was explicitly critical of those arrangements in parts of the West where priests were allowed to remain married, but only if they lived with their wives as brother and sister.

With the shockingly high incidence of corruption among the clergy in the 10th and 11th centuries, the Roman Catholic Church took formal steps to impose celibacy on all of its priests, beginning in the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-85) and then at the First and Second Lateran Councils in 1123 and 1139, respectively. The fact that the Council of Trent felt the need to reaffirm this discipline in the 16th century indicates that it was still being widely ignored.

In any case, the issue is back on the table today.

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

Seize the initiative in resolving personal conflict

23rd Sunday of the Year (September 8): (R3) Matthew 18:15-20; (R1) Ezekiel 33:7-9; (R2) Romans 13:8-10.

Have you ever noticed that wherever there are people, there are conflicts? Where two or three are gathered together, there's going to be disagreement, and eventually someone is going to be unhappy. It's true in religion. It is true in business. It is true in politics.

Where there are people, there is conflict. Even in the church.

A priest arrived at his new parish. An older couple invited him to dinner. While the wife was preparing the meal, her husband and the pastor talked. The conversation turned to church matters. The pastor had heard about a big fight in the church years earlier. He felt it would be good to know about this tragic event.

"As I remember it," the husband said, "the fuss was over the location of the new organ. Some wanted it in the balcony, others wanted it in the sanctuary." The priest asked, "Which side did you and your wife favor?" The old gent paused for a moment, scratched his head, then called out to the kitchen, "Honey, where did we want the organ put in the big church fight?"

The church is not immune from conflict. Sometimes these conflicts are over issues that merit serious discussion, such as abortion, homosexuality, civil rights. Often, they are over inconsequential things such as where to put the organ.



a word
for
sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Ever since Cain and Abel, conflict has been part of the human condition.

Often, though, unresolved conflict brings with it much pain. That is why we ought to take conflicts seriously. They can lead to other problems. Unresolved conflicts can lead to the loss of one's job, or even to divorce.

During World War II the Bunker Hill Air Force Base was located near a small church in Kokomo, Indiana. Many of the airmen came to the church to be married, because the little chapel was cozy and attractive. The chapel was wired for sound. Prior to each ceremony, the minister would place a pile of religious records on the automatic changer to provide soft background music.

In one service, everything was going well until they came to the part that goes, "and to thee I will be true as long as we both shall live." Then there was a click, and over the speaker came a choral rendition of the World War II song, "Just Be-

fore the Battle, Mother."

There are so many battles in homes today over unresolved conflicts. No wonder Jesus, in today's Gospel, gives us advice about resolving conflicts. He tells us to take the initiative in resolving conflicts. He doesn't say, "If you and your friend disagree on something." No, he says, "If your brother sins against you, if you are the injured party, take the first step to resolve the conflict." What's important is not that you're right, but that you are committed to preserving and improving a relationship.

It is a simple thing. Take the initiative. If you think of someone with whom you have a strained relationship, look beyond the problem. Look at the person with whom your relationship is strained and move toward reconciliation.

More than 30 years ago, a brief story appeared in *Reader's Digest* about a town in Minnesota that got its name in a strange way. When the community was first settled, it had no name. People began to move to the area, and soon the townspeople called a meeting to choose a name for their town. Many suggestions were made, but they couldn't agree on the name. The discussion soon became heated and quarrelsome. One man in attendance that night became so disgusted by the way things were going that he jumped up, pounded on the table with his fist and shouted, "Let us have harmony!"

Someone present suddenly seized the

idea and shouted back, "Yes! Let's have harmony!" And the town got its name: Harmony, Minnesota.

Harmony is a wonderful thing to have in a community, a family or a church. If harmony is going to take place, someone has to heed Jesus' advice: Take the initiative.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, September 9

1 Corinthians 5:1-8;
Psalms 5:5-6, 7, 12; Luke 6:6-11

Tuesday, September 10

1 Corinthians 6:1-11;
Psalms 149:1-6, 9; Luke 6:12-19

Wednesday, September 11

1 Corinthians 7:25-31; Psalms
45:11-12, 14-17; Luke 6:20-26

Thursday, September 12

1 Corinthians 8:1B-7, 11-13;
Psalms 139:1-3, 13-14;
Luke 6:27-38

Friday, September 13

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22B-27;
Psalms 84:3-6, 8, 12; Luke 6:39-42

Saturday, September 14

Numbers 21:4B-9; Psalms 78:1-2,
34-38; Philippians 2:6-11;
John 3:13-17

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