

Consider married laity for sainthood

Many people have been asking in recent years why there are not more saints drawn from the ranks of ordinary married laywomen and laymen — individuals who did not join or found a religious community after the death of their spouse.

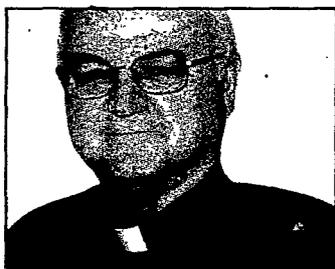
Why have so many of the canonized and the beatified never entered a committed, loving relationship with another human being, or raised a family, or held an ordinary job in the world?

Of the more than 450 individuals canonized by the current pope, more than 150 were clergy, about 20 were nonordained religious men and more than 30 were religious women. That is almost half of the entire number.

While it is true that more than 160 laymen and more than 80 laywomen have also been canonized in this pontificate, most of these were part of large groups of martyrs: 92 of the 103 Martyrs of Korea, 59 of the 117 Martyrs of Vietnam and 83 of the 120 Martyrs of China.

As many Catholics know, however, saints have significance as individuals, not as anonymous members of large groups. Individuals, not crowds, serve as models of Christian discipleship. And yet almost all of the lay people canonized by Pope John Paul II fall into this collective category. They were a part of large contingents of heroic Catholics martyred for their faith in Asia.

The Vatican appeared to be moving in a new direc-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

tion over a year ago when the pope beatified Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi, an Italian couple who had been married for nearly 50 years and had four children. Following the death of her husband, Maria did not enter a convent or found a new religious order. It seemed like a perfect gesture on the Vatican's part.

However, when the media probed a bit more deeply, they discovered that the couple had lived the last 26 years of their marriage as brother and sister, and that none of their four children had ever married and given them grandchildren. Their two sons became priests, one daughter became a nun, and the other daughter embraced a life of consecrated virginity. Hardly a typical Catholic family.

And that is not a marginal consideration. Saints are canonized not for their own eternal glory — they receive a full measure of that in heaven — but to provide models and examples of Christian holiness.

What does it mean to be a true and faithful disciple of Christ? Look to this saint or

to that saint, the church replies. How they lived their lives on this earth is a sure guide to how we should live our lives here and now.

And therein lies the challenge and the problem for the church. If it canonizes too few individuals with whom the overwhelming majority of people can identify, the point and purpose of their canonization are negated. Saints are not only sources of spiritual and material benefits through their intercession with God; they are also — and primarily — witnesses of the Gospel and of Christian sanctity.

Since 95 percent of the human race marries and raises a family, it is only logical that the church should present for universal emulation individuals who lived ordinary married lives in an extraordinarily virtuous way.

Unfortunately, that is not the way it has been. The overwhelming majority of canonized saints have been priests and nuns, and the trend does not seem to be moving in a different direction.

It was recently announced that John Paul II intends to canonize 12 new saints in three separate ceremonies in May and October. Six are clergy, and six are nuns. There is not a single layperson — married or unmarried — among them.

Progress? Hardly.

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

LETTERS

Says 'experts' are lacking on morality

To the editor:

What caught my eye and my ire in the *Courier* of April 10 was a small piece about "Experts" advising the Vatican that zero tolerance for sexual abuse of minors was the wrong policy to pursue. The piece neither identified the experts, their field of expertise nor why they said what they did. One thing is clear — they are obviously not experts on morality. Sexual abuse of minors ranks just below murder as a most grievous sin and a serious felony punishable by a lengthy prison sentence and registration as a sex offender. I find it reprehensible that any group of rational, moral persons would suggest that the church tolerate sexual abuse of minors, in effect giving those covered by the policy at least one such detected crime before they are defrocked. In other words two bites of the apple!

Thomas J. Krajci
Murphy Road
Corning

EDITOR'S NOTE: The item to which Mr. Krajci refers was a synopsis of a longer Catholic News Service article. The unabridged version identified symposium participants simply as "eight experts, none of them Catholic, who came from Germany, the United States and Canada. Several had presented papers at the 2002 international conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual

Abusers. ... Dr. Martin P. Kafka, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and president of the Massachusetts chapter of the treatment association, was the only U.S. expert invited."

The article also said the panel had criticized zero-tolerance policies because they "ignore the difficulty of determining the future risk posed by the offender and may actually increase the risk" by "unleashing them on the general public" without the supervision and support systems that may have helped them control their negative behavior."

Stories do not add up, writers say

To the editor:

What is wrong with this picture? In the April 10 *Catholic Courier*, the front page listed the main features in this way:

1. "Diocesan campaign soliciting \$50 million." Did we miss something, or did we not just finish the Thanks-giving Appeal; which, by the way, fell 6 percent short of its goal? Changing the name and time of the campaign will not change the fact that people are not giving because they cannot afford it. Interesting — not enough money!

2. "Board advises closing of school in Brockport." The article states that many families have transferred to Holy Family School in Le Roy because of lower tuition. This seems to mean that the parents in Brockport don't have the money to continue giving their children a Catholic education in the Diocese of Rochester, but value the system enough to send their children to Le Roy. Interesting — not enough money!

3. "Pastoral Center forced to lay off 9 employees." Why? Because the Thanksgiving Appeal fell short. (Please review #1.) Father Hart noted that costly Pastoral Center renovation is going on because of contracts signed two years ago,

Catholic Courier

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