

# Lay college leaders often ill-equipped

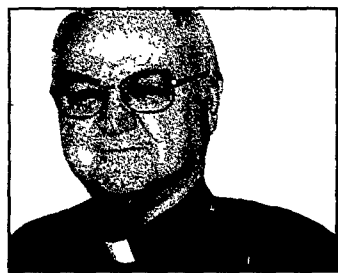
In mid-June an academic conference, cosponsored by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, was held at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., on "Lay Leaders in Catholic Higher Education."

There was at least one paper given that merits more careful scrutiny because it contains some sobering words of caution about the current trend toward lay presidencies of Catholic universities and colleges, once the exclusive domain of clergy and religious women.

The paper, "Leadership and the Age of the Laity: Emerging Patterns in Catholic Higher Education," was given by Melanie M. Morey, an educational researcher whose doctorate is from Harvard, and Dennis H. Holtschneider, a Vincentian priest and executive vice president of Niagara University.

At first glance, the trend toward lay presidencies is one that most Catholics, schooled in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, should readily applaud. The church, after all, is the whole people of God, which means that the laity also have, by reason of their baptism, responsibility for its life, mission and ministries (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nn. 30 and 33).

The council insisted, moreover, that the laity, along with the clergy, "possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and coura-



Father Richard McBrien

## Essays in Theology

geously about those matters in which they enjoy competence" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 62).

A key word here is "competence." If lay persons are to have an active voice and role in the internal life of the church, they need some measure of competence in Catholic theology, broadly considered, and some understanding and experience of how the church functions.

To encourage the laity to achieve this competence, the council urged as many as possible to "receive an appropriate formation in the sacred sciences, and [to] develop and deepen these studies" (n. 62).

Unlike members of the clergy and many religious women, the laity do not have the opportunity to acquire, over the course of several years of study, an extensive background in theology and doctrine, biblical studies, church history, spirituality, liturgy, and canon law. Relatively few of the thousands of lay Catholics who have graduated from a Catholic university or college took

more than two undergraduate courses in theology.

The Morey-Holtschneider paper generated some intense discussion at the conference because it raises a warning flag about the lack of preparation many lay presidents have in dealing with the central issue of Catholic identity and mission. Expertise in business or science, for example, is no substitute for a minimally sophisticated background in the theological disciplines and some hands-on experience of church life.

The paper does not say lay presidents must have a doctorate in theology or some equivalent field. But they do need to have more than a catechism-level knowledge of the Catholic tradition and a Mass-on-Sunday experience of the church.

Finding No. 4 of the Morey-Holtschneider study reads: "There is a significant lack of formal theological and spiritual preparation among [lay] presidents. There is also widespread agreement among presidents that inadequate lay preparation presents a problem for the future of Catholic higher education. Despite this, few lay presidents (9%) report that they personally feel ill-equipped to lead the religious mission of their institutions."

In other words, the problem exists everywhere except in their own back yards.

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

## We should leave angels to their work

### To the editor:

Do I live on another planet or was not Sister Schoelles' article telling us not to overreact to a secular law passed by a secular government?

I was reminded of a homily I heard from Father Norman Tanck on the parable of the sower who sowed good seed, but his enemies sowed weeds in his fields at night (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Father focused on the section where the workers ask if they should pull up the weeds, and the owner says no lest they destroy the good plants in the process. Instead all should be harvested together at which time the angels would sort the wheat from the weeds. The message I got from the homily was that perhaps it is not our job to try to decide what God's position is on these issues — that perhaps the good or evil of certain acts has to be worked out individually between God and his child.

This doesn't mean we aren't bound to destroy the immorality in our own lives through the guidance of the Church and development of our consciences. However, we maybe should stop trying to discern the immorality in the behavior of others — lest we destroy the wheat with the weeds. If you remember your Church history — the 30 years war, the Inquisition, the over-zealous missionaries to the New World — you see how quick-

ly man bumbles when he tries to do the angels' jobs.

To me, Sister Schoelles was neither promoting promiscuous behavior, nor changes in the sacrament of matrimony. What I saw was an attempt to understand the reasons for an orientation, historically ignored by our universal Church which is called to welcome all God's children.

Miriam Ganze  
 Covington Road  
 Rochester

## Laws permit abortion, yet protect pets

### To the editor:

Over the years, much of the world turned its back on various atrocities. Our sisters and brothers were abused as slaves for decades, many were slaughtered by dictators during the Holocaust, and many have died during recent ethnic cleansings. The greatest abuse occurs to the most innocent of all. For 30 years, more than 42 million babies have been terminated due to abortion! The tide is turning through prayers, education and by learning from those affected by abortion. Thank God the silent screams of these babies have been heard.

Our country was founded on religious freedom. The Declaration of Independence starts with: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Abortion takes a Life and affects others. Abortion takes away our Liberty and enslaves people with guilt. Abortion takes away Happiness like the smile and hug of a baby.

We have laws to protect wildlife/pets and call ourselves humane, but we have a law allowing abortion and call it a choice.

Steve DeLucia  
 Marquart Drive  
 Webster



## 'Thinking stuff' me the first

### To the editor:

Reader Dorothy Geneseo is right good to read opinion the various column appear in the Courier Pat Schoelles has good deal of healthy and deserve from those of us pleased to read helpful and intelligent comments. I apologize silent for so long columnists are fit the targets of negativity, yet their education, knowledge and courage are shared with us. We are not accepting all that we it is great to have the options available so that be better for Catholics. I rethoughts presented by others McBrien and as well as Sister Schoelles before the news. So I have some positive comments about in the letters to the editor instead of all the complaints would be a nice change. Hats off! to the Courier for continuing to provide a great "thinking-stuff"

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