

Hierarchy should address problems

Two years ago this month, three pastors of the Archdiocese of Boston met to discuss some of the problems facing them as priests. They had been frustrated by the failure of their archbishop, Cardinal Bernard Law, to help his priests address their concerns.

From that small meeting in August 2001 emerged the Boston Priests' Forum. It grew more rapidly after the initial disclosures of sexual abuse by priests had surfaced in *The Boston Globe* in early January. The following December, a significant number of the forum's members called for the cardinal's resignation, and he did so within the week.

The future of the priesthood and of the Catholic Church itself remain unclear, more than a year after the U.S. bishops met in Dallas to address the sexual-abuse crisis. Laity and clergy alike are wondering about the shape of the priesthood and the church in another five, 10 or 20 years, and about the steps that church leaders need to take to prepare for the inevitable changes.

As Mass-attendance figures continue to plummet nationally, as financial contributions continue to decline, as parishes continue to be closed or merged, and as vocations to the priesthood continue to dwindle to a relative trickle, what strategies do the Vatican and the bishops have for dealing with these challenges?



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

Whenever a voice is raised that seems both well-informed and honest, people eagerly listen. One such voice has been that of Father Donald Cozzens, a priest of the diocese of Cleveland and former seminary rector who currently teaches at John Carroll University.

In his many lectures around the country regarding the sexual-abuse crisis, Father Cozzens has argued that the church cannot shape the future of the priesthood nor its own institutional future unless it is prepared to face the present situation of both, objectively and forthrightly.

In a talk this past March, published in the spring issue of *Boston College Magazine*, Cozzens cited some exceedingly sobering statistics:

- In 1968 there were almost 5,000 diocesan seminarians preparing for ordination. In 2002 that number hovered around 2,800.

- One out of six parishes in the United States lacks a resident priest.

- A quarter of the diocesan seminarians studying in

the United States today are from other countries. Eighty-three percent of them intend to remain here after ordination, which means an increasing number of priests who do not fully understand our culture.

- If all of the seminarians now studying for the priesthood in the United States are ordained, they will replace fewer than 50 percent of the priests who will be leaving the active ministry.

- As of 2000, there were 433 priests over the age of 90 and 298 under the age of 30. The average age of seminarians is now almost 35.

- Although the U.S. Catholic population has increased from more than 28 million in the 1950s to about 67 million today, weekly Mass attendance is at an all-time low.

Father Cozzens wonders what the ministerial priesthood would look like if, instead of today's 28 percent attendance rate at weekly Mass, 70 percent of Catholics were regularly present for the Eucharist, as was the case in 1970?

"How could the church ever meet the demand for the Eucharist?" he asks. "The institutional church seems relatively untroubled by such questions."

Rarely has the need for enlightened and courageous leadership been more urgent.

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

Profit key in culture of death

To the editor:

There is a seldom mentioned aspect of the culture of death that is as much a part of the assault on human dignity as are abortion and euthanasia — our profit defined economy. Profit in and of itself is neither good nor evil. In an economic system ordered toward the common good of the whole human population it would be reasonable to expect profit to be a secondary by-product of a healthy business. However, capitalism as it defines the economic life of our nation is not ordered toward the common good; it is ordered toward the generation of profit.

Given the reality of fallen human nature and the propensity to sin, the problem of establishing profit as the defining goal of economic life should be all too apparent. There is nothing inherent in the goal to provide a positive motivation for moral conduct. While the state may enforce certain restraints and certain individuals and corporations may establish moral limits for themselves, there are no internal checks and balances within the system, and ultimately the goal itself works to undermine such restraints. Profit as defining goal and principle of our economy, with its close association with greed and the lust for power, ensures that self-interest — and not the common good — will dominate the socio-economic landscape. The law of capi-

talism as it functions in our society is that any human weakness, vanity, fear, or desire that can be exploited for the sake of profit will be.

No amount of emphasis on personal responsibility is going to change a system that is inherently disordered and that promotes and legitimates immorality. As long as profit remains the defining goal of our economic system the existence of physical poverty and the continued impoverishment of the spirit of our people is ensured.

James Lynn
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Mumford

Debates points made in column

To the editor:

Antoinette Bosco's column ("History ignored, repeats," August 14) contains serious errors. She claims Wilson was "infected with 'war fever,'" but his 1916 campaign slogan was "He Kept Us Out Of War." Wilson tried to avoid war but Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare forced his hand.

She states that Wilson "... allowed ... a 'witch hunt' in seeking out anyone who might dissent ..." This "witch hunt" was the Red Scare of 1919 led by Senator Poindexter, which occurred after the war and concerned Communists, not war opponents. Besides, it is preposterous to argue that a president who suffered a stroke in August 1919 and was incapacitated for the rest of his term "allowed" a witch hunt.

Lastly she asserts that Wilson supported suppressing differing opinions. She writes, "Conformity, he maintained, would be 'the only virtue.' Every man who refused to conform 'would pay the penalty.'" What Wilson actually wrote was vastly different. In his reluctance to enter war he wrote, "... lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be

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brutal and ruthless spirit of ruthlessness will enter into our national Congress, the policeman on the street would be the and every man to conform with penalty." Wilson a dire predicting conformity. Instead of dissonance from history has twisted the all recognizable smirched Wilson.

Is Ms. Bosco simply ignorant? Or is she so self-righteous that she believes connected with must be evil? If the answer, it is ignored the past.

Will back put more behind

To the editor:
I support the "wage" program the August 7, 2003 *Catholic Courier*. However, businesses participating in the program, hoping for gooders and political demand the living wage. I am sure that those owners who refuse to come adequate the business a family? Will the