

# Boston Catholics vocal about leaders

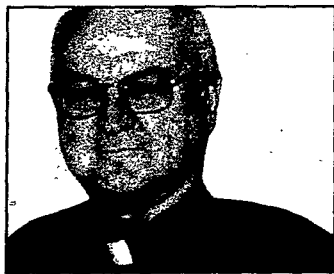
When a new diocesan bishop is appointed, it is customary for those interviewed by the media to speak of him in glowing terms. The choice always seems to be just the right one, even "inspired," and the pope is credited with an enormous measure of wisdom for having made it.

Occasionally, there is a discordant voice, but it is often met with howls of protest. To raise questions about an episcopal appointment is considered tantamount to an attack upon the Holy Father himself.

Given the nature of potential candidates for appointment to a major see nowadays, it is inevitable that the appointee will have the profile of a strong, even hard-line, conservative, selected for his loyalty rather than leadership talents.

Discordant voices may not be popular with a few Catholics, but those voices reflect the thinking and concerns of the great majority of the Catholic community today. Such is the case with the July 1 appointment of Bishop Sean O'Malley as the archbishop of Boston.

The appointment was initially praised and celebrated from within a fairly broad cross-section of the Boston Catholic community — priests who will have to live and work under the new archbishop's authority, laity who hope to win a sympathetic response to their requests for dialogue on matters of pastoral concern and even a lawyer or two who



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

see dollar signs in the resolution of pending lawsuits by victims of sexual abuse by Boston priests.

In May *The Boston Globe* released the results of a poll of area Catholics regarding the qualities they would like to see in the successor of Cardinal Bernard Law.

Nearly one in five Catholics said that they were now so alienated from their church that they have considered joining a non-Catholic church.

Sixty-two percent indicated that they had lost confidence in the church as an institution, and nearly half acknowledged that they are now giving less money to it. Moreover, 27 percent said that the sexual-abuse crisis has caused them to attend Mass less regularly.

Church officials in Boston acknowledge that Mass attendance has dropped 14 percent since 2001, while revenue from the annual fundraising appeal decreased by 47 percent.

More than 16 months after the scandal first erupted, the laity's alienation from the church is accelerating

rather than diminishing. Fifty-three percent of Boston-area Catholics insisted that there needs to be a "modernizing [of] church attitudes on social issues."

A plurality said that the requirement of celibacy is the primary cause of sexual abuse in the priesthood, only 9 percent blaming gay priests for the crisis, contrary to the explanation proposed by certain high-profile conservative Catholics.

Asked to describe the ideal relationship between an archbishop and his flock, the majority said he should be both a leader and a listener, open to cooperation with priests and laity.

Although a significant plurality cited "openness to change" as the most important quality they would like to see in their next archbishop, only 18 percent thought the pope would make such an appointment.

In the weeks and months ahead, it will become clear whether this skepticism was justified. If there is an obvious discrepancy between the archbishop's approach and that of the majority of his flock, those who greeted the appointment with hope and enthusiasm will undoubtedly need to re-evaluate their initial reaction. And the early critics will, too, if the opposite is the case.

For the church's sake, one hopes the skeptics were wrong.

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

## Petition not a challenge to charism

To the editor:

*The New York Times* has reported on the statement of a number of priests in Milwaukee that was sent to Archbishop Dolan, calling for the ordination of married men to the priesthood.

Archbishop Dolan's reply appeared in their diocesan newspaper, "This is the time we priests need to be renewing our pledge to celibacy, not questioning it." What the Archbishop and all bishops need to realize is that allowing married men to be ordained is not in itself a "questioning" of celibacy. Celibacy can remain — for those who accept that charism. The admission of married men to the presbyterate has already happened when numerous married Anglican priests were converted and ordained as Roman-Catholic priests. They serve with distinction and holiness. Our Eastern Churches — so-called "eastern rites" — allow married men to be priests. They, too, serve with distinction and holiness.

These men are the proof that celibacy in the Latin Church is not an absolute.

In order to promote a renewed love for the Eucharist (the central worship of our Church), to provide for sufficient ministers to the People of God, and to increase vocations (a call from God, according to some), celibacy should not have to be an obstacle.

I hope our own priests in this diocese will have the

courage to ask for more help by ordaining married men who have received a nudge from God and acceptance by the bishop.

Donald Muench  
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Pittsford

## Bishops' plea 'wishy-washy'

To the editor:

The *Catholic Courier's* Aug. 28 issue printed an example on page 3 of wishy-washy liberalism that is confusing the faithful. Catholic bishops of Florida have asked the governor to spare the life of a convicted murderer of two people that he killed nine years ago. On page 3 we also read that John J. Geoghan, convicted child molester, was beaten and strangled to death by convicted murderer Joseph L. Druce, who killed a man 15 years ago. So our prisons are made even more dangerous to inmates because those with blanket opposition to the death of convicted murderers help send them to prison instead of the graveyard.

You can take all bets that more innocent lives have been destroyed in the abortion mills than innocent lives taken in the death chamber.

Our judicial system is far from perfect, but their greatest imperfection was making it "legal" to murder millions in the womb. This is the greater battle, my dear Bishops, and it should have been joined 30 years ago, daily and weekly from God's pulpit, by reminding the faithful from the start that the Supreme Court cannot make law; that is reserved under our Constitution for our wishy-washy Congress.

Donovan Dunn  
Frazier Street  
Brockport

## Culture varies in many ways

To the editor:

It is heartening to read of Mary Lou Reifsnnyder's warm acceptance of a priest from India who is visiting

her parish (should come, culture," Sep Rochester di with a num from variou Nigeria, Pola Lanka, Ghar others — as v

It might though, to try Richard McE he challenges As I read his he calls no p ture or count he does righ that there are tures within Faith, and dif to be faced.

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