

MOVEMENT FOR MARRIED CLERGY

NEWSLETTER

Number 22, January 2008

EDITORIAL

New Year's Greetings to all our members and friends, and as always I take this opportunity of thanking you for your continued support of our cause. Your loyalty is being rewarded. It is clear that the tide of opinion in the Church is now running strongly in our favour, and personally I regard the momentum as unstoppable. All serious observers of the Catholic scene are agreed that there is no theological or immovable disciplinary barrier to the ordination of married men. The practicalities are now beginning to bite. Most dioceses in this country are now amalgamating parishes. This is a euphemism for removing residents priests from some of them and giving extra work to the survivors.

SUCCESS IN AUSTRALIA

You will recall the special edition of the newsletter which was sent to you in the autumn about the petition organised in Australia. A number of Catholic activists who have the well-being of the Church at heart, organised a petition addressed to the Australian bishops, urging them to take practical steps to ordain married men. The shortage of priests in Australia is now critical, and when a parish in that vast country is closed the deprived parishioners might have to travel a hundred miles for Mass.

RESULTS: The petition collected a remarkable total of over 16,700 signatures.

At their November conference the bishops discussed the issue for more than three hours, and they have referred the matter to a sub-committee.

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THOSE RESULTS ?

Firstly the numbers are remarkable. In secular politics comparisons are significant. A few years ago a nation-wide petition asking the Australian government to ratify the Kyoto agreement received 1,942 signatures. Another petition aimed at preventing genocide in Dafur obtained 2,982 signatures.

Secondly the discussion. An important taboo has been broken. Hitherto the previous pope had forbidden bishops to discuss the possibility of altering the law on celibacy. (It is unbelievable that bishops should be treated in such a demeaning fashion). Fortunately the independent minded Australian bishops were more influenced by the pastoral needs of the dioceses for which they are responsible. It is a very significant development.

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE OPPOSITION. A meeting in early November in support of the petition in Camberwell (Australia N.B.) was disrupted by ultra-conservative Catholics who shouted down the speakers. This is significant. It confirms that the opponents of married priests have no theological arguments. The number of signatures on a COUNTER-PETITION is disputed, but probably 1900.

LITERARY COMPETITION. Like many quality papers, we are introducing a Competition. WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING "But sexual intercourse, the sexual act between a woman and a man, is unthinkable without an act of the will, especially on the part of the man. It is not just a question of the actual decision but also of the physiological possibility of carrying out the act, of which man is incapable in states in which he is unable to exercise his will, for instance when he is asleep, or unconscious for some other reason.

It is in the very nature of the act that the man plays the active role and takes the initiative, while the woman is a comparatively passive partner, whose function it is to accept the experience. For the purposes of the sexual act it is enough for her to be passive and unresisting, so much so that it may even take place without her volition while she is in a state in which she has no awareness at all of what is happening - for instance while she is asleep, or unconscious."

ANSWER OVERLEAF. Helpful clues: Written by a man, and one who had no sexual experience.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

I know it's boring, but all organisations have to raise money. (Just think of the American election!). May I remind you that subs. are now due, (£15, & £8 concessions). Post cheques (payable to MMaC) to the treasurer Mr. R. Hughes, 11 Lawrence Leys, Bloxham, nr. Banbury, Oxon, OX15 4NC.

ENGLISH PETITION

Following the success of the Australian petition, an enterprising English woman is organising one in this country. The text is the same as the Australian petition. The initiative has the full backing of MMaC, and several other Catholic organisations. The organiser is Mrs. Maureen Robinson. A copy of the petition is enclosed with the newsletter for all our paid up members.

PRACTICAL STEPS. Each member who is a lay person is asked to try for at least ten signatures to the document. Priests are asked to aim at one hundred, since your points of contact are so much more numerous.

DEADLINE The petition is due for presentation to the hierarchy at their Low Week Meeting, so please ensure that the forms are posted to Mrs. Robinson by ~~February 20th~~. Her address is printed on the form

SEPT. 1st

IS THERE REALLY A LACK OF VOCATIONS ?

It all depends what you mean by "vocation". In a letter to *The Tablet* a leading theologian, Professor Nicholas Lash wrote :- "I was shocked by the complete absence, in your report of "priest shortages" in Boston, of any mention of the Eucharist. The article could have been commenting on the lack of branch managers in a municipal corporation. The Catholic Church is a network of eucharistic communities.

There is no "shortage of vocations". Men and women have vocations when the Church invites them to undertake some office. All talk of laypeople taking on "new forms of ministry" is so much persiflage until the ecclesiastical authorities bite the bullet and invite sufficient men (married or celibate) and women (ditto) to be ordained to the presbyterate. Without the Eucharist, the Church perishes." (*The Tablet*, 18-08-07, reproduced by kind permission of Professor Lash.)

Literary Competition. Answer: The author was Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 1960, English translation, page 271.

LOOKING AHEAD : AGM 2008

Although the AGM will take place in mid - summer, we need to look ahead and plan it now, because it will have a new format.

It is clear now that the intellectual argument has been won. All serious minded Catholics in this country can see that there is no theological barrier against ordaining married men.

Accordingly in this year's AGM we will not invite another leading theologian to present any aspect of a married clergy, but we will be looking at the practicalities. So we will have a

SYMPOSIUM

That is to say, we will invite people to come to the AGM and share personal experiences about the effects on their lives of the amalgamation of parishes. e.g. Would you feel betrayed if the church of your marriage had been closed ? We want to hear more of this kind of testimony, because it is our conviction that amalgamating parishes is not the answer to the shortage of priests.

PRACTICAL STEPS. All members of MMaC are urged to investigate the situation of amalgamated parishes, to discover the effects of this policy. Please invite the people to come to the AGM and speak, or write down their experience so that it can be read out at the meeting by a member of MMaC.

ROMAN INITIATIVE

The Congregation for the Clergy has published plans for perpetual Adoration of the eucharist in specified churches in every diocese, to make reparation for the sexual abuse scandals of the recent past. (*The Tablet* 12.Jan '08, and *The Guardian* 7, Jan.'08). What is one to make of this plan ?

Several questions come to mind. If reparation is needed, surely it should be undertaken by those who perpetrated the evils. Secondly reparation, like all penance should be painful, but Adoration should be an enjoyable form of prayer. Thirdly, does this evade the real causes of sexual abuse ? Namely inadequate screening of candidates for ordination. And more seriously, does compulsory celibacy act as a contributory cause in turning priests into sexual predators ? The Ferns Report (Irish Government) and other observers have stated that it is a factor. Until these basic questions have been sorted out the plan seems to have little to commend it.

THIS NEWSLETTER is produced for MMaC by Michael Winter (13 Foxham Rd., London N19 4RR), who is responsible for the opinions expressed.