

ANOTHER SURVEY OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS

On October 21, the *Los Angeles Times* released the results of a survey of Catholic priests. The most salient finding was that young priests are more traditional than their older counterparts. For example, priests under age 41 “expressed more allegiance to the clerical hierarchy, less dissent against traditional church teachings, and more certainty about the sinfulness of homosexuality, abortion, artificial birth control and other moral issues than did their elders.”

We have no reason to doubt the survey’s findings but we were distraught by some aspects of it. On June 26 the *Los Angeles Times*, along with the Allentown, Pennsylvania daily *The Morning Call*, mailed the survey to Catholic priests nationwide “with the goal of better understanding the issues and challenges facing the church in America today.” Because the response rate was so low, another mailing was sent on July 25. Many priests complained to the Catholic League about some of the questions and the way they were phrased.

No wonder so many priests have contacted the Catholic League about this survey. For example, question 26 reads, “When you need counsel and guidance, how comfortable do you feel about going to your bishop or to the superiors of your order?” One of the priests who contacted us rightly labeled the question “ridiculous,” saying, “It is just not a reality that priests go to their bishop for counsel since they have personal spiritual directors and it is not practical especially in large dioceses.” Moreover, whatever might be said could then be twisted: “But if most priests answer that they never go to their bishop, then it could look like the priests don’t trust their bishop.”

Several priests objected to questions 45 and 47. After first

asking priests whether they favored women's ordination (#44) and the ordination of married priests (#46), they were then asked, "Regardless of whether you favor or oppose [it]...which of the following statements do you think is the most compelling reason for doing so?" This is a textbook example of an ideologically loaded trap that is ripe for misinterpretation.

This prompted us to comment: "The reason the two newspapers sent the survey out in June was to satisfy their voyeuristic appetite. The reason they sent it out again in July is because they got stiffed. All of which reveals more to us about the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Morning Call* than Catholic priests."