

MEDIA PUSHING CHURCH TO CHANGE

The internal affairs of any religion should be the business of its congregants, yet when it comes to the Catholic Church, the media offer a dispensation. Recent comments by the Vatican's secretary of state, Archbishop Pietro Parolin, who simply restated the Church teaching on celibacy, have ignited the passions of the media.

In September, NBC "Nightly News" anchor Brian Williams, and ABC "World News Tonight" anchor Diane Sawyer, both questioned whether the Church is going to drop its celibacy requirement for priests. NBC followed with a story by Tracy Connor that teased the issue further: "Meet Father Dad: How Married Priests Would Change the Catholic Church." The conclusion: "More students in the seminaries, more people in the pews, and the pitter-patter of little feet padding through the rectory." They forgot to explain why, if this were likely, the Protestant mainline denominations are sinking.

Here's the real news: the Catholic Church in the Eastern Rite has long permitted married men to become priests, and it is in full communion with the pope; Anglican married priests who convert and become Catholic priests are accepted in the Catholic Church. As Archbishop Parolin said, the teaching on celibacy is a discipline, not a dogma, and therefore it can be changed. It was expected, but not mandated, that priests be celibate in the Church's first thousand years; it was encoded as a discipline in the 12th century. So, yes, the Church can drop its stricture on celibacy. Whether it should is not for the media to decide.

Right on the heels of married priests comes the call for women priests. This is more difficult: Pope John Paul II effectively closed the door on this subject, citing the Church's inability

to change Scripture. No matter, many are huffing and puffing over the alleged ordination of an old lady in Albany: a faux Catholic group claims to have ordained Mary Theresa Streck. What is really amazing about this story is the serious coverage it was given by the media. They should have questioned why poor Mary wasn't made a bishop.