Letters to The Tablet: May to September 2020

02 May 2020

**Not so lonely**  
Doubtless the sentiments expressed by the writers of the two letters under the title “Lonely priests” (Letters, 18 April) were prompted by concern for us priests, but they also view our celibate lives as a problem we are struggling with.  
  
The compulsory celibacy of Latin rite diocesan priests is debated by some Catholics. But I want to reassure your readers that, for very many of us, it is not true to suggest that embracing priestly celibacy was “not a totally free choice” – even less that it is an “insupportable burden”.   
  
Over forty years, like many priests of my acquaintance, I have had to grow deeper into the commitment I undertook at ordination, to follow the Lord and serve his people as a celibate.   
  
There are indeed challenges in this way of life, as there are in fidelity in marriage too, and some have not lived out commitments they initially made.  
  
We diocesan priests do lead solitary lives but they are not necessarily lonely. Indeed, the extraordinary circumstances of the current lockdown may be less challenging to us than to many. Like many another parish priest, I have been the recipient of tremendous support, encouragement, and indeed practical help from my parishioners, which expresses the community we share and leaves me far from lonely. I hope I succeed in offering a similar concern to them.   
  
**(Mgr) Timothy Galligan**  
London SW11

**School for clericalism**  
Perhaps the most revealing moment in BBC Scotland’s documentary about the Scots College in Rome (Priest School, available on BBC iPlayer) was the glimpse it gave of two black women in the kitchen.   
  
“The college,” the voiceover explained, “is supported by a handful of Franciscan nuns; they do laundry, keep the college clean, and help prepare dinners.”  
  
So these privileged white males, elsewhere shown studying, playing football, downing cocktails and celebrating formal dinners, are taught from the outset that it is quite acceptable for them to have black women to do their dirty work. Women were otherwise hardly to be seen.  
  
Can we be surprised at clericalism in the Church when it is built into the structure of our seminaries.  
  
**(Prof.) Terry Wright**  
Newcastle upon Tyne

07 May2020

**Nuns in the kitchen**  
The students at the Scots College in Rome (as featured in BBC Scotland’s film, Priest School) appear to have committed that most heinous of modern sins of being “privileged white males”, according to Professor Terry Wright (Letters, 2 May).   
  
What does this hackneyed phrase mean in this context? All seminarians are male, and most British seminarians are white. This leaves the issue of “privilege”, which seems to be related to Professor Wright’s sight of nuns in the kitchen, some of whom were black. If none of the nuns were black, if it was a white male (privileged or otherwise) in charge of the kitchen (as at the Beda College 30 years ago) would Professor Wright have been provoked into complaining?   
  
**(Fr) Julian G. Shurgold**  
Wonersh, Surrey

I agree with Professor Terry Wright about the servile status of the Franciscan nuns in the Scots College in Rome. I also felt an overwhelming sense of hierarchy from the scenes of bishops and cardinals en masse in their fine robes. The seminarians were in awe of them and clearly enjoyed being in a cosy all-male club set apart from the real world.  
  
The documentary provided a fascinating glimpse of an environment that subtly sows the seeds of clericalism. It is no wonder that women are relegated to the margins of the Church.  
  
**Frank Capocci**  
Southampton

14 May 2020

**Prayer at home**  
Dr Claire Jenkins (Letters, 9 May) describes how she takes bread and wine as an Act of Communion when she shares in a “streamed Mass”. I am permitted to celebrate Mass on my own and on most days I do so from the privacy of my kitchen. I, and most priests in my experience, find that this is a strange experience and demands of us a real act of faith. What is intended to be a celebration of the community has, in present circumstances, to be tantamount to a private celebration.   
  
In our parish, we are blessed with a streamed celebration of Mass every Sunday and so – probably against all the rules – I “virtually” concelebrate with our parish priest. I say all the words with him, I listen to his homily and I consecrate bread and wine with him. This enables me to join in the celebration and prayers of the parish, and to offer Mass for all the parishioners. I am actually, and not only “virtually”, in communion with Pope Francis, my bishop, and with the whole Church.  
  
The celebration of Sunday Mass is no longer a solitary event for me, who am “locked down”, and I rejoice in that.  
  
**(Bishop) Crispian Hollis**  
Portsmouth

28 May 2020

**Nuns in the kitchen**  
Fr Julian Shurgold’s letter (9 May) is typical of those clerics who “just don’t get it”. They cannot see that an exclusively male clergy is an affront in a society that in the last 150 years has seen women enter and flourish in all areas of professional and public life.   
  
They cannot see that in every aspect of the Church’s sacramental life women play a subservient role, and that this conveys implicit messages about the worth of women. They cannot see that training seminarians in a group that is exclusively male is bound to create an environment that fosters clericalism.  
  
**Peter Bradshaw**  
Timsbury, Somerset

11 June 2020

The liturgical gender imbalance of which Tina Beattie complains is perhaps a consequence of the Latin Church’s insistence on clerical celibacy. If she would tune in to a livestreamed liturgy from one of the English-speaking Orthodox parishes in this country, she would see a very different picture. In the present restricted conditions the participation of the wife, and probably also the children of the priest, prevent the celebration from assuming an air of unreality. As the wife of the priest is often choir director (or sole chorister), and sometimes also reader of the Epistle, she plays as prominent a role as that of her husband.  
  
**Hugh Allen**  
Tiverton, Devon

13 August 2020

**Parish finances**  
The article “Government rejects priests’ pleas for financial support” (News from Britain and Ireland, 8 August) took my mind back to the very first meeting of the National Conference of Priests in the summer of 1969.  
  
A resolution was accepted unanimously, asking the bishops to organise a rationally planned system of salaries and pensions for all secular priests. The general feeling was that the accident of working in a wealthy parish or a poor one should not govern a priest’s remuneration. Similarly, the traditional sources of income like Christmas and Easter offerings were too much like tipping a waiter in a restaurant.  
  
Sadly, the bishops refused to act upon the resolution.   
  
**(Dr) Michael M. Winter**  
London N19

17 September 2020, The Tablet

**Topic of the week: Prelates block Amazon evangelism**

It saddens me when I read (Church in the World,12 September) that “sources inside the Synod [of the Amazon] say that the proposal to ordain married men as priests for remote parts of the Amazon rainforest ... was strongly resisted by senior prelates in the Roman Curia who succeeded in blocking immediate change”.  
  
Do these prelates know the Amazon? Do they know that years can go by without the visit of a priest to remote villages; that where there is no Catholic presence the Protestant sects move in and convert whole villages; do they realise that thousands of Catholics have to live in concubinage and die without the Sacraments?  
  
I have had the good fortune to spend many years in the remote highlands and the rainforest of Peru. I have trained catechists and occasionally sent them off to villages with the Blessed Sacrament to conduct services at the village feast. They were men of great responsibility and reported back with joy, telling me how well they had been received.   
  
After a brief preparation they could have been ordained as presbyters under the guidance of the bishop or seminary ordained priest. The people would have accepted them, the Protestant sects would have fled the villages, the Catholic people would have been evangelised and have died with the Sacraments, the Church would have flourished.  
  
**(Fr) Gerard Hanlon**  
Lima, Peru

So Pope Francis is prepared to ignore the majority vote of the Amazon bishops to ordain married men because of opposition from the Roman Curia.   
  
In Pope Francis’ own terms, can a field hospital be run without doctors or medicine? Perhaps he could ask the Curia how on death they propose to justify themselves to the Good Shepherd for refusing to obey his injunction to “Feed   
my sheep”?  
  
**Elizabeth Price**  
Linton, Kent

17 September 2020

Melanie McDonagh (Notebook, 5 September) opposes the application by Anne Soupa for the post of Archbishop of Lyons, but I was pleased to see that she sees the prime role of a bishop as to preach and teach, and finds Soupa well qualified for this. Perhaps she should join one of the organisations promoting women priests listed by Joanna Moorhead (“So tired of waiting”, 29 August)?  
  
But I was disappointed that she saw the role of Lydia and Chloe as simply that of distributing alms to the poor, suggesting that their significance derived from having money, and even more disappointed to see Joanna Moorhead’s reference to Mary Magdalen as Christ’s wealthy patron. Neither she nor anyone else was Christ’s patron, nor is there any scriptural evidence that any of these women were wealthy. To see them as such is as traditional and reprehensible as accepting that males have an innate right to rule. Both beliefs are constructs of that Church run by rich men from which Pope Francis seems, so slowly, to be liberating us.  
  
**(Dr) Tom Stanford**  
Newcastle upon Tyne

What is the reason for the change in men’s and women’s lives that leads them to believe in equality? Joanna Moorhead’s article on Artemisia Gentileschi (Arts, 5 September) revealed that she was the family’s breadwinner.  
  
In 1947 my mother became the breadwinner in our family. It certainly changed me. I expected, as did my husband, an equal relationship. Of my four children, two daughters are the breadwinners and my son is not. This makes a male-dominated Catholic hierarchy alien and deficient for us.  
  
**Elaine Gavaghan**  
Welwyn, Hertfordshire