

# Should Priests Be Allowed To Marry?

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

A centuries-old Catholic tradition — the conviction that a priest should never marry — is being so decisively challenged by priests themselves that its removal from Catholic practice may be only a matter of time.

Even though Pope Paul has steadfastly expressed his opposition to a married clergy, the rising tide of Catholic opinion is for the first time in centuries, running against the Pope.

**TWO WEEKS** ago, following a meeting of more than 200 Canadian Catholic clergy who voted to make marriage for the priest

optional, Canada's largest daily newspaper, the Toronto Star, advocated in a

## Perspective

lead editorial, "It's time to let the priest take a wife."

Priests in Italy, Germany and Holland already have stated they are strongly in favor of dropping the celibacy ban. In the United States a survey by a Harvard Jesuit reveals a majority of U.S. priests want the same privilege — of at least having a choice whether to marry or not.

The rule on celibacy did not emerge in the church until four centuries after the birth of Christ. And it didn't become firm until the 11th century. In fact, the man Catholics hold to be their first Pope, St. Peter, had a wife. The priests are saying that altering the rules now is

not to embark on a new course but to return to an old one.

**ORTHODOX BISHOPS** have defended the ban on marriage on grounds of pastoral efficiency. The priest who is single, they say, is a more devoted man. Unencumbered by wife and family he is more dedicated and more available to the people.

Of course, the main problem here is the problem of the authority of the church itself.

**THE PRIESTHOOD**, like any other branch of the Christian ministry, is a lonely calling. Martin Luther, the first great reformer who doggedly tried to remain within the church, found much comfort and strength in his wife, Katie.

Marriage for the priest would only make him more human — more sympathetic to the problems of his flock. And it would certainly open the door for another look at the other great controversy among Catholics — the problem of birth control.