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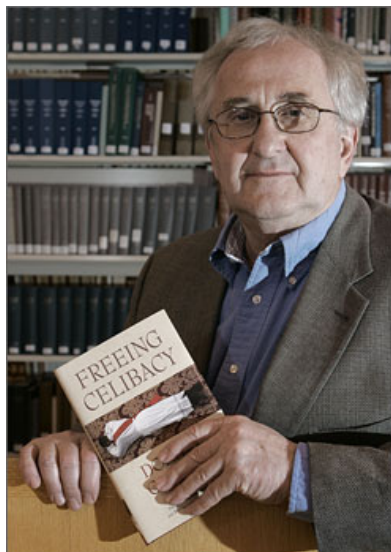
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# Gadfly priest challenges mandatory celibacy in new book

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By Andrew Welsh-Huggins, Associated Press

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, Ohio — A former seminary president who drew national attention to the number of gay Roman Catholic priests tackles mandatory celibacy in a new book, calling it burdensome and unnecessary.

The Rev. Donald Cozzens says the requirement is hurting the church at a time of priest shortages.

"Many, if not most, of the inactive priests would be serving in our parishes if it were not for the law of celibacy," Cozzens writes in *Freeing Celibacy*.

"Celibacy used to go with priesthood as fish went with Fridays," Cozzens said in an interview. "Over the past 40 to 50 years, I would argue that more and more Catholics are questioning the need to link celibacy with priesthood."

A celibate priest himself, Cozzens has written four other books on issues and problems of the priesthood. In his 2000 book, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, later translated into six languages, he used interviews and studies to contend that the Roman Catholic Church had a disproportionately high percentage of gay priests, nearly half of all seminarians and priests.

Cozzens' previous writings made a valuable contribution to the debate over homosexuality by raising the issue at a time when many priests and bishops were pretending it didn't exist, said the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, editor of the conservative journal *First Things*, who upholds the Catholic teaching that same-sex attraction is disordered.

"It was that climate of, 'Let's pretend that we don't know about it,' that Cozzens blew the whistle on in a constructive way," Neuhaus said.

There were about 16,000 active priests nationwide in 2005, a 27% decline from 1965, according to Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. About 3,200 parishes were without a resident priest in 2005, compared with 549 in 1965.

Cozzens distinguishes between what he calls the charism, or gift, of celibacy, which he says is an approach freely chosen by only a few priests and nuns, and celibacy as a requirement.

"I am trying to say to the church, the charism of celibacy needs to be celebrated, the obligation of celibacy needs to be reviewed," he said, interviewed in his office at John Carroll University in this Cleveland suburb.

Cozzens teaches religious studies at the Jesuit school. At the time of his 2000 book he was president of St. Mary Seminary in Cleveland.

**THE REV. DONALD COZZENS BIO**

**DATE OF BIRTH:** May 17, 1939.

**TITLE:** Writer in Residence, John Carroll University.

**EDUCATION:** Ordained, St. Mary Seminary, Cleveland, 1965; master's of religious education, University of Notre Dame, 1973; doctorate in counseling psychology, Kent State University, 1976.

**EXPERIENCE:** Priest, Diocese of Cleveland; Diocese of Cleveland religious personnel administrator; president-rector, St. Mary Seminary; Writer in Residence, John Carroll University.

**BOOKS:** *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, 1997; *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, 2000; *Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church*, 2002; *Faith That Dares to Speak*, 2004; *Freeing Celibacy*, 2006.

— Associated Press



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In almost three decades as pontiff, Pope John Paul II was adamant that the church would not change its celibacy requirement. As recently as November, a Vatican summit led by Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed mandatory celibacy for priests as a non-negotiable job requirement for showing devotion to God and the people they serve.

The Vatican requires celibacy of priests ordained under the Latin rite, although married men can become priests in the Eastern Orthodox rite. The Vatican has accepted some married Anglican priests who came over to the Catholic

fold.

The church also has about 30,000 deacons worldwide, including about 15,000 in the United States. Deacons, who can marry, can perform many duties in the church, including baptisms and marrying people, but cannot serve Holy Communion.

Celibacy as a universal requirement took hold in the 12th century, but priests and bishops were able to marry during the previous millennium.

Some studies seem to support Cozzens' stand.

A 2002 Catholic University of America study found that 56% of priests said celibacy should be optional.

A.W. Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine monk who studies and writes about celibacy, estimates that 50% of Catholic clergy are sexually active at any given time. Church leaders have questioned that finding.

Anyone studying to be a priest is aware of the celibacy requirement and should not be surprised by its imposition, said the Rev. Mike Woost, a theology professor at St. Mary Seminary.

Celibacy "is the way we embrace our love of God and our love of God's people," Woost said. "This is the way we try to image to the rest of the world the importance of God's reign in our lives and the life of the world."

He said a bigger hurdle to attracting more priests is low pay and lack of material comforts.

Cozzens also says that ending mandatory celibacy could help weed out candidates for the priesthood who have an underdeveloped and immature understanding of their own sexuality.

"I don't think it's fair to say that mandatory celibacy is a clear cause of clergy abuse, but it may be a factor in a number of cases," he said.

In 2004, the National Review Board, a Roman Catholic lay watchdog panel investigating the church abuse scandal, concluded that celibacy did not cause the crisis but the church did not effectively screen out "many sexually dysfunctional and immature" priests or properly train seminarians for the celibate life.

Woost also questioned celibacy's role in the church abuse scandal, noting most of child abuse in society at large involves men who are married. Cozzens responds that it is a question of proportion, since there are far more married men than celibate priests.

Cozzens, 67, a priest for 40 years, says he still isn't sure whether he has embraced celibacy as a choice or has found ways to conform to the requirement.

"Celibacy has worked in my life and that is due to the grace of God," he says.

A moment later, however, paraphrasing poet T.S. Eliot, he confesses that, "At times I feel it's cost not less than everything."

Woost said Cozzens remains a priest in good standing whose books help potential priests.

"Raising these issues at the very least has caused us to continue to try and articulate more clearly why it is we as priests embrace a celibate lifestyle and what's at the core of that for us," Woost said.

Another priest who has written books questioning celibacy said the practice is unlikely to change under Pope Benedict.

The Vatican sees mandatory celibacy as a way of preserving institutional control even in the face of a shrinking priesthood, said the Rev. Michael Crosby of St. Benedict Friary in Milwaukee and author of the 2003 book *Rethinking Celibacy, Reclaiming the Church*.

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