

# Commentary

R. EMMETT TYRRELL JR. ✓

If I am accurately perceiving the national controversy over pederasty in the American Roman Catholic Church, I have to conclude that the Boy Scouts of America are vindicated.

The only logical conclusion deducible from the media's outrage over revelations of pederasty in the pulpit is that the Boy Scouts' ban against homosexual scout leaders is OK. The vast majority of irregularities reported in the present scandal have been between errant priests and post-pubescent boys. Apparently, the Boy Scouts' wisdom and prudence goes beyond tying knots and putting out forest fires. Maybe now the Boy Scouts will again have access to government facilities and to the largess of such charities as the United Way.

It is only a matter of time before the American Catholic Church adopts the same standards for the priesthood that the Boy Scouts have maintained for Scout leaders, despite the criticisms of the politically correct. Soon, if the spirit of reform in the church continues, every priest in the church will be able to take the Boy Scout oath without winking. Perhaps Scout leaders will soon be admitted to the priesthood, and American intellectuals will begin to speculate on

when the Roman Catholic Church will finally select a Boy Scout leader as pope.

The last few months' revelations that the Catholic hierarchy covered up for hundreds of priests, having sexual relations with perhaps thousands of boys, provoked anger all over America. Even liberal forward-lookers are angry, though now they are in the weird position of opposing homosexual priests while favoring homosexual Boy Scout leaders. Embracing such contradiction is for liberals their special art form; but if it becomes too much a strain there is a remedy to this contradiction, to wit: Liberals could drop their boycott of the Boy Scouts if the Boy Scouts promise to enlist homosexual priests as Scout leaders.

As for the American Catholic Church, its cardinals who recently met in Rome with Pope John Paul II have now adopted a policy for the "dismissal from the clerical state of a priest who has become notorious and is guilty of the serial predatory sexual abuse of minors." That really is not very convincing. For now Catholic parents intent on religious instruction for their children had best send them to the Boy Scouts, where the young will also learn to identify poison ivy.

The church hierarchy bears a

## Bifurcated rage on perils of pederasty



heavy responsibility for this scandal, a scandal that abounds with ironies in a country that is windswept with

conflicting notions of sex. Yet the church's teaching on sex, particularly sex in the priesthood, is not am-

bivalent. The hierarchy has known about certain priests' misbehavior. The errant priests compose a small percentage of the priesthood, but obviously they have acted with an astounding abandon that should have elicited action from the hierarchy years ago. Part of the problem is that the hierarchy is so insulated from normal Americans. In fact, I am not all that clear it is capable of relating to normal Americans.

At the expense of sounding crass, let me venture the comparison of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church (or any church for that matter) with the faculty of practically any public school system. Both clerics and teachers claim (not without reason) to possess a special expertise. Both claim to be open to the ordinary citizens; in the case of the church, the faithful; in the case of the teachers, their students' parents. However, in the crunch, both church leaders and teachers follow their own professional interests. Their special expertise, inclines them along on that preordained course. Try arguing with a cleric or a teacher about the way either carries out his or her duties.

The church's professional interest has been to avoid scandal and to keep as many priests as possible in

the parishes. Thus they have been ignoring a serious problem. The standard they adopted in Rome falls far short of addressing the problem — "notorious" and "serial" sexual predators are but the worst of a bad lot. Any priest who cannot avoid sexual activity with young men, or for that matter with young women, has already shown himself unable to keep his word. Priests vow celibacy. For those who have broken that vow the church ought to find a suitable monastery or retirement from the clergy.

The fact is that many dioceses for many years have been ordaining priests who were unworthy of the calling. I have known morally upright priests who have been objecting to this laxness in the church. Most have been ignored and exiled to remote regions. Now their warnings have been vindicated. Bring back the vindicated critics, and remember how easily hierarchies lose touch with their constituents and with their purpose. And take the Boy Scouts' oath without winking.

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