



*Terry Mattingly*

## Fathers, mothers & Catholic sons, Part I

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *First of two columns.*

**T**he Chicago news was full of sex, children and Roman collars.

This wasn't part of the first national "Sins of the Fathers" furor in the mid-1980s. This was the early 1990s and the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago eventually opened its files on all 2,252 priests who had served in the previous four decades. The powers that be hunted for pedophiles and they found one.

The key word is "one." One priest had been accused of assaulting a prepubescent child. The other allegations involved priests and sexually mature, but under-age, adolescents -- mostly boys.

"Those Chicago numbers are not unusual. This is, in fact, part of a pattern we see in diocese after diocese," said Father Donald B. Cozzens, former vicar for clergy in Cleveland and then rector of a graduate seminary in Ohio.

"Of course, any abuse of children is horrifying and it is just as wrong -- morally and legally -- when sexual abuse occurs with teen-agers. But it isn't helping matters, right now, for people to keep blurring the lines between these two conditions. This isn't just about pedophilia."

Debates about sexuality and the priesthood will only heat up, if that is possible, now that a crucial Vatican voice has spoken. A close aide to Pope John Paul II told the New York Times that it's time to slow or even stop the flow of gays into the priesthood. "People with these inclinations just cannot be ordained," said

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psychiatrist Joaquin Navarro-Valls.

Cozzens stressed that he agrees with researchers who believe sexual orientation is irrelevant in discussions of pedophilia. But what if pedophilia is not the issue?

By definition, pedophiles are sexually attracted to boys and girls who have not reached puberty. But Cozzens said reports he has studied, and his own experience as a counselor, indicate the more common problem among Catholic clergy is "ephebophilia." This is recurrent, intense sexual interest in post-pubescent young people -- teen-agers.

The term "ephebophilia" is rarely used in church debates and the press. Yet, Cozzens said that whenever clergy vicars held conferences 90 percent of the sex-abuse cases they discussed fell into this category. Church authorities are reluctant to investigate this reality.

Why this conspicuous silence?

"Perhaps it is feared that it will call attention to the disproportionate number of gay priests," wrote Cozzens, in his influential "The Changing Face of the Priesthood," published in 2000. "While homosexually oriented people are no more likely to be drawn to misconduct with minors than straight people, our own experiences was clear and, I believe, significant. Most priest offenders, we vicars agreed, acted out against teenage boys."

In his most controversial chapter, Cozzens quotes reports claiming about 50 percent of U.S. Catholic priests are gay, with the numbers higher among priests younger than 40. Talk of a "gay subculture" grew in recent decades as 20,000 men left the priesthood to get married.

The seminary climate changed - radically. Cozzens cited a survey in which 60 percent of one seminary's students identified themselves as gay, 20 percent were "confused about their sexual identity" and 20 percent said they were heterosexual.

Cozzens concluded: "Should our seminaries become significantly gay, and many seasoned observers find them to be precisely that, the priesthood of the 21st century will likely be perceived as a predominantly gay profession."

This is the proverbial elephant in the sanctuary that few bishops want to discuss.

Cozzens said that, along with many other researchers, he does not see a direct link between homosexual orientation and sexual abuse. Yet the cloud of secrecy and denial that swirls around the gay subculture makes it hard to discuss urgent issues -- such as ephebophilia.

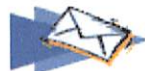
"Pedophilia is a totally different kind of sickness and it can't really be treated," he said. "You simply have to do what you can to help the abuser and then make sure all future contact with children is cut off. There is no other way. ...

"But there are many bishops out there who, for a variety of reasons, have been convinced that priests can be successfully treated and reassigned to other parishes if the sexual contact was with teen-agers. Now, that belief is being shaken."

**NEXT WEEK:** Fathers, mothers and Catholic sons.



[ <<Pat Summerall's new life ]



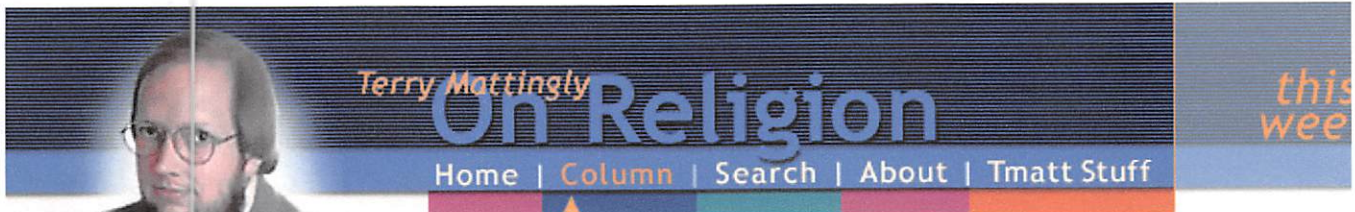
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*Terry Mattingly*

## Fathers, mothers & Catholic sons, Part II

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Second of two columns*

**F**ew Catholic boys grow up to be men of the cloth without drawing inspiration from their parish priests and receiving the blessing of their mothers.

Both halves of that equation have to work or the church suffers.

"When you talk about how young men enter the priesthood, you are talking about the future of the church," said Father Donald B. Cozzens, former vicar for clergy in the Diocese of Cleveland and then rector of a graduate seminary in Ohio. "At some point, it becomes terribly important what Catholic parents -- especially mothers -- think of their priests."

Find a young priest and you will almost always find a find a mother who wanted him to be a priest, like the priests she has known and trusted.

That's how it's supposed to work. Several decades worth of sex scandals involving clergy and children -- usually teen-aged boys -- have not helped. But there are other tensions, as well. In his influential 2000 book, "The Changing Face of the Priesthood," Cozzens pleads for frank talk about other painful issues, as well as the sexual abuse of young males.

Priests face skyrocketing demands on their time as church membership rises and the number of priests declines. Priests live and work under the microscope, yet they also report feeling isolated from their flocks and from each other. Lately, Cozzens has been hearing about priests who -- lashed by scandal and suspicion -- have stopped wearing clerical clothing while not "at

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work." The stares and whispers are too painful.

And there is another sexual secret that is making these issues harder to discuss, he said. In his book's most quoted chapter, Cozzens cites reports claiming 50 percent of U.S. Catholic priests are gay, with the numbers higher among those under 40 years of age. This "gay subculture" grew in the past three decades, as 20,000 or more priests left their altars to get married.

Cozzens is not opposed to celibate gays being ordained and he thinks most priests -- gay and straight -- are serving the church faithfully and keeping their vows. Nevertheless, he is convinced this gay subculture is affecting who is becoming a priest and who is not. Why is this?

In previous generations it was homosexuals who often felt alone and out of place in Catholic seminaries, living in a shadow culture. Today, discreet networks of gay priests thrive in seminaries and dioceses from coast to coast, said Cozzens. It's common for heterosexuals to feel confused, misunderstood and left out. Many question their calling and flee.

Meanwhile, he said, it's "likely that gay priests will be encouraging, consciously or unconsciously, more homosexually oriented men than straight men to consider a vocation to the priesthood. Conversely, homosexually oriented men considering a priestly vocation will be especially drawn to a parish priest who happens to be gay."

Cozzens said the "likelihood exists that like will be drawn to like." Once again, he said he does not believe gay priests are more likely to break celibacy vows than are straight priests.

It's also past time, he said, for Catholic leaders to start talking about how the changing face of the priesthood is affecting relationships between priests and parents. It would help to stop and consider a mother's point of view.

"Perceptive mothers may sense that something is

different about the pastor ... who happens to be gay," Cozzens noted. "They may indeed like and respect the priest, but find they are not comfortable in encouraging their son to consider the priesthood."

This attitude shift is especially significant when combined with a major statistical change in Catholic life. In the past, when large families were the norm, it was a matter of pride to have a son enter religious life. But what if most Catholic families contain only one son?

"When it has become normal to have two children or less, you are not going to find many parents who are encouraging a son -- especially an only son -- to become a priest," said Cozzens. "They want him to get married, to have grandchildren and carry on the family name. ..."

"So there are fewer sons and there are more mothers who are asking hard questions."



[ <<Fathers, mothers & Catholic sons, Part I ]



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