

COLUMNISTS

Book examines crisis facing the priesthood

Father Donald Cozzens' new book, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, (The Liturgical Press, 2000) is the most important work on the priesthood to appear in many years. His thesis, that the shape and demands of the priesthood have changed dramatically since the Second Vatican Council, is not original.

What is original is the honesty, competence and balance with which he describes and critically analyzes the crisis the priesthood faces today.

Defenders of the status quo cannot write him off as someone who doesn't know what he's talking about or who is out to destroy the church. Those who know Father Cozzens regard him as a spiritually healthy and pastorally committed priest with more hands-on knowledge of the subject than any hundred other priests in North America. Well-trained not only in theology but also in Freudian and Jungian psychology, he taught both subjects for nearly a decade before becoming diocesan vicar for clergy and religious for six years and then president-rector of Cleveland's major seminary. It is this sort of expertise, shaped by education and experience, and honed by considerable intellectual gifts, that permeates this clearly written and powerfully truthful book.



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

The priesthood, Father Cozzens says, has changed in many ways since the heady days before Vatican II when any Catholic mother would have given her proverbial right arm to have a son become a priest. There are still many who would, but many more who would not.

What happened to effect such a drastic change? Why has the number of priests and seminarians declined so sharply over the past three decades when the Catholic population is escalating?

Twenty years ago there was approximately one priest for every 1,000 Catholics in the United States. By 2005 the ratio is expected to be one for every 2,200. Moreover, the priesthood is an aging community, and the priests who are retiring and dying are not being replaced, man for man. Not by a long shot.

Father Cozzens points out that in his own diocese there were 240 priests age 40 and under in 1970. In 1999 there were only 35. He cites a number of factors to explain this trend: the reluctance of Catholic parents to encourage an only son to become a priest, thereby losing their opportunity for grandchildren; the successful integration of Catholics in the professions and in the business world, offering many more career options than the sons of immigrants enjoyed in the past; the pall placed over the priesthood by the scandals involving sexual misconduct with minor boys; the "gaying" (not just the "graying") of the priesthood; the general loss of respect among Catholics for the authority of priests and bishops; the over-worked, burnt-out condition of too many priests that is evident to any insightful parishioner and would-be parent of a future priest.

In the face of such a crisis, the church can take one of two paths: denial (often in the form of a naive optimism about the power of prayer and of new recruitment techniques) or careful study and reflection followed by courageous action. Father Cozzens urges the church to take the second path, but sees no evidence at the moment that it is doing so. Nonetheless, he ends his book on a note of hope,

and for three reasons.

First, there is a growing number of priests who believe the present problems must be forthrightly faced. He cites one of the strongest voices, Father Norman Rotert, a priest for 42 years and a former vicar general for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. "The shortage of priests," he told the Catholic Press Association in 1995, "is not going to be solved by gritting our teeth and praying for more vocations... We must talk about the issue if we are going to find a creative solution."

A second reason for hope lies in what Father Cozzens calls "the apparent purification and maturation the priesthood has undergone in the last two decades of the twentieth century." Most priests, he believes, "have not given in to despair or lost their nerve," notwithstanding the bruising of their spirit.

The third and strongest reason for hope is the priests' faith in the power of the Spirit to be with them through the darkest hours. "Behind the changing face of the priesthood," he concludes, "remains the saving face of Jesus the Christ."

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Pray for friends, as Christ prayed for Apostles

Seventh Sunday of Easter (June 4): (R3) John 17:11-19; (R1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; (R2) 1 John 4:11-16.

The name Reggie White, defensive end for the Green Bay Packers, is known to most football fans. Before signing a \$17 million deal with the Packers, White said he would look to God to tell him where to play. Later, Green Bay Coach Mike Holmgren confessed that he had left a message on White's answering machine that said, "Reggie, this is God. Go to Green Bay."

Sunday's Gospel is the "real" Lord's prayer. After the Last Supper, after having reviewed everything that he had taught the Apostles and after having answered all their questions, he had one more thing to do for them, namely, to pray for them.

In their presence Jesus prayed, thanking God for his friends, and praying for their well-being.

A lawyer from Australia named Ned once visited Kenya in Africa. He walked through one of the worst slums in the world, to a hut where three brothers lived. When he entered the hut, he found himself in the center of a dozen or so children leaping into the air with joy at his presence. Then the kids started a



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

sing-along, and they had a wonderful time together.

When it came time for Ned to leave, from the far side of the room he heard a quiet, clear voice say: "We pray for Ned and his family and the people of Australia." The children became very quiet and responded: "Jesus, remember them when you come into your kingdom."

Ned couldn't believe that here in the middle of Africa, a group of slum kids, with reverence and earnestness, were holding up before God the people of Australia. He thought that if Australia has any hope it will be because of prayers of kids like these.

Tony Campolo, a minister, tells that at a worship service a man prayed a very pointed prayer for a friend. "Dear Lord,"

the man prayed, "you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in the silver trailer down the road a mile. He's leaving his wife and kids. Please do something to bring the family together."

As the man prayed, he repeated the location. Tony wanted to say, "Knock it off, fella. Do you think God's asking, 'What's that address again?'"

After the prayer, Tony preached and then left to drive home. On the turnpike he noticed a hitchhiker and decided to give him a lift. "My name's Tony," Campolo said, "What's your name?"

"Charlie Stoltzfus," the man replied. Campolo, dumbfounded, got off at the next exit. "Hey, where are you taking me?" asked the hitchhiker. "Home," Campolo said. Tony drove right to the silver trailer. That afternoon that young man and his wife surrendered their lives to Christ and became reunited.

Sometimes we forget how powerful a simple prayer can be. Do we pray for our friends? Jesus did. He prayed that his Father give them strength. Jesus knew the cost of being one of his followers. He knew there would be times when his disciples would be in danger. He knew there would be times when they would be tempted to run. Jesus didn't pray that

they be freed of their problems, but that they be strong. "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one."

Jesus is praying for us. He is asking his Father to make us strong; and he is asking us to pray for our friends. Finally, we could pray for ourselves that we will truly be strong and that we shall always love others.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, June 5
Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33
Tuesday, June 6
Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11
Wednesday, June 7
Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11-19
Thursday, June 8
Acts 22:30, 23:6-11;
John 17:20-26
Friday, June 9
Acts 25:13-20; John 21:15-19
Saturday, June 10
Acts 28:16-20, 30-31;
John 21:20-25

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