

# COLUMNISTS

## Celibacy, homosexuality do not cause abuse

I suppose many readers have found themselves following the various media comment on the bishops' meeting in Dallas. I certainly have. I also watched some televised segments of the meeting itself. I have read all sorts of newspaper commentary and reporting. Much of what I have seen, heard and read has gone in one ear and out the other. A few comments have remained. I may rehearse some of those here.

For example, one of Cardinal George's early comments from several weeks ago was something like this: "Well, the conservatives don't like homosexuality, and the liberals don't like celibacy, so we're off to the races." It seems to me that comment revealed in a short space part of the political landscape surrounding this whole situation. Everyone wants to point to a cause for the child sex-abuse scandal, and everyone wants to find a solution for it, too. The trouble with this is that there is not likely to be one single cause for what has happened, and there is not likely to be an easy solution, either.

A further problem is that we all come at the problem with our original biases, so will come at things with whatever customary blind spots we've managed to develop over the course of our lives. Add to this our famous American "can-do" attitude and we're likely to be finding quick fixes all over the place. In my own limited experience, quick fixes usually lead to a state far worse than the first!

At any rate, the ground we tread in the



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

days ahead will be very treacherous turf indeed. This column will try to walk along some of it. My first comment is simply that I have known healthy gay and lesbian people in ministry and out of it. Pedophilia and ephebophilia are the result of unhealthy adaptations, and both heterosexually-oriented people and homosexually-oriented people are known to have engaged in that activity.

My second comment is that I have known healthy celibate people as well as healthy non-celibate people. Non-celibates as well as supposed celibates have engaged in pedophilia and ephebophilia.

I don't think it is either homosexuality or celibacy that leads to or causes individuals to sexually abuse children. I think it relates more to a failure to develop the capacity to enter into mature relationships that are challenging and fulfilling. People who are gay and straight, people who are celibate and married need to develop that capacity.

If we do not develop this capacity, we

convert our need for relationship into the obsession for power over another. This makes us prefer relationships in which we can dominate the other. Children, then, become a natural outlet in these cases. Mature relationships involve us with companions and partners who will demand from us the capacity for genuine intimacy. By this I mean the willingness and capacity to be confronted, to grow, to be honest and forthright, to respond to the other, to accept our weaknesses and shortcomings, to become genuinely loving in the face of our own and the other's failures.

Gay and lesbian people as well as celibates can develop these capacities. The cause for the crisis now at hand is neither homosexuality nor celibacy.

Having said this, and acknowledging how important our response to the current situation will be, I want to say something else as well. First, any attempt to "reform" the priesthood ought to move in the direction of trying to make adjustments that will help to foster the capacity for better adult relationships. Father Donald Cozzens, the author of *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* and a former diocesan vicar general and seminary rector, suggested in a weekend appearance on "Meet the Press" that our attempts to deal with the current crisis may indeed call for deep and widespread structural reform within the church.

Cozzens, who has spoken locally on a number of occasions, discussed the cur-

rent situation in these terms: "I think it can be a real intimacy issue, and I think we need to take a look at the structure of the priesthood today to see if it is unwittingly leading to a level of immaturity... that is higher than we might expect." He also observed, "I think many of the priests who have abused minors and children are very lonely men who do not know how to have honest, real intimacy... with their peers."

Father Cozzens' words are wise ones. If we degenerate into turning the months ahead into a witch hunt against priests or seminarians who are gay, if we become rigid about the complexity of human sexuality or deny the genuine and universal need for intimacy, we will fail in our important task. There is much that needs renewal and reform in the Catholic Church. It will be easy to oversimplify the truth of what is happening these days. It will be tempting to divide the church into the "good guys and the bad guys." It will be handy to simply find a nearby scapegoat and fix the blame on somebody, some group, or some way of thinking. What will be much harder, what will require genuine strength, will be to be a people of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, anxious to move forward in the belief that we are all children of the God who creates, redeems and sanctifies each and every one of us.

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Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.



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