

Praise for *Freeing Celibacy*:

"Many have questioned whether there is sufficient connection between priesthood and celibacy to warrant the Roman Rite requirement that only celibates be ordained. Few, however, have argued as cogently as Donald Cozzens for that requirement to be abandoned.

As a Bishop from Oceania, a region where the requirement of celibacy for ordination leads to a continued dearth of priests for evangelization, pastoral care, and regular celebration of the Mass, I am deeply grateful to Donald Cozzens for setting out so compellingly the arguments for an urgent review of the present discipline in the Roman Rite.

Pastoral bishops arguing for a reconsideration of the present insistence that Roman Rite priests be celibates will be both helped and heartened by Donald Cozzens's admirable review of the ecclesial and pastoral value of mandatory celibacy."

Cardinal Thomas Williams
Archbishop of Wellington
New Zealand

"With his trademark clarity, insight, and wisdom, Donald Cozzens has written the best book on the controversial topic of celibacy in many years. Certainly one of the most misunderstood practices of the Christian tradition, celibacy has been both wrongly elevated over the married life, and unfairly blamed for the sexual abuse scandals. Cozzens's superb new book places celibacy in its proper historical and theological context and, in the process, shows how the healthy celibate can be not only productive, but also holy."

James Martin, S.J.
Author of *My Life with the Saints*

"Fr. Donald Cozzens, a respected priest, teacher, seminary rector, and author, argues persuasively that the charism of celibacy as a gift of the Spirit should be distinguished and released from the canonical mandate of celibacy as a condition for ordination to the priesthood. While recognizing the great contribution of priests gifted with the charism of celibacy to the Church, he empathizes with the priests, who strive by the grace of God to live the celibate life without being blessed with the charism of celibacy. He concludes, 'the time has come to set celibacy free.'"

Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan
(Ret.) Auxiliary Bishop
Diocese of Brooklyn

"*Freeing Celibacy* is one of the clearest and most straightforward examinations of the role of obligatory celibacy in the Roman Catholic priesthood and in the life of the Church. In his characteristically low-key, even gentle fashion, Father Cozzens effectively challenges each of the traditional defenses that have been mounted in support of the discipline. The book, in effect, points its finger at a massive elephant in the Church's living room that many still pretend not to see."

Richard P. McBrien
University of Notre Dame

"Combining history, theology, pastoral experience, and sincere love for the church, *Freeing Celibacy* is a courageous, forward-looking book that invites reflection and discussion on the role of celibacy in the life of the church. Donald Cozzens, in the clear, readable style that has distinguished his earlier writings on the priesthood, challenges the church to see celibacy in the only way that fully describes its proper meaning, namely, as a gracious gift of God freely chosen and freely lived. A must-read for all who are concerned about the continued viability of eucharistic communities."

William H. Shannon
Nazareth College
Rochester, New York

"*Freeing Celibacy*, what a marvelous double entendre! With wisdom, compassion, and passion Cozzens argues that celibacy for the diocesan clergy is 'freeing'—an experience of freedom and joy—only if the church 'frees' it from legalism, fear of sexuality, and lust for power, that is, only if we have the courage to let it be what it essentially is—a gift/charism from God. This book must be meditated upon by every bishop, priest, candidate to the priesthood, and by anyone concerned about the future of the Roman Catholic Church."

Peter C. Phan, Ph.D.
Theology Department
Georgetown University

Father Cozzens, in his usual insightful way, has given us a fresh way to look at priestly celibacy. One finishes the book with a resounding 'why not?' to the issue of optional celibacy. Only a priest with his rich and varied background, as well as his understanding of celibacy through faithful service to the Church, has the authority and wisdom to write what will be the authoritative book on the subject.

Paul Wilkes
Author of *In Mysterious Ways: The Death and Life of a Parish Priest*

“Here is what we need to know about the relatively short history of mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests, about its nature, its giftedness, and its difficulty. Cozzens writes with directness, honesty, and respect—for celibacy, for those who attempt it, and for those who will not free it for the good of all God’s people. And we don’t need to be ordained priests to appreciate what he says and to see celibacy in a new light. This is such a fine book!”

Stefanie Weisgram, O.S.B.
Former book review editor, *Sisters Today*

“Using part of the title of his last book, we can definitely say that Donald Cozzens ‘dares to speak’—and thank God for him and his commitment to the truth. In *Freeing Celibacy* he explores the theology, history, and sociology of both mandated and charismatic clerical celibacy. He looks at the reality of church governance and listens to the testimony of priests and laity. He recognizes and lauds the power and grace of the genuine charism of priestly celibacy, but celibacy merely mandated yields unnecessary problems and horrors for him. He amasses his evidence in such a compelling way that even the hierarchs may hear him: Mandated celibacy is ready for repeal!”

Andrew P. Connolly
Saint Francis de Sales Parish
Patchogue, New York

“Father Cozzens is correct in saying that the issue of priestly celibacy needs a full and open discussion. There is too much secrecy and misinformation about the priesthood today, and Cozzens helps by opening up the windows. Cozzens speaks from decades of experience, giving him judgment about the gifts and limitations of men in the priesthood. Here is a wise, reflective, spiritual book affirming celibacy for priests with a charism of celibacy but not demanding it of all.”

Dean R. Hoge
Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.

“Cozzens seeks to free celibacy from its juridical stranglehold. Celibacy is a charism freely given by the Holy Spirit, which is intended to be freely offered to God and the community. Celibacy’s charism is total radical self-giving love through life-long abstinence from sexual relations. Ironically, mandating celibacy through Church law makes celibacy an obligation for many who do not have the charism, and offers the false promise that the gift will come through obedience to the law. Can we continue to impose celibacy as a law on diocesan clergy, many of whom do not have the

charism? Cozzens mounts historical, theological, and pastoral reasons why the mandate should end.”

Kathleen A. Cahalan
Associate Professor
Saint John’s University School of Theology
and Seminary

“Cozzens’s discussion about *Freeing Celibacy* offers a profound and balanced respect for charismatic celibacy, while laying out a clear case for a return to the early Christian community’s equally healthy embrace of a married presbyterate and episcopate. He leads us through questioning John Paul II’s mindset that celibacy is ‘the pearl of great price which is preferred to every other value no matter how great.’ From professional experience, Cozzens provides sharp insights into the dark side of imposed and legislated celibacy and the negative impact it continues to unleash on our church. While highlighting examples of true celibate commitment, Cozzens offers a clear and passionate view of men who know they have been called to priesthood, but are yoked to celibacy as a requisite for continued ministry. His comment that many priests ‘sense that God takes no pleasure in their loneliness’ rings profoundly with a sense of personal experience. Cozzens’s concise history of mandatory celibacy provides a great and readable overview for those who would like to learn more about why it has endured. One is left wondering how we can ever have a priesthood that exhibits authenticity and credibility, or true spiritual leadership, as the norm, while our priests and bishops are kept institutionally celibate.”

C. Russell Ditzel
CORPUS
High Bridge, New Jersey

“Donald Cozzens gives the reader much to ponder. In an accessible style with attention both to historical context and theological foundations, he describes the joy and beauty as well as the burden of celibacy. Cozzens recognizes the faithful service of most priests; at the same time, he also recognizes the irony of mandating a gift or charism. He argues convincingly that the restriction against marriage placed upon those who have the charism of priestly ministry but not that of celibacy are unjust. Though the requirement of celibacy and its impact on diocesan priests is the primary focus, lay, ordained, and vowed religious will all find this book to be an insightful reflection on the liberating nature of faithfully living out one’s call from God. This deeply honest examination of celibacy should be read by all who strive to lead lives faithful to the baptismal call to bear witness to the Gospel.”

Regina Wentzel Wolfe, Ph.D.
Dominican University

DONALD COZZENS

FREEING
CELIBACY



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Faith That Dares to Speak

The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest

IN MEMORY OF
JAMES PATRICK COZZENS
1946–2005

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN GERMINATING for more than forty years. In fact, it is fair to say I've been wrestling with its substance since I felt called to the priesthood more than sixty years ago as a first grader at Holy Name Elementary School in Cleveland. But even from these early school days my desire to be a priest met with a sense of unease. First-graders are too young for existential angst, but I believe I felt something akin to this pervasive, unsettling anxiety. The source of my unease was another first-grader—and the ensuing twelve year infatuation with JoAnn refused to relax its hold on me until I entered the seminary. To my innocent Catholic imagination, celibacy went with priesthood the way fish went with Friday. I see things a bit differently today.

The present book has been percolating, so to speak, for some five years since Peter Dwyer, the director of Liturgical Press, and I discussed the need for a reflection on the hot-button issue of mandatory celibacy. It reached a boiling point, if you will allow me to mix my metaphors, when I was asked to do an endorsement for a book on celibacy by a noted author for whom I have considerable regard. The author evidenced a profound respect for the priesthood, the church, and for celibacy rightly lived. His manuscript, however, brought me up short. In spite of the author's grasp of the spiritual, psychological, and sacramental character of

celibacy and its witness to a sexually obsessed and confused culture, it labored, I thought, under the weight of a serious flaw. The author had intentionally avoided any discussion of what is arguably the core theological issue of celibacy—its requirement by church law for diocesan priests of the Latin rite. Celibacy that rings true, celibacy that is one's truth so to speak, celibacy that fosters a passionate love of God, humanity, and creation, is first and foremost a gift of God's Spirit for the mission of the church. In theological language, it is a charism (a gift), the implications of which we will explore in the chapters that follow, especially chapters two and three.

Wise counsel on how to live a life of celibate chastity with integrity and fidelity must acknowledge the problematic character of mandated or obligatory celibacy. For at the core of celibacy's breakdown—and it is breaking down—is the attempt by the church to mandate a charism. Church officials have for sometime now spoken of celibacy as both a charism and a discipline. If a Catholic (man) feels called to the priesthood, the Holy Spirit, the church proclaims, will bestow the grace necessary for the seminarian and future priest to remain faithful to his promise of celibacy.

Does grace abound? Christians believe it does indeed. But grace builds on nature, and if an individual does not possess the aptitude, temperament, and quality of soul that are the human foundations of charismatic celibacy, calling upon grace to make up for these deficiencies is a manifestation, one can argue, of ecclesial arrogance. A well-respected scholar and seminary professor understood the daunting task of training seminarians for celibate living who do not possess the charism of celibacy. "It is like

trying to train people to be ballerinas who can't dance the two-step."

Of course, discerning a charism, whether to celibacy or preaching or counseling or parenthood, is often difficult and the task of a lifetime. Sometimes, like Jeremiah, we come to see the full reality of our gifts and talents (our charisms) only in the autumn of our lives. And of course mystery pervades the working of grace. By God's grace, it is possible, it would seem, to grow into a charism. Or better put, God is free to bestow God's gifts even in the mature years of one's life. Moreover, it is possible to grieve choices not made, opportunities not taken, and at the same time rejoice thankfully in the blessings and joys of the path taken. But, oh, at what price. It seems this is the principle the church is standing on: *Embrace the celibate priesthood whether you feel blessed with the charism of celibacy or not, it urges its seminarians, and you will receive the grace to live it faithfully and with joy.*

For numerous priests, that is more or less how things have played out. For others, for many others, celibacy has been an unnecessary, unnatural, and unhealthy burden that has shrunk their souls and drained the last drops of passion from their lives. For still others, while celibacy has proven to be a similar burden, they have found the courage to resist the shrinking of their souls and the extinguishing of their passion. I trust these men will find themselves and their mostly hidden stories of conflict and courage in the pages ahead.

Freeing Celibacy's primary focus is the law of celibacy for diocesan priests. The arc of its concern includes the experience of celibacy of vowed religious: monks and

nuns, brothers and sisters. And it acknowledges that some lay people are called to lead celibate lives for the sake of the gospel—Dorothy Day, for example. Still others experience celibacy not as a choice but a reality imposed by life's circumstances. In this book my attention remains on ecclesiastically endorsed and mandated celibacy, the publicly recognized celibacy of diocesan priests.

Let me here acknowledge and give thanks for the companions in faith who have strengthened me and accompanied me on my own celibate journey of preaching, teaching, and writing: My family, who from the very beginning intuitively understood the joys and sorrows, the dignity and peril of celibate priesthood. Their evident joy and pride in their priest son and brother were balanced by their acceptance of me as one not so much set apart but as one of their own. I am grateful for friendships with women religious who never doubted the graced and blessed character of our celibate and transforming love. I give thanks, too, for brother priests who met with me for years and in some cases decades for prayer, faith sharing, and personal truth telling—their honest struggles and brave discipleship made me proud to be a part of their brotherhood.

Over the years I've enjoyed deep friendships with married couples whose warmth and hospitality and human goodness revealed the grace with which they carried the burdens of family life and celebrated the joys and intimacies of their common life. Evenings in their homes and at their tables inevitably renewed my spirit. Students from Ursuline College, Saint Mary Seminary, and John Carroll University gave me hope in the future of our church and

society—their search for meaningful lives revealed their spiritual hunger and their love of God. And finally I acknowledge and thank theologians and journalists, too numerous to mention by name, who have dared to tell the truth about the priesthood, about sexuality, about celibacy, about the church's need for renewal and reform. I have been inspired by their example. To all of the above, my heartfelt thanks.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MYSTIQUE OF
CELIBACY

Mys-tique, n. an aura of heightened value or interest or meaning surrounding a person or thing.

THERE IS SOMETHING SEXY ABOUT CELIBACY. What could possibly prompt someone to publicly claim that he or she will not marry, not date in the usual sense of the word, and not engage in explicit sexual behaviors? The question itself has a certain allure to it. The curiosity celibacy raises, at least in many people, signals more than mere interest. It signals fascination. What makes these men and women tick? Are they simply misfits—strange, fearful, repressed, reclusive? Many think so. On the other hand, those who get to know integrated, mature celibates sometimes come to the conclusion that celibates might well “make the best lovers.” Moreover, healthy, vital celibate people are attractive: not necessarily physically attractive, but with the compelling attractiveness that comes from the contemplative center of the soul—the only place where people come to be at home with themselves.

With notable exceptions, they seem to be less self-absorbed than most and many celibates seem genuinely interested in others. Often they project a spiritual aura that

signals it is safe to approach and safe to reveal. Publicly perceived as unavailable for romantic liaisons, the quality of being “off limits,” and “out of bounds,” at least in some celibates, makes them all the more attractive in the eyes of many. Platonic friendships between celibates and between celibates and non-celibates, freed from the undercurrents of sexual and romantic tensions, are often sources of spiritual insight and simple delight. And where there is sexual attraction, the celibate commitment to non-genital relationships has the capacity to generate transforming, spiritually enriching, and life-defining friendships.

A half century ago Deborah Kerr and Robert Mitchum captured celibacy’s sexual allure and mystique in the film *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*.¹ Stranded on a Japanese held island during World War II, Kerr as Sister Angela and Mitchum playing the worldly Corporal Allison spend days and nights hiding in one of the island’s caves. The chemistry between the two disparate characters thrown into inescapable physical proximity is the underlying motif of the film. Mr. Allison, the only form of address that Sister Angela affords him, finds himself falling for the nun in full habit whose studied propriety and apparent indifference to the romantic and sexual possibilities of their situation only intensifies his attraction. His interest, it seems to me, is more than sexual desire for an attractive young woman. Sister Angela’s vowed foreclosure of erotic and romantic fulfillment puzzles Mr. Allison and at the same time captivates him. Without apparent understanding, he has been confronted with the mystique of celibacy, the mystical union of the sensual with the sacred, the flesh with

the transcendent. When these polar elements of life converge, as they do at the most sublime moments of human desire and self-giving, our finite world touches the infinite. Mr. Allison had never before encountered such a holy convergence of spirituality, chaste reserve, and physicality. Rather than his sexual desire degenerating into lust, it is held in check by respect, even reverence, for the obvious innocence and goodness, the obvious simplicity and religious faith of Sister Angela.

Celibacy's mystique is romanticized in films like *Going My Way*, *The Sound of Music*, and *The Flying Nun*. Dramatic films—*On the Waterfront*, *Shoes of the Fisherman*, *Thornbirds*, *Mass Appeal*—and the short-lived television series *Nothing Sacred* reflect more subtle and nuanced portrayals of celibacy's mystique. So do the novels of Graham Green, Frank O'Connor, J. F. Powers, James Carroll, and Andrew Greeley.

The mystique of celibacy seems to hold even in secular, consumerist societies instinctively suspicious of denial and sacrifice. Corporate moguls and hard-nosed business people have been heard to say, "I'll do anything for those nuns." Religious orders of monks and nuns include among their benefactors individuals who acknowledge little understanding of the celibate life—but nonetheless sense something genuine and authentically spiritual there that deserves support. There is a pull, a difficult to analyze attraction, to a lifestyle that seems to make no sense to our modern and post-modern culture. Perhaps celibate people, at least from time to time, ignite the divine spark commonly believed to lie dormant in the human soul. When celibacy is their truth, they point to the transcendent, to

the mystery dimension of life itself, to the human hunger for what matters most.

The same dynamic of regard and reverence for individuals foregoing their right to sexual/genital fulfillment can be found throughout history from the Vestal Virgins of Roman antiquity to the monastic movements of the early middle ages to the various modalities of contemporary religious life. Not even the clergy abuse scandals of the last decades of the past century have extinguished respect for the celibate lives of Catholic priests. Celibacy's mystique, the intuitive understanding that there is something special, something mysteriously present in publicly identifiable celibate individuals—especially when celibate life is closely linked to religious faith—is a phenomenon worthy of reflection.

Of course, in the dark shadow cast by the clergy sexual abuse scandals, the mystique of celibacy has waned. Many people no longer place priests on pedestals. Instead of leading lives of holiness, they see them leading lives of self-indulgence. For growing numbers of Catholics, priests are people to be tolerated rather than emulated.

If celibacy in the twenty-first century is ambiguous, it's polar opposite, sexual indulgence, is profoundly so. While arguably the deepest, strongest human desire after life itself, sexuality and sexual behavior nevertheless generate considerable fear and anxiety. Lovers know that loving well entails vulnerability. Even the first signals of sexual interest risk the hurt and humiliation of rejection. We seem to understand without formal instruction that loving involves pain and suffering and that sexual intercourse, by its very nature, makes promises, promises we are not

sure we want to make. Add to the inherent possibility of hurt connected with sexual relationships the real pain and wounding associated with many first experiences of sexual contact, particularly abusive, exploitative ones, the attraction/repulsion dynamic is not surprising. Celibacy may be for individuals scarred and wounded by early sexual experiences an invisible cloak of safety from the destructive forces potentially present in sexual encounters. Surveys of vowed religious women reveal that many suffered sexual abuse in one form or another before they entered the convent. Evidence continues to mount that the majority of priests guilty of abusing children and teenagers were themselves sexually abused as minors. In addition to the inherent ambiguity of human sexuality, gay priests wrestle with the church teaching that their orientation is more than ambiguous, that it is intrinsically disordered. For men terrified by the possibility or certitude that they are gay, a celibate priesthood is often appealing. To some extent, it appears, many celibates have found the ambiguity of human sexuality and its concomitant anxiety too much of an existential burden to bear. In this state of soul, the vows and promises made to practice chaste continence are seen as an attractive, even compelling alternative.

Christianity, of course, has long been suspicious of sexuality and quick to praise those who explicitly forego active sexual lives. We find the roots of this suspicion in the spirit/matter dualism that influenced St. Augustine's negative judgment on sexuality—even in the context of married love.² The church's calendar of saints is disproportionately heavy with celibate men and women and the few married saints listed

usually lived most of their lives as widows and widowers or abstaining from intercourse. To this day in church circles, at least on a theoretical level, spirit trumps nature and the sensual. There is an irony here. Believers acknowledge that sexuality is God's gift, that committed sexual expression in covenanted relationships (i.e., marriage) is holy, and even that married love is sacramental. Yet, large numbers of believers, especially among church authorities, remain deeply suspicious of the sensual and sexual.

At the same time, there is considerable wisdom in cautious, respectful approaches to sexuality. Philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich and others speak of sexual desire as *daimonic*—a reality having the ability either to lift and transport the human spirit or to wound, even destroy it.³ Other examples of the *daimonic* include wealth, power, fame, ambition, and of interest here, religion. The best of our religious leaders, philosophers, and spiritual writers have warned us to approach these central aspects of life with care and caution. Though fundamentally good or neutral in themselves, these forces have the power to wreak terrible harm. Not only can we make this claim about sexuality, I will assert in the chapters ahead the *daimonic* character of celibacy itself.

Celibacy's mystique goes beyond the human fascination with sex and the intentional foregoing of an active sex life. Especially in the Catholic imagination, the regard and reverence for vowed religious and celibate clergy can be traced to the long history of heroic service and self-sacrificing pastoral care that is typical of Catholic priests, nuns, and brothers. Celibates are perceived as men and women for

others. As missionaries, teachers, nurses, and pastors, they have “left all” and risked everything in a heroic response to the gospel. In Camus’ terms, they are rebels who refuse to collaborate with the seductive forces of either utopianism or nihilism. Men and women of faith, they struggle to live simply, day by day, acutely aware of their own limitations and the numbing pseudo-values celebrated by their culture. Throughout the centuries many have suffered to the point of martyrdom in the pastoral care of their people and in fidelity to the human struggle for justice and peace. Many more have gained the status of elders: men and women whose life-long fidelity to the word of God and unquestioned authenticity has led others to see them as wisdom figures. These are the bigger-than-life members of religious orders and congregations. These are the pastors grandparents tell their grandchildren about. These are the teachers remembered at class reunions. To greater and lesser degrees, and with many sad and even tragic exceptions, their witness to the gospel enlightened and encouraged and, not infrequently, transformed countless lives.

The newly ordained and recently professed religious know that the respect they receive, from Catholics and often from non-Catholics, has yet to be earned. It comes their way because of those who have gone before them. Moreover, they understand they are part of a tradition that has shaped and sustained this mystique—that they stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before them. Mystique, they begin to understand, emerges slowly, refined in the crucible of unselfish service and heroic struggle of a group or profession. It has been created, if you will, by others long dead and often forgotten.

Another factor contributing to celibacy's mystique is the intentional gender blurring characteristic of male clergy and religious. Men in dress-like cassocks, flowing robes, lace vestments, and embroidered capes have for centuries fostered an androgynous clerical milieu. When explicit sexual gender is suppressed in the service of sustaining celibate continence a mystique does indeed emerge. But it is ultimately unsuccessful, unhealthy, and susceptible to perversion. In some clerics, behaviors emerge that are classic examples of camp and dandyism,⁴ and, as we shall see in chapter seven, this is an environment especially attractive to some gay men and others confused about their sexual identity.

With the exception of the environs of Rome close to the Vatican, the sight of black-robed priests has declined dramatically since the Second Vatican Council. Still, the image of priests in cassocks remains steadfast in the Catholic imagination of middle-aged and older believers. The androgynous dress, in turn, was complemented by the androgynous demeanor and style of numerous clergy. Just who were these men? What made them tick? Were they God's chosen or simply strange? In anti-clerical circles, the response to such questions was emphatically derisive. Yet among the faithful, a certain reverence for the mystery and sacred dignity of the priesthood was passed from generation to generation. Added to this reverence and fascination was the overlay of aristocratic privilege, power, and secrecy associated with clerical culture. Working class sons were suddenly members of the church's aristocracy—with comforts and status that seemed to more than make up for the imposed celibacy of the priesthood. The institution of celibacy—with its androgynous, asexual tenor—

eventually became grounded on a rock-solid foundation buttressed by theological, spiritual, political, economic, cultural, and institutional ramparts. It was a fortress of considerable strength.

The androgynous character of the priesthood notwithstanding, and in spite of the celibacy requirement, vocations to the priesthood were abundant in the middle decades of the twentieth century. And many of these recruits for the priesthood were unambiguously masculine. Not a few were veterans of World War II, men with generous hearts seasoned and sobered by the rigors and horrors of armed conflict. They believed they knew what really mattered and eagerly embraced the mysterious call to priesthood and ministry. Others came from the farms, while the majority arrived at seminary gates from cities not yet thinned by suburban sprawl. Since grace, Christians believe, builds on nature, this generation of seminarians as well as others were attracted, at least in part, to the mystery, grandeur, and power intimately linked to ordination—to what I have referred to here as the mystique of the celibate priesthood.

In addition to the promise of celibacy (a condition for ordination), diocesan priests promise their bishop obedience and at the same time commit themselves to lives of gospel simplicity. Religious order priests, of course, take vows of poverty, chastity (understood as celibate continence), and obedience. While the mystique of the priesthood is grounded in the mystique of celibacy, it is reinforced by the equally counter-cultural commitments to obedience

and simplicity of life (the vow of poverty of religious priests). In societies shaped by the Enlightenment values of rational self-determination, independence, and liberty, obedience to a bishop, abbot, or religious superior can be as puzzling as the forgoing of sexual and human fulfillment in marriage. This is especially the case when the obedience has a quasi-military character. Such surrender of individual will raises the same questions associated with celibacy. What kind of men and women are these? Is their commitment to the church's mission heroic or masochistic? Do they possess an otherworldly wisdom or are they simply naïve? Are they to be admired or pitied? In the eyes of many, the obedience of priests and religious is as fascinating and perplexing as celibacy.

Theologian and spiritual writer Ronald Rolheiser has proposed that those who sleep alone are poor.⁵ Celibacy, from this perspective, is a kind of poverty. The celibate trusts that the human intimacy that he or she needs as a finite, limited creature will be provided, will come in ways not manipulated or controlled. As the poor often wait for daily bread, celibates wait, without willful maneuvering, for the human connectedness essential for the life of their souls. Physical poverty is nothing to be romanticized. It carries no aura of mystique. Emotional poverty, on the other hand, trusting that one's human need for relationship and communion will ultimately be met, is a different matter. The vowed poverty of celibate religious and the simplicity of life common to committed celibate priests are a constant challenge and countersign to any culture of consumption. When celibacy is understood as emotional poverty, a state

in life making no public declaration, no claim that another is one's spouse or covenanted partner, its fundamental mystique is deepened.

Society's fascination with the Catholic priesthood, a fascination that extends far beyond the Catholic community, is closely linked, I have proposed here, with the mystique of celibacy. If celibacy were not required of priests, it is reasonable to ask, would the public's enduring interest in the priesthood be diminished? Is the mystique of celibacy so intimately connected with the mystique of the priesthood itself that the mystery and allure of the ordained, undoubtedly weakened in recent decades, would be further eroded to the point of extinction? Many today fear it would. Moreover, they believe that without mandatory celibacy priests would become even more middle class than they already are—at least in the minds of some. These individuals insist that without obligatory celibacy priests would lose what little "fire in the belly" they currently possess, that they would be even less prophetic and counter-cultural to a society awash in secular values.

While there are other arguments for maintaining mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests of the Latin rite, as we will see in the chapters ahead, celibacy's mystique should not be judged inconsequential.

Faithful response to the charism of celibacy, we will see in the following chapter, is one of the church's great treasures. Like other charisms, it is to be honored and respected. At the same time, when celibacy is imposed and legislated it can undermine the integrity of the church's leadership and

cause needless human suffering. If charismatic celibacy is indeed a jewel in the crown of the priesthood, mandated, obligatory celibacy for individuals not blessed with the charism is a silent martyrdom.