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## Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church, by Len Sperry

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ing the midnight oil” (p. 7). While most will agree with the idea that students must be responsible for themselves and their work, one must take note that a great deal of this book is focused on urban or inner-city children, many of whom will not be able to realize those responsibilities at high rates. Due to the fact that a disproportionate number of minority children come from single-parent families, dire poverty, and crime-ridden neighborhoods (which the authors do mention), these tasks will not be so simple to achieve. Furthermore, can all the statistical documentation that shows the racial gap in learning really be attributed to family culture, or are we refusing to see the true disadvantages that maintain the educational gap for Black and Hispanic children? *No Excuses* will challenge the reader to consider difficult questions such as these amidst the complex social context that frames the U.S. educational system.

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## SEX, PRIESTLY MINISTRY, AND THE CHURCH

LEN SPERRY  
LITURGICAL PRESS, 2003  
\$16.95, 200 pages

*Reviewed by P. Del Staigers*

In his book, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, Peter Steinfels notes that Church culture in a former era was glorified in the movies. There were 34 nominations for Academy Awards in 1943, 1944, and 1945 to honor movie heroes. Of these heroes were Father Flanagan in *Boys' Town*, Father Chuck O'Malley in *Going My Way*, and Karl Malden's labor priest in *On the Waterfront*. "There emerged a super padre, virile, wise, good-humored, compassionate, and in emergencies possessed of a remarkable knockout punch" (Steinfels, 2003, p. 71). From 1952 to 1957,

Bishop Fulton Sheen attracted 30 million people to listen to his message.

The 1940s, 1950s, and most of the 1960s live in stark contrast to our present era of Church life. It is that disparity of Church images that makes Len Sperry's book, *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*, such an important read at this time. The back cover states that the book "provides an objective and authoritative account of psychosexual development in priests," and it is just that. Sperry is balanced and fair in the presentation of varying, often opposing, views. Honestly reminding the reader that we are no longer the Church of the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s, the author discusses issues that the Church is dealing with today.

The Foreword, written by Donald Cozzens, who himself has written solid accounts of our present situation regarding Church structures and accountability states, "Sperry's significant accomplishment will not only prove an essential resource for our understanding of the factors that have contributed to the present crisis, but also for our efforts in building a renewed and healthier ministerial presence in the Church" (Sperry, 2003, p. x).

In some circles in the church of the 1980s and 1990s, there was an often-vocal criticism that psychology had become too powerful for religion. The last 2 years of the Church's life have led to the deeper understanding that, through trial and tribulation, religion and psychosexual development are integrally related. Sperry's background as a professor of psychiatry, coupled with a deep understanding of the Church, represents both arenas well. *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*, is an honest appraisal of how stunted psychological development, unhealthy repression, shifting paradigms of Church, clericalism, and new understandings of psychology have all made for an environment of confusion and uncertainty. It is a fair treatment in a time when many want to blame the psychologists as an amorphous group of professionals. Sperry's treatment will bring some deeper understanding to the complexity of the situation for those willing to read the book and consider its contents.

Chapter 1 is an excellent resource for basic definitions of words used when discussing issues of sexuality. Every Church spokesperson would benefit from this chapter alone, as would members of the press. Many of the linguistic disputes regarding issues of sexuality in the Church have their locus in the imprecise use of terminology.

The case studies that Sperry uses are helpful for those who may not have a strong academic background or expertise in the area of psychological development. This is a strength throughout the book. The treatment of intimacy, especially for the celibate, is not something new for people who have been formed in more recent years for ministry, but it is very current and helpful.

Sperry emphasizes that we are all a part of an organization. This is a danger for a priest/leader who ministers and aspires to be "faithful" to the insti-

tution, and who might over-emphasize the importance of acceptance by that organization. A lack of understanding of the distinctions of confidentiality and secrecy has probably been one of the major points of contention in the sex abuse scandal. An organization that becomes too closed runs the risk of not being able to distinguish between confidentiality and secrecy.

At the heart of this distinction may be the issue of narcissism that Sperry treats with so much depth. Laying out a clear understanding of the term “as a specific style of responding to others that is self focused but not necessarily pathological” (Sperry, 2003, p. 88), Sperry defines three styles of narcissism in which a sense of entitlement, or “a claim for special treatment, reward or privilege, is a key feature” (p. 89). This section, in particular, should be read by vocation directors, admission boards to seminaries and religious communities, those responsible for formation, and people working with sexual abusers. The final chapter should be read by the latter group, as it deals with removing an abuser from ministry. Chapters 6 through 11 all directly deal with the dynamics which accompany a narcissistic personality, and would be a good “check” for anyone presently in ministry to assure that his or her ministry is a healthy living of one’s vocation.

Sperry devotes an entire chapter to the selection of suitable candidates for the priesthood in chapter 8. As sexual development and identity are critical areas of admissions inventory, the chapter gives concise and clear descriptions of development that admission boards would find helpful to determine healthy candidates. Developmental markers are identified in order to name traits of narcissistic entitlement and narcissistic personalities.

The book would be an excellent resource for those involved in the training of ministers. If there is ever required reading for bishops in preparation for the National Conferences, this would be an excellent resource as the Church continues on its way to healing.

We no longer live in the era of *Boys’ Town*, *Going My Way*, or *On the Waterfront*. Those times have formed us, to be sure, but they are gone. Our complexities and struggles today are public and call for personnel and ministers with great vision, unafraid to name the truth. *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church* might well help us on our way.

## REFERENCES

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