



# Goodbye Father: The Celibate Male Priesthood and the Future of the Catholic Church

*Richard A. Schoenherr*

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In the last half-century, the number of Catholic priests has plummeted by 40% while the number of Catholics has skyrocketed, up 65%. The specter of a faith defined by full pews and empty altars hangs heavy over the church.

The root cause of this priest shortage is the church's insistence on mandatory celibacy. Given the potential recruitment advantages of abandoning the celibacy requirement, why, Richard A. Schoenherr asks, is the conservative Catholic coalition--headed by the pope--so adamantly opposed to a married clergy? The answer, he argues, is that accepting married priests would be but the first step toward ordaining women and thus forever altering the demographics of a resolutely male religious order.

Yet Schoenherr believes that such change is not only necessary but unavoidable if the church is to thrive. The church's current stop-gap approach of enlisting laypeople to perform all but the central element of the mass only further serves to undermine the power of the celibate priesthood. Perhaps most importantly, doctrinal changes, a growing pluralism in the church, and the feminist movement among nuns and laywomen are exerting a growing influence on Catholicism.

Concluding that the collapse of celibate exclusivity is all but inevitable, *Goodbye Father* presents an urgent and compelling portrait of the future of organized Catholicism.

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