

instance—the individual suffers a “failure of privacy” and, says Velleman, feels shame. Blushing, the physiological response to shame, can lead to even more feelings of shame since, again, the blush exposes the private self.

Velleman thinks that the much discussed “de-moralization” of society is more easily understood through his conception of shame. Someone who poses nude in a magazine or reveals kinky secrets on a talk show will likely *not* feel shame, in his view. Why not? Because the exposure is a personal choice that now becomes part of the individual’s public face. It is intentional. But a person caught changing clothes at the beach

would likely still feel shame, because the exposure was unintended.

Velleman agrees with those who argue that American society is far gone in shamelessness, but he doesn’t think the solution is to “rescandalize” things such as births out of wedlock. The problem is that the public self has gotten out of control: “People now think that not to express inclinations or impulses is in effect to claim that one doesn’t have them, and that honesty therefore requires one to express whatever inclinations or impulses one has.” There is no quick fix. What’s needed, according to Velleman, is a larger sense of privacy, a renewed understanding that people are not all they appear to be.

The Aura of Celibacy

“The Scourge of Celibacy” by Garry Wills, in *The Boston Globe Magazine* (Mar. 24, 2002),
P. O. Box 2378, Boston, Mass. 02107–2378.

Conservative Catholics insist that priestly celibacy has nothing to do with the pedophilia scandals that have rocked the church. On the contrary, it has *something* to do with the pedophilia, and *everything* to do with the cover-ups, argues Wills, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and the author of *Papal Sin* (2000).

“The ‘grace’ (charisma) of celibacy, a thing now suspect, was the source of a priest’s high standing, of the special aura that set him apart,” Wills says. That aura may not cause pedophilia, but it does “foster and protect it,” giving clerical pedophiles unmatched “ease of access” to young prey. Unlike Boy Scout leaders, teachers, and others in professions that run special risks of harboring pedophiles, priests were “presumed to be disciplined by [their] code of sexual abstinence.” Unlike the coach or the teacher, the priest “had the whole care of the child’s soul as his province” and could range far and wide in the lives of children. Trusting Catholic parents were reluctant, even after their children were abused, to damage the aura that priests enjoy.

Catholic bishops and other hierarchical superiors have been even more hesitant to impair the aura, Wills notes. “They can see that a wrong has been done to a few children, but they feel that the souls of all children depend on their receiving the truths of the faith with respect for the carrier of that good news. This

is the higher good next to which bishops have weighed too lightly the harm done to the abused.” (As for the reassignment of pedophile priests, the bishops accepted “the faulty assurances given them by therapists in the past” that the men were “cured.”)

Conservative Catholics have pointed out that, despite the “pedophile priest” headlines, most of the youths involved in the recent scandals were not young children but teenage boys. The need, they say, is to screen out not only pedophiles but actively gay aspirants to the priesthood. Wills has a different take: “Though being gay has nothing to do with pedophilia, the claim of celibacy is obviously being hollowed out by sexual activity, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether with consenting adults or with abused minors. The protection of the aura of celibacy demands the coverup of a whole range of activities.”

Celibacy was not always demanded of priests. Not until the fourth century did it begin to become the norm, arising as “ascetics of the desert became so famed for their heroic abstinence that people began to consult them and to look down on priests as insufficiently holy to be given the kind of reverence that hermits had earned.” The priests embraced celibacy as a countermeasure. Today, however, celibacy has lost its original justification. The time has come, in Wills’s view, for the church to start phasing out mandatory celibacy.