

GREELEY Andrew M, *Priests : A Calling in Crisis*, University of Chicago Press 156 pages  
\$12.00  
2005

## **Editorial Reviews**

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Greeley, a professor of social science at two universities (Chicago and Arizona), draws upon the tools of his trade to challenge some stereotypes of the priesthood today, particularly in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis of 2002, which he acerbically calls "The Year of the Pedophile." He utilizes various sociological and psychological studies to demonstrate that priests are no less emotionally mature than other American males in their age groups—and that, in fact, they may enjoy more supportive and varied friendships than other men. He challenges the widespread stereotype that the priesthood is rife with homosexuals, noting that in a landmark Los Angeles Times survey of priests, only 16% identified themselves as homosexual. (Sociologists and statisticians may wonder at the reliability of data that is entirely self-reported but, as Greeley notes, these figures are the best we have.) Greeley also counters the stereotype of priests as unfulfilled "emotional wrecks" with evidence that they are actually more likely to report themselves as happy than are other males (and, interestingly enough, than Protestant clergy). With helpful tables, graphs and charts, this slim but opinionated volume should be required reading for students and reporters who are willing to look past sensational headlines to the more complex and nuanced picture beyond.

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### **From [Booklist](#)**

The mixture of humility and arrogance that is part of Greeley's appeal surfaces here when, referring to his sociological studies, Greeley says they are usually "not very good" but "the best there is on the subject" because no one else is doing what he does. He dismisses psychologists' studies of the priesthood, suggesting that psychological methods are inferior to sociological methods as bases for global interpretation. He dismisses former priests' and non-Catholics' studies, suggesting that they are biased (his are "empirical"). Be that as it may, the data underlying this book depict the Roman Catholic clergy as representative of the population as a whole. Priests are relatively satisfied in their work and no more or less sexually mature and self-fulfilled than other men. The greatest problem facing the priesthood, which Greeley locates in the institutional structure of the church, is disconnection from the concerns of the laity. In the end, he advises, "Clergy at all levels from the pope to the lowliest parish curate must be quiet and listen. And listen. And listen." *Steven Schroeder*

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### **Review**

"Greeley's summary is sobering.... His agenda of sorting out the social meaning of the priesthood in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis may be the kind of rough talk that will wake up some readers and empower others.... It's worth listening to what he has to say." - Father Paul Philibert, National Catholic Reporter; "I cannot imagine a more thorough critique of the stereotypes clouding intelligent discussion of the Roman Catholic priesthood - or a more unsparing assessment of the priesthood's real problems. As blunt as ever, Father Greeley backs his strong views with the best available data. The future of American Catholicism depends on its will-ingness to confront findings like these." - Peter Steinfeld, author of A

People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America; "Greeley draws upon the tools of his trade to challenge some stereotypes of the priesthood today, particularly in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis of 2002.... This slim but opinionated volume should be required reading for students and reporters who are willing to look past sensational headlines to the more complex and nuanced picture beyond." - Publishers Weekly" --*This text refers to the [Hardcover](#) edition.*

### **Product Description**

For several years now, the Roman Catholic Church and the institution of the priesthood itself have been at the center of a firestorm of controversy. While many of the criticisms lodged against the recent actions of the Church—and a small number of its priests—are justified, the majority of these criticisms are not. Hyperbolic and misleading coverage of recent scandals has created a public image of American priests that bears little relation to reality, and Andrew Greeley's *Priests* skewers this image with a systematic inside look at American priests today.

No stranger to controversy himself, Greeley here challenges those analysts and the media who parrot them in placing the blame for recent Church scandals on the mandate of celibacy or a clerical culture that supports homosexuality. Drawing upon reliable national survey samples of priests, Greeley demolishes current stereotypes about the percentage of homosexual priests, the level of personal and professional happiness among priests, the role of celibacy in their lives, and many other issues. His findings are more than surprising: they reveal, among other things, that priests report higher levels of personal and professional satisfaction than doctors, lawyers, or faculty members; that they would overwhelmingly choose to become priests again; and that younger priests are far more conservative than their older brethren.

While the picture Greeley paints should radically reorient the public perception of priests, he does not hesitate to criticize the Church's significant shortcomings. Most priests, for example, do not think the sexual abuse problems are serious, and they do not think that poor preaching or liturgy is a problem, though the laity give them very low marks on their ministerial skills. Priests do not listen to the laity, bishops do not listen to priests, and the Vatican does not listen to any of them. With Greeley's statistical evidence and provocative recommendations for change—including a national "Priest Corps" that would offer young men a limited term of service in the Church—*Priests* offers a new vision for American Catholics, one based on real problems and solutions rather than on images of a depraved, immature, and frustrated priesthood.

### **From the Inside Flap**

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### **About the Author**

A prolific author of fiction and nonfiction, **Andrew Greeley** is on the staff of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and professor of social science at the University of Arizona. His nonfiction books include *Confessions of a Parish Priest*, *Religious Change in America*, *The Catholic Imagination*, and *The Catholic Revolution*.