

DISHONORING MY REGIMENT

A Response and Reflection by Thomas Doyle

I became part of the "regiment" as a Dominican priest in May, 1970. I first became aware of the reality of sexual abuse of minors by priests before I was ordained through rumors and stories about certain priests in the Order who "liked altar boys." I never knew that "liking altar boys" went far beyond touching until after I was ordained. I learned the disgusting extent of "liking altar boys" in 1984 when I was working at the Vatican embassy and first became involved with the whole issue of clergy sex abuse. That was when I was asked to manage the file of Gilbert Gauthé, the notorious priest from Lafayette LA. My direct involvement increased with each month and each year and continues today.

Let me start out by offering my conclusion. The "regiment" truly is dishonored. It is dishonored in part by the thousands of priests who have raped and abused innocent boys, girls, men and women.....and in doing so have ravaged their souls and the souls of those who loved them. But the regiment is dishonored even more by the bishops, archbishops, cardinals and popes, who have enabled, covered up, lied, manipulated, ignored and responded in anything but a Christian manner. They have really dishonored the regiment because they have knowingly turned their backs on that which the regiment is really all about, namely following the example of Christ. They can't fall back on the excuse that they suffer from a sexual disorder or are impaired by substance abuse. Their impairment is a moral impairment and there is no excuse for that. Two recent examples: the first I will cite is the total lack of hierarchical integrity in Chicago! Cardinal George is a criminal and a traitor to the regiment.....but will the members of the regiment who are so concerned about its honor step up and call him on it? No! Why not? Fear, timidity, irrelevant respect for the office? Pick one. They are all irrelevant to the facts. The second example is the famed Msgr. Wally Harris in New York. The hero of Harlem was interviewed by the John Jay Study people and complained about the number of false accusations.....all the while knowing he was guilty himself.

The regiment has also been dishonored by the thousands of priests who knew that others were abusing children and did nothing. It is dishonored by the thousands who looked the other way and failed to speak out in support of the victims. It is dishonored by the many priests who stood by in silence while their bishops ran roughshod over victims, lying to them, lying to the public and lying to the clergy because of their obsession with their image and their power.

The regiment is dishonored by those priests who have spoken out but only to voice their self-centered concern about priests' rights and the tarnished image of the priesthood brought on by "a few." It is dishonored by those who have complained about the bishops' lack of concern for priests, manifested in the provisions of the Dallas

Charter and their on-going lopsided response but who have never complained about the bishops' dishonest, unchristian and criminal response to reports of the denial of the victims' rights. The regiment is dishonored by the priests who whine and complain about the shame brought on them by the minority of abusers. The shame is not only from them but from the silence and complacency of the majority.

The regiment is dishonored by those priests and bishops who keep trying to shift the blame to anyone but themselves with idiotic claims such as that of Madison's Bishop Morlino who recently announced that the whole problem was caused because people didn't obey the 1968 anti-birth control encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

I'd like to share some of my own experiences which have led to these conclusions. When I first became involved in this issue in 1984 I was shocked to learn that former priest Gil Gauthe had raped dozens of children but I was even more shocked, scandalized and confused as I quickly learned that the US Catholic Conference and the bishops who knew about the abuse were only concerned about covering it up. When cover up was impossible due to the lawsuit filed and the criminal charges against Gauthe that came as a consequence, the response from the leadership of the Bishops' Conference was as if this was a nuisance that would go away much more quickly if I stopped pushing it. A couple priests on the embassy staff told me that it would be best if I back off because "we don't air our dirty laundry in public."

The Gauthe case and the others that came to light back then did not go away. I don't remember anyone at the time showing any concern for the victims with the exception of Fr. Mike Peterson. No one from the Bishops' Conference or from the embassy staff ever mentioned the victims. All they worried about was containing the problem and managing the negative publicity.

After I left the embassy I was approached by the media several times. I spoke honestly and shared as much as I knew. I was criticized by priests because I opened up the brotherhood to dishonor as one put it. I still recall being at a Canon Law convention in Florida in the late eighties. Just prior to it I had given an interview that was widely quoted. At the convention I was attacked by several priests and was accused of betraying the brotherhood. Not one priest asked about the truth of the matter and no one was concerned about the problem itself or about the victims.....they were only concerned about the bad publicity for the ""regiment.""

In spring of 1986 I had organized an all day seminar in the Chicago area. Presenters included psychologists and attorneys who would provide information on responding to the problem and to the victims. We invited bishops and chancery officials from around the U.S. Not long before the event Cardinal Bernardin called me and urged me to cancel the event because he felt it would draw undue attention to the problem and would ""sensationalize"" it, to use his

words. I refused. We held the seminar to a full house but not one priest from Chicago attended. Why? Because the Cardinal had let the word out that it was to be boycotted. Best to let the problem get worse rather than dishonor the Chicago branch of the regiment.

In 1992 I attended the first major gathering of victims in Chicago, the Vocal (later LinkUp) conference. I met three priests who were there because they had been ministering to victims. All three had spoken about the evil of clergy sex abuse from their pulpits and all three had been silenced and disciplined by their bishops for drawing undue attention to what one bishop referred to as a "minor problem." I might add that since then there have been annual gatherings of victims sponsored by the two main support groups, LinkUp and SNAP. The clergy have never flocked to these gatherings to show their concern or support for victims. True, a few brave men always show up, but never more than a few. Only one bishop has ever attended and stood in solidarity and support of the victims, Bishop Tom Gumbleton. Where were the others?

In 1988 Bishop A.J. Quinn of Cleveland wrote to my former boss, the Vatican ambassador or nuncio as he is called, and complained about me. He was upset that I was magnifying the problem by speaking to the media. He told the nuncio in his letter that the "pedophile nuisance" would soon go away. To his credit the Vatican ambassador, Cardinal Laghi, sent me a copy of the letter and told me that he did not agree with Quinn's statements.

Between 1984 and 2002 I do not recall a single instance where a priest or a group of priests spoke out publicly in support of victims other than the outstanding speech Andy Greeley gave at the 1992 conference mentioned above. I do not know of any who have publicly criticized the way bishops were responding. I don't know of any priests' senate ever saying anything publicly. The Canon Law Society of America had a couple seminars about the issue but has never done anything worthwhile other than express concern over priests' rights. Nothing about victims or victims' rights!

I recall when I was on active duty with the Air Force being called by a priest who worked at the Archdiocese for the Military Services. He advised me to stop speaking to the press and also told me that the archbishop was considering issuing me an order to stop testifying on behalf of victims. He assured me that they were concerned about the problem but that there was a better way to handle it. My response.....doesn't waste your time and effort because I am not going to stop.

Many priests have told me over the years that if the church had only followed Canon Law we would not be in this mess. Nonsense! Canon Law is what the bishops want it to be. It has never been effective in protecting the rights of lay people. It has been totally useless in bringing justice to victims. It's not that the canon law system lacks the provisions for action. But law has to be applied to

mean anything and the people in charge of making Canon Law work are the bishops. Need more be said?

After 2002 things changed and people were speaking out all over. For the first time the National Federation of Priests' Councils, an independent group, started making noises. They were concerned about priests' rights in light of the Dallas Charter and the zero tolerance policy of the bishops. They had never said anything before this and expressed concern only about themselves and not about victims. They still have done nothing to help the victims.

Since 1988 I have reviewed several hundred priest-personnel files. In my work as a consultant and expert witness in civil cases and grand jury investigations I have also reviewed several hundred depositions taken from cardinals, bishops and priests. Many of these are available for all to see on several websites. In most of these depositions when asked about their knowledge of sexual abuse by accused clerics, the deponents either could not remember or they simply denied the abuse. While there were certainly cases when these clerics did not in fact have any direct or indirect knowledge, in most it was known from other sources that they did know about the abuse in question. How can one explain the denials and the memory lapses? My conclusion was that these clerical deponents either suffered from some form of cognitive disorder, or brain damage in plain English, or they were lying. Either way, these clerical deponents could have assisted in the search for the truth and supported the victims. They did not. They covered for the abusers even under oath. They chose to bring dishonor to the regiment.

The Knights of Columbus take great pride in their loyalty to the Church and to the bishops. They regularly show their support for priests and announce their love for the Church. They shell out barrels of money to the Vatican, to bishops, to seminaries and to other causes in support of priests. The Knights of Columbus have totally missed the boat. They have supported priests and bishops in their moral bankruptcy and in their destruction of the bodies and souls of the victims of abuse. They have said and done nothing to support the victims. Remember the words of Jesus: "If you do this to the least of my brothers you do it to me." It looks as if the Knights and the bishops they protect have somehow missed that verse.

In the early days Andy Greeley spoke out publicly in support of victims. Over the years several priests have reached out to victims and survivors and some have even stuck their necks out, going public with their criticism. They were punished by their bishops and usually hammered or isolated by their "brother" priests. Since 2002 I have become aware of a small number of heroic priests who have placed their Christian commitment before the "brotherhood" or the image of the regiment and in so doing this small band of brothers has brought honor to the regiment. I'd like to name a few because these are the men who really live what Christian pastorship is all about: Ken Lasch, Bob Hoatson, Bruce Teague, Dave Hitch, John Bambrick, Gary Hayes, Jim Scahill, Tom Gumbleton, Geoff

Robinson, Pat Powers, Pat Collins, Ron Coyne, Don Cozzens, Walter Cuenin, Bob Bowers.....to name some but not all. Some quietly support and others provide direct pastoral care. Ken Lasch and Bob Hoatson, through Road to Recovery, have provided more pastoral care to victims in one day than all the bishops combined in 20 years. There are others whose names I cannot recall right now.

There are also the 58 priests from Boston who signed the letter asking Bernard Law to step down. In the clerical world, where priests are often treated like indentured servants, that was an incredibly brave act.

There are priests who complain about the many false accusations and the lack of legal representation and due process for accused priests. In the first place there are very few false accusations.....10 that I know of out of thousands of cases. Those who make this charge have produced no credible evidence beyond rumor and hearsay. There is however truth to the complaint that there is little effective canonical-legal representation for accused priests.....just like there has NEVER been any canonical-legal representation or due process for the victims of clergy abuse. Why is this so? Because the bishops do not believe in objective due process for anyone but themselves.

Perhaps the most sickening charges use the words ""Catholic-bashing, priest-bashing or anticlericalism."" If there is shame attached to being a priest today it's because the priests and bishops have brought it on themselves. If any group is responsible for anti-Catholic sentiment it's the bishops. Their self-serving response to the victims of abuse is about as anti-Catholic as one can get. If being a good and orthodox Catholic means essentially being a good and faithful Christian, then the bishops are the largest single group of dissenters and unorthodox heretics in the Catholic Church. They have sacrificed charity for image and institutional power. They have redefined orthodoxy to mean mindless obedience to their obsession with themselves and their power.

There is nothing magical or mystical about the priesthood that justifies any special treatment in the face of committed crimes. If we look at the gospels we find nothing that even remotely justifies setting priests on a pedestal or granting them ""above-the-law"" status. On the contrary there is abundant evidence that Jesus showed plenty of anger towards the church men of his time because they had lost their way and abused the people whom they were supposed to serve. There is ample scriptural evidence to justify a priesthood that would devote itself to the care of the marginalized, forgotten, abused and rejected. In our era the marginalized have been made so by the very clergy who have been ordained to protect them. Why then does it seem that the hierarchy and so many of the priests are so adamant in defending a priesthood that looks and acts more like a latter-day aristocracy in an anachronistic monarchy?

Perhaps one reason is that priests are formed from the beginning into a clerical

culture that teaches them that God wants a "regiment" that is set apart and special. Perhaps yet another reason is that priests are formed in a culture that rewards docility, unquestioning obedience, intellectual mediocrity and total loyalty to the papacy and hierarchy while it dismisses and even punishes originality, creativity, independence or loyalty to one's conscience.

I have heard more than one diocesan priest describe his state as "economic servitude" while complaining that the bishop held him in total captivity with the power to suspend his salary, health benefits, retirement, residence and ability to work. It is pathetic but true that fear is major component in convincing many priests to stay loyal to the brotherhood.

In spite of what appears to be a very bleak picture, I believe it is unfair and inaccurate to write off the entire priesthood as uncaring, weak or dishonest. In my travels I have either met or heard about many men whose essential loyalty is to the mission and ministry of Christ and not to the adulation of the papacy or the hierarchy. They serve unselfishly and often among those whom they serve are the victims and survivors of sexual or spiritual abuse inflicted by priests or bishops.

On the other hand it is dishonest and destructive to try to minimize the incredible damage that has been done by dismissing it, saying it is the result of a minuscule number of "bad apples." The actual numbers are certainly not minuscule. Far more shameful is that fact that the number of bishops who have lied, covered up and enabled is not a minority but the majority. Priests and bishops have to wake up and face reality. There has been immense dishonor and shame brought to the "regiment" because the "regiment" has been subjected to self-delusion. Its members, at least some of them, have actually believed they were part of some sort of elite fraternity and in so doing have lost sight of the fact that it's not a "regiment" at all but a group of men whose calling is not to be "special" but to be compassionate reminders of the compassionate Christ.

One final shot and it's at the nuns who have arrogantly and stupidly tried to frame sexual abuse as a "male" or "clergy" problem. Sex abuse by nuns has been covered more deeply and has been more difficult for the general public to swallow.....but it is a major element of the overall nightmare. The dishonor to their regiment and the ruination of countless boys and girls, men and women brought about because of the physical, emotional and sexual abuse by women religious has been just as horrific as that perpetrated by the clerics. The nuns' major organization, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, has responded to the victims with just as much arrogant and imperious disregard as have the bishops. The nuns have shown themselves to be just as clericalized as their male counterparts. They have brought just as much dishonor to their regiment as the clerics have to theirs.

Together the priests, bishops, nuns and brothers who have sexually abused minors and adults and those from these ranks who have looked the other way, denied, lied, covered up, revictimized and enabled constitute a disgusting, sorry mess that has brought great dishonor not only to their respective regiments but to the Body of Christ.