

THE CAUSES AND CONTEXT STUDY of the JOHN JAY COLLEGE

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I share the skepticism of many who have questioned the effectiveness of the work of the John Jay College research team. I understand that when they started their work in 2003 they did so with the expected presuppositions about the bishops' motivation. As they began to perceive things they became perplexed, as has happened to all of us who were taught to trust the institution and to trust and respect the bishops. Two years ago I was asked to spend time with the research team at the John Jay College in New York. I spent an entire day giving them my recollections of the history of the abuse issue in the US and explaining the inner workings of the institution and what I had perceived to be the real attitude and motivation of the bishops. They listened avidly because they had no prior loyalties or deference to the Catholic hierarchy who had hired them.

As the second phase proceeded the JJC people continued to collect and analyze data and that data would be substance for the added and essential research into the bottom-line question: **Why did all this happen?** I believe that all along most of us who have been in this from the start and there are a few other than I who have been around and involved since 1984. I knew what it was about just as surely as we knew the difference between day and night.

The bishops as a group do not want outside experts delving into the various aspects of the abuse crisis because they have realistic fears of what the experts will come up with in fact they not only have no desire, they have an aversion to the possibility of outsiders finding out what really has been happening as much as a vampire has an aversion to sunlight. This fear of opening the files should be obvious. Bishops have fought tooth and nail to prevent disclosure of their files either to the press or to attorneys. They have created one bogus excuse after another as a roadblock. Cardinal Mahony and Bishop Lori each took the issue all the way to the Supreme Court of the U.S. and both lost. The opposition isn't about the protecting privacy of victims or the reputations of innocent priests. It is all about keeping the secrets hidden. Who gains? No one. Who loses? Everyone, especially the laity who donate their hard earned dollars because tens of millions of these dollars are spent by the bishops, through their lawyers, in the fight against disclosure.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, the USCCB commissioned the John Jay College to conduct a research study. They no doubt intended to create the

impression that they really were concerned and wanted to get to the bottom of it all and in doing so they proceeded on the no-longer-valid assumption that the victims, their supporters and millions of others are stupid and not only stupid but blindly docile to their exalted office. They were dead wrong.

Then came phase two. This had been promised by the bishops so they could not back down but they showed their true intentions by blocking funding for several years and then finally by giving the JJC about \$300,000 to complete the work, telling them to find the rest themselves. The total dependence on the U.S bishops for funding had a positive effect: it facilitated much more freedom for the researchers to follow what they saw to be valuable paths of inquiry.

The final report is in the making. The bishops see the whole venture as a publicity move to make it look like they care and that they are committed to finding out why this all happened BUT they know and we know that the real target of the research has thus far eluded scrutiny and that target is them.

The skeptics are right. The JJC has, in a sense, been used. However the second phase will be better than the first because even though the source of so much of the data is the Church itself, the JJC has gathered enough to come up with some staggering conclusions. Their data and their analyses will be invaluable for those who are moving forward to find the answers to the central question, **Why**.

All along the fundamental need has been for honest, complete and uncompromising accountability of those responsible. This nightmare did not happen by itself. This accountability is clearly impossible from within the Church for the simple reason that the Church's governmental structure is monarchical. The three powers basic to all government: executive, legislative and judicial are not separate in the Church. The three powers are vested in the pope for the entire Church and in the diocesan bishops for their dioceses. There are no checks and balances as we are accustomed to in our democratic way of life. Hence, there is no accountability. The official Church has based its governmental structure on the tradition that Almighty God fully intended that the Body of Christ should have a hierarchical government with the various hierarchs appointed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The study of the foundations of this governmental system is essential to answering the ultimate question, **Why**.

The presumption that the hierarchical structure is one and the same as the Body of Christ, the People of God, and is essential to the existence and success of Christ's mission on earth is the foundation of the bishops' obsession with protecting themselves and the institution at all costs. They actually believe that there can be no Body of Christ without them and that the Lord Jesus can do little if anything

meaningful in human life unless He does it with and through the bishops. Catholics are taught that they must believe this in order to be real Catholics. There is a slight problem with this line of belief. History has clearly demonstrated that there were millions of people who were born and died before Jesus ever existed. None of these people were ever baptized. They had no idea what a bishop was and no doubt many of them were decent, good and caring human beings in spite of the fact that none of them ever went to Mass. So what of them? Were they simply the waste products of the Higher Power's creative endeavors, leading up to the day when He finally got it right, evidenced by the creation of the Catholic Church? St. Thomas Aquinas, who the Church holds up as its primary theologian, based much of his thought and conclusions on the work of Aristotle. Not only was Aristotle not a Catholic, he wasn't a bishop and he wasn't even Italian. So where does that leave us as we continue to look to Aquinas for guidance? Maybe there was something good about the many pre-Christian societies and maybe there was integrity and honesty in the searches of many for a meaningful Higher Power.

These are only some of the questions that can lead to doubts about the bishops' basic beliefs that their way is the only way that really counts.

Back to accountability. Throughout Catholic history the institutional Church's only important authority figures, all of whom have been popes and bishops, have seen various degrees of harm inflicted on other Catholics by members of the Church itself. All too often the harm and destruction were done in the name of orthodoxy which of course was a thin mask for the real reason-maintaining power. The scourge of sexual molestation of children, minors and adults of both sexes is added to other atrocities committed in the name of Catholicism. These are all spun around by revisionist historians in order to deflect any real accountability. The list is impressive and depressing! The inquisition, the crusades, the colonization of Latin and South America, the tacit enabling of Nazism and the seemingly never-ending paranoia of the Inquisition-Holy Office-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are not exactly shining examples of the fulfillment of Christ's mission on earth. It is no coincidence that the seat of Church authority has never paused long enough to take a long, hard, honest, risky and painful look into itself and its governmental system to discover how and why such systemic evil got started in the first place and then was allowed to grow, fester and destroy.

The contemporary revelations of widespread sexual abuse by clerics and consequent cover-up and enabling by popes and bishops marked a change in direction. It has been slow and probably unnoticed by many but it has been happening. What is the difference? There has been a gradual but definite

paradigm shift in the institutional Catholic Church and the Church's place in secular society. The overwhelming influence of the hierarchy has been shrinking. The stratified and unequal political model so deeply imbedded as the Church's social and political foundation, so widely taken for granted, has lost its solid footing. The mythology that has surrounded popes, bishops and priests - a mythology that served as a guarantee of their power has been challenged from all sides. The challenges to long-held beliefs have led to the exposure of the irrelevance or even invalidity of many of them.

More and more people have been waking up to the realization that the emperor really has no clothes on. This gradual process of de-mythologization is rooted in a number of factors not the least of which has been the remarkable changes in the socio-economic and political structures of our world. Monarchy, long believed to be the only valid way of doing government, is now an elaborate but quite ineffective relic from the past. The last surviving absolute and therefore integral monarchy is the Roman Catholic Church.

The complex process of paradigm shift is the context into which the contemporary clergy sexual abuse crisis surfaced. Unlike the various Church-based crises of the past, the popes and bishops are not in control. The victims of this plague of Church-based oppression, in the form of sexual molestation, refused to retreat to their individual prisons of pain, shame, guilt and trauma, fearing that if they challenged the Almighty Church things would go worse for them than they already have. If we stop, take our sights off of the present problems and controversies and look behind us at the past 25 years we can see a momentous unfolding of events that is still in process. The power to cover up has dwindled to the force of a Mack Truck with a dead battery and a driver who doesn't know how to open the hood. The victims/survivors and their supporters have shouted as individuals and as one: **We're fed up and we're not going to take it anymore!**

Forging a trail out of the medieval cavern of ecclesiastical control has been slow, perplexing, excruciatingly painful, confusing, uncertain and expensive. In spite of every effort of the popes and the bishops to stifle, distract and confuse those who have challenged them, they have not been successful, and they won't be successful. As one wise victim said many years ago, **They have money, power and influence and we have the truth.**

Accountability is the key. Without it the evils of the past will be repeated and justice, at least in the Church, will fade to irrelevance. It is one thing to recognize the crying need for accountability and to demand that it take place, but quite another to make it happen.

The events of the past twenty-five years have proven without a shadow of a doubt that there is an unquestioned need to demand radical accountability of the popes, the Vatican bureaucrats, the bishops and the complacent clergy and laity. Now, how do we make this happen? The foundation involves uncovering the objective and radical truth about how the Catholic Church's administrative and governing processes actually work. Then, moving deeper, is the need to discover **why** the theory and practice of Catholic Church government is as it is. Finally, after seeing what we are dealing with, there comes the time to make accountability happen. This involves leaving behind the ranting and raving, the name-calling and condemning, the sense of defeat and feelings of uselessness in the face of the ecclesiastical Behemoth.

In place of expressions of anger and indignation, both of which will always be justifiably present, we must challenge the validity of continued monetary support of an institution that has squandered the donations of believers to hide and then defend its criminal actions. Then we must actively but patiently collaborate with the institutions in the secular community that are established to require accountability of those who offend the community. In spite of set-backs and occasional unjust and uninformed judicial decisions, the legal and judicial communities in our society have been indispensable in forging the trail out of the cave and into the light. Just look at the past two weeks. In Argentina an **archbishop** was sentenced to eight years in prison for sexual abuse that happened in his past. In Ireland the outrage of the Irish people at the revelation of the abuse that happened in the Archdiocese of Dublin has forced the resignation of four bishops. Much more remarkable though has been the almost unbelievable emergence of the Archbishop of Dublin as a clear voice for justice. Twenty five years ago or even ten years ago such events were unheard of and not even hoped for.

Returning to the efforts of the John Jay College, I see them as another source of hope. They have provided invaluable information that helps us as we continue to peel away layer after layer of the protective cover of the institutional Church. Those who still believe in the institutional Catholic Church and hope to return to a Church marked above all by honesty and humility should be encouraged. We should all be grateful to the Higher Power, not for the incredible evil and horror of the sexual abuse and molestation phenomenon, but for the courage and strength of the countless victims of the Church's heretical departure from the compassionate mission of Christ. Arising from the pain and oppression inflicted upon them they stand as the force of reform and the return from the obsession with power to the light of Christ as the Church's one and only center.