

# REFLECTIONS ON CLERGY ABUSE- WHERE WE ARE TODAY

## *PART FOUR*

### *What of the Future?*

I believe that every effort must be made to delve into the complexity of clergy sexual abuse with a view to discovering concrete answers to the many questions that continue to surface. There surely is enough polemical, defensive and accusatory rhetoric to last more than a lifetime. But does the rhetoric equal progress in the search for objective answers? The anger, frustration and rage experienced by the victims and others as well has certainly been justified by the enormity of the sexual crimes and the institutional cover-up. Without this emotional and spiritual fuel the victims, their attorneys and their supporters would no doubt have been overwhelmed and totally discouraged by the seemingly impossible task of overcoming the deep-seated toxic effects of clericalism.

Bishops and others constantly refer to the victims' anger as if it were some sort of moral fault or worse, a symptom of emotional or mental illness. Anyone who is astounded or critical of the victims' collective and individual anger has a massive moral blind spot. This anger is kept alive not so much by memories of the actual abuse but by the confusing, contradictory and often re-victimizing response of the Catholic clerical authority structure.

The anger and rage won't go away. It is a reflection of the reaction to the moral turpitude of an organization that not only allowed but in countless cases enabled the physical and emotional violation, the spiritual wounding and even death of countless boys and girls, women and men, who have been among the most faithful and vulnerable of the Church's membership.

I make these remarks about anger to provide a context for the following expression of hope. The only way the Catholic Church and the secular society will ever begin to understand the reasons why this clergy sexual abuse phenomenon has continued to be such a pathological part of the Catholic ecclesial culture is through serious academic research, study, and discussion.

This will not be provided by the institutional Church. The bishops are morbidly afraid of independent research into this deadly subject precisely because they won't be able to control it. A few years ago some of the

psychologists who had been treating clergy abusers suggested to the U.S. Bishops' Conference that they sponsor a study based on the data that had been obtained at several of the therapeutic centers where the accused clerics had been evaluated and treated. The bishops refused.

In February 1993 a "Think Tank" was held in St. Louis, approved by, though not funded by the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference. Their conclusions were remarkably accurate and their recommendations realistic and concrete. This report was "revised" by the Bishops' Conference and the final version, published in the bishops' official newsletter, *Origins*, was eviscerated of any content that would have redounded unfavorably to them.

The Vatican sponsored a symposium in April, 2003 on sexual abuse. The event featured eight people whom the Vatican had decided are experts on the issue. Four were Germans, three Canadians and a lone American named Dr. Martin Kafka. According to news reports the papers were published in a volume entitled "*Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Scientific and Legal Perspectives*" which was sent to all the bishops and to some reporters in February, 2004. A search of the Vatican, USCCB and Canadian Bishops' web sites, the libraries at Catholic University of America and Georgetown University as well as four book search web sites revealed nothing. The Vatican web site doesn't even mention the symposium and there seems to be no evidence anywhere of the existence of the book. None of the participants, including the lone American, were familiar to those most closely involved with clergy abuse. The reports said little about the content of the talks except that the connection between homosexuality and child abuse was discussed and that it was agreed that it is not the cause. The Vatican's commitment to scholarship is seriously questionable since nothing resembling even mediocre scholarship has emerged from the Holy See.

The real work is being done by scholars, academics and researchers who are not connected, influenced or controlled by the official Church. After the initial media exposure in 1984, thousands of newspaper and magazine articles have appeared. Since it takes longer to write and publish a book, at least a *credible* book, than it does to publish an article, the books were a bit slower in coming, but they did indeed appear on the scene. Marie Fortune published *Is Nothing Sacred* in 1989 and it remains a foundational resource. Stephen Rossetti wrote *Slayer of the Soul* in 1990 and followed it with several other scholarly books and articles.

Jason Berry's *Lead Us Not Into Temptation* was the first to deal exclusively with the contemporary history of Catholic clergy abuse and it remains the ultimate invaluable historical source. Jason has continued to write...mostly articles but his last book on the subject, *Vows of Silence* probed even deeper into the ecclesial culture. Jason and Gerry Renner's monumental work had its impact. I have no doubt that it was primarily due to their dedication to truth that the boom was finally lowered on Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado.

There have been scores of books published about clergy abuse. Some are based on the personal stories of victims while others have been the result of credible scholarship. I'd like to mention some of the invaluable works that have come forth in past years as well as a few selected titles that are on the horizon. Some of my favorite historical accounts are of course Jason's works, which stand apart from all others. I have found *Gospel of Shame* by Burkett and Bruni, *Betrayal* by the Boston Globe and *Our Fathers* by David France to be accurate historical accounts.

Critical scholarship has extended beyond the historical accounts. Anson Shupe published his fascinating sociological study, *In the Name of All That's Holy* in 1995. That same year, Richard Sipe published *Sex, Priests and Power*. In my opinion these two works probed more deeply than any others into the causality of the present and past of clergy abuse. In 2001 Eugene Kennedy published *The Unhealed Wound* which led the search for answers beyond the celibate clerical culture into the very foundations of the church's sexual theology.

I had not intended to provide an annotated bibliography with this presentation yet there are a few more books that are essential in creating a valid understanding of the complex reality of clergy abuse. I will list only a few of the ones I have found insightful and revelatory:

Candance Reed Benyei, *Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems*.

Barry Coldrey, *Religious Life Without Integrity*.

Donald Cozzens, *Sacred Silence: Denial and Crisis in the Church*

Paul Dokecki, *The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Reform and Renewal in the Catholic Community*.

Louise Haggett, *The Bingo Report: Mandatory Celibacy and Clergy Sexual Abuse*.

Thomas Plante, *Bless Me father For I Have Sinned*.

Thomas Plante, *Sin Against the Innocents*.

Stephen Rossetti, *A Tragic Grace*.

Anson Shupe, *Wolves within the Fold*

Anson Shupe, *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America*.

Of unique and very special import is an outstanding work edited by three mental health professionals entitled *Misinformation Concerning Child Sexual Abuse and Adult Survivors*. The editors, Charles Whitfield, Joyanna Silberg and Paul Fink, have provided a very scholarly and heavily footnoted anthology of clinical articles that dismantle the purported credibility of the "False Memory Foundation." In the same volume they provide credible information about recovered memories and the lasting impact of sexual abuse on victims. This book is particularly important as an antidote to the shallow assertions of many Church spokespersons that recovered memory is an unproven theory proposed mainly to enrich attorneys.

I would certainly add Richard Sipe's other two revolutionary studies of clerical celibacy, *A Secret World* and *Celibacy in Crisis: A Secret World Revisited*. They will soon be joined by two other exceptional scholarly works: *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* by Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea and *Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Roman Catholicism* by Myra Hidalgo. Finally, Marci Hamilton has probed deeply into the civil law response to harm done by the Catholic and other church as well in *God vs. The Gavel*.

I have not included Philip Jenkins's book *Pedophiles and Priests* (1996) as a credible resource because his primary sources appear to have been newspaper accounts. This author did not appear to have any contact with abuse victims or the professionals who have worked with them. This book attempts to shift the blame onto the mythological anti-Catholic media. In short, his book is more of a distraction than a source of insight.

I'd like to conclude my very brief consideration of publications with a word about *Sex, Priests and Secret Codes*. This project started off as a simple research paper, looking into the historical background of the canon or law from the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* that named clergy sex with a minor as a canonical crime. As we worked our way back through canonical history we discovered that the Church's own official documentation revealed the sordid history of clerical violations of mandatory celibacy. We are following this book up with a companion volume that will accomplish two things...we hope: an enchiridion of the ecclesiastical documentation with a commentary

as well as a more detailed look at the recent history of the bishops' response to clergy sexual abuse, beginning in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Looking For Answers in all the Wrong.....and Right Places***

Why has clergy sexual abuse occurred throughout history? Why haven't the Church's authority figures done anything to effectively stop it and help heal the victims? These are the essential questions. They have given rise to a number of other, closely related questions that touch on a variety of aspects of Catholic Church life.

Those whose lives are inextricably intertwined with the institutional Catholic Church have naturally reacted in a defensive manner. This is certainly understandable. The initial reaction to the revelations followed a classic pattern: denial, minimization, blame shifting, and more denial. The overriding tendency was to look for causality *outside* of the ecclesiastical world. The secular culture and media, obsession with materialism, sexual revolution, rejection of the Church's moral teaching and lack of fidelity to vows and commandments were the commonly heard, hard-wired opinions as to the *why* of it all. No one in the hierarchy wanted to look within and certainly no one wanted outsiders looking at the inner workings of the Church's governing system or its clerical culture. Yet that is where the answers are and they are no longer that well hidden. There seems to be an obsession with preserving the hierarchy's credibility and teaching authority by means of more secrecy, denial and authoritarian tactics when in fact total openness and honesty would much better serve the beleaguered institution.

The answers lie within. A massive amount of scholarship has resulted from the clergy abuse phenomenon. While the authority structure and its incumbents have been buried in denial, the outside world and even significant numbers of still-faithful, devout and loyal Catholics continue to reel from the seemingly never-ending effects of the "scandal." The astonishment is directed not so much at the scores of sexually dysfunctional clerics, but at the power structure that allowed it to happen and still can't seem to "get it right."

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have announced that they will commission a study on the "causes and context" of the clergy abuse phenomenon. This is what their web site says:

*Will there be other studies commissioned by the National Review Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops?*

***Yes, the National Review Board will commission a larger study focusing on the “causes and context” of the crisis of sexual abuse of minors by members of the Catholic clergy in the United States.***

*When will this study be commissioned?*

***This study will be commissioned by the National Review Board in the Fall of 2004.***

*Will Requests for Proposals be issued for the “Causes and Context” Study?*

***Yes, RFP’s will be issued and published on this website.***

*When will the National Review Board announce the contract for the study?*

***The National Review Board hoped to announce the awarding of its contract for the Causes and Context study by the first of July.***

***Unfortunately, the Board has not been able to meet that deadline due to changes in its membership, the complexity of the undertaking, and the high quality of the submitted proposals. The members have set a new deadline of August 15<sup>th</sup> for notification of their decision.***

It is now late 2006 and there is still no contract for the study much less a work-in-progress. The past studies, especially the John Jay report, are valuable but their accuracy has been questioned, based on the fact that the bishops themselves were the primary source for the data upon which the research findings were based. The initial National Review Board Report made significant headway in naming some of the relevant causes, nearly all of which were either ignored or devalued by those who had most need of listening to them. Much additional research needs to be done and it cannot be credibly accomplished by the ecclesiastical institution itself. In light of the results of independent scholarship that have already been published, and the negative reaction of the various official Church entities and individual bishops, one wonders if the promised project will ever see the light of day.

The more realistic question is not *when* this study will happen, but *whether* it should happen. While the bishops and the Vatican have been busy trying to put various levels of *spin* on the clergy abuse issue, others have steadily looked it and a consensus has emerged. The results of this consensus are certainly not favorable to the institutional Church with its present governing ideology. Yet they are real and the Church may well mark the beginning of a new day by taking them seriously.

Frank Douglas, a perceptive and articulate lay man from Tucson, is in the process of putting the final touches on a “White Paper” that will serve as an essential resource into understanding the various aspects of clergy abuse. Frank recently offered some realistic and “on target” thoughts about the proposed study and why it should be scrapped. I’d like to move toward the conclusion of this long paper by quoting Frank, and in so doing, mentioning that I agree totally:

*Do we need this \$5 million study? I don’t think so. The evidence is overwhelming what the causes and context are. Let those who have eyes and ears, look and listen. Here are the causes and context:*

*§ An institution with an oppressive, authoritarian structure and culture*

*§ An institution whose officials believe that its governance by an elite all-male, supposedly celibate clergy is divinely ordained and can do no wrong*

*§ An institutional culture of secrecy, silence, and deceit that places more stock in public relations firms than the values of the gospel*

*§ An institutional culture of elitism that places a higher value on the reputation of the institution and its elite, priestly caste than on the safety of children*

*§ Passive bishops and religious superiors who followed orders rather than basic human instincts of right and wrong*

*§ A deferential, naive laity that believed/believes what the bishops tell them*

*No, we don’t need a study. We need a good jolt of strong coffee to wake us up.*

*Let’s save the \$5 million and put it toward a therapy fund for survivors of abuse*

Bravo Frank! You have captured the thoughts of countless people across our country and in Europe as well. I might add my own summary of “causes and context” in amplification of those of Frank Douglas. He has hit on some of the more toxic elements of the institutional Catholic Church culture. I would add the following as necessary subject for research:

1. The *traditional Catholic philosophy of human sexuality* which has created a deeply rooted culture of systemic dysfunction. Sexual shame is at the root of the institutional distrust of the social sciences and of psychology as well. Clerics are formed in an atmosphere that nurtures immaturity, fear of intimacy and even veiled disdain for women. Catholics, clergy and laity alike, are forced to live in fear and guilt for having sexual lives. (*Thanks to Myra Hidalgo for these insights.*)

2. The *moral vacuum* that is so obvious among the members of the clerical elite and among many lay believers as well. Something is wrong when an entire class, the leadership/authority class, cannot see the evil in sexual abuse and its cover-up.

3. The *hierarchical governmental system* which the official church claims is willed by God but for which there is highly questionable scriptural roots. In any case, this system has become an end in itself to the obvious detriment of the members of the Church who are, as Vatican II so clearly said, the *People of God*. It seems that the fundamental structural question is this: *is Christ the center of the Church or is the Vatican the center of the Church?*

4. The *clerical elite* which have given rise to *clericalism* and *anticlericalism* for centuries, has kept the toxic arrogance, secrecy and magical thinking alive throughout much of the Church's history. Has it been so important and essential to the mission of Christ that the physical, emotional and spiritual destruction of the most vulnerable among us is justified?

#### ***The Future: Some Hopes and Cautions***

The most recent cover-ups, Chicago and Santa Rosa are examples, are not aberrations but symptomatic of an enduring attitude. This attitude must be understood and confronted. The lay people *must not* be influenced by the remnants of clericalism which do no more than enable the clearly toxic behavior of some of the official leadership.

We cannot be misled and distracted by rhetoric. The pronouncements of the Bishops' Conference and of many individual bishops are carefully crafted by public relations firms. Their purpose is not to reflect the reality of fundamental change, but to distract while in fact the conference retrenches and retreats from the accountability it must be forced into accepting.

We cannot let our anger and frustration cause us to turn on ourselves. Anger is good and it is not only necessary but justified but we must remember that *we must control the anger and not let the anger with our abusers control us*.

The more progress each one of us makes on our personal path to spiritual and emotional healing, the better equipped we are to look beyond our own emotional needs to the cause before us. All of us are, or were, firm believers in the Church and in Christ's presence in this church. Whether we believe in the structures, customs, hierarchical dogmas, clerical protocols or canonical regulations is not essential to our hope that this Church reflect not the outmoded and often toxic remnants of monarchical splendor, but the equality, charity and compassion of Christ. These are the values that sustained the earliest followers and they are the same values that hopefully will see all of us through this present era of darkness.

