

From **RICHARD SIPE** www.richardsipe.com

More and More Voices of Reason

“...from rank and file Catholics are speaking up about the sex abuse crisis. These people are speaking from their personal pain and experience about the duty of bishops and priests—and their past and present failure—to take responsibility for dealing with clergy abuse that is still a crisis. The reports generated by the National Review Board, The John Jay Survey, and a dozen Grand Jury Reports all point to the fact that “bishops effectively lacked accountability.” Even in their 2002 Dallas meeting the bishops failed to account for themselves, and stated that “fraternal correction” would be applied to any failures of bishops. The bishops then put Robert Brom, bishop of San Diego, in charge of that committee. Brom allegedly abused a seminarian when he was in Minnesota. So much for oversight.

The two voices recorded here, that of a monsignor, Harry Byrne, and a survivor, Dave McGuire, are ***voices worth listening to.***” AWRS

THE DISHONORING OF MY REGIMENT!

Monsignor Harry J. Byrne, J.C.D., 7.24.2008 - Retired

My formerly honored regiment of Catholic priests has been disgraced by an infiltration of pedophiles into its ranks. My colleagues and I bear that dark shadow to this day. It's cause: the failure of many bishops to obey Canon 1395. Yes, it's that simple! The canon orders punishment for a priest, who sexually abuses a minor. Punishment, not therapy! Much less secret reassignment with damage to more children! Furthermore, no bishop has been punished by his superior, as required by Canon 1389, for failure to enforce Canon 1395. Regardless of good intentions, bishops and their superiors are responsible for the effects of what they do or fail to do under their job descriptions. A tiny minority of priests abused children; an estimated two thirds of the nation's bishops secretly reassigned abusers.

Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessor, John Paul II, has on visits here apologized for this shameful abuse. But neither has shown that he understands the problem. If a problem is not understood, it cannot be solved. Both popes see the problem residing in individual priests. No finger is pointed at a bishop. Benedict in Australia recently declared, “I ask all of you to support and assist your bishops in combating this evil”. Sorry! Benedict has it backwards. He should ask the bishops to listen to and work with the laity. They understand the source of the problem; our bishops, for the most part, do not! In his trip to the US, Benedict on April 15, 2008 apologized for the pain caused by the sexual abuse phenomenon. He declared that it had “been badly handled”. Use of the passive voice enabled him to avoid saying by whom it had been badly handled.

John Paul II also seems to have had it backwards. On April 23, 2002, addressing the US cardinals, who had been summoned to Rome, he spoke of “how the Church will help society to understand and deal with the crisis”. Its arrogance, unintended as it may be,

betrays the depth of his misunderstanding: it was society through its media, district attorneys, and trial lawyers that had forced the Church to face its own problem! Later he would reward Cardinal Bernard Law, driven from Boston by his priests and people as poster-boy for those bishops reassigning abusers, to a prestigious church in Rome, with a six-figure salary, and seats on nine governing commissions!

John Paul spoke of “the great harm done by some priests...”. Regarding their superiors, he said, “...many are offended at the way in which the Church’s leaders ARE PERCEIVED to have acted...”. In the Pope’s mind, in the clericalism cast of mind, he and bishops are immunized from direct criticism. John Paul then proceeded to call for “a purification of the entire Catholic community”. Pardon me, please! Do not dare to try to deflect blame on the Catholic community. It belongs on the few miscreant priests and the many miscreant bishops. It is these latter who have been judged responsible, not just by the press, but by our civil courts and judicial system to the tune of \$2 billion, not the bishops’ own money, but the contributions of the faithful!

The clerical mentality - trying constantly to project an ideal, even if false, image of Church - is the underlying cause of thousands of young people damaged, \$2 billion shot, three dioceses bankrupted, and now, in the latest phase, innocent priests becoming victims of allegations of incidents two or three decades past, inadequately investigated by their bishops.

The US Bishops’ Dallas Charter has been a great success in its programs to protect children by vetting personnel and developing educational and awareness programs. As to its provisions to remove allegedly abusive priests, it has been severely criticized by the bishops’ own National Review Board, Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ and eminent canonists for its lack of proportionality - a pat on the bottom treated equally as serial rape, the “one strike, you’re out” rule, and the abandonment of any statute of limitations. The bishop is constituted arresting officer, prosecutor, judge, and appellant bench - an unworkable combination of conflicting roles. Many instances of innocent priests being removed from ministry are now surfacing. Appeals to the US Conference of Bishops have been made, without success, to revisit and amend the Charter’s flawed, purportedly judicial structure. Do the bishops fear that the Church would appear to victims’ groups and the public as backing off its initial determination to reform? If so, here again, clericalism’s cast of mind puts a desirable Church image ahead of the reality of truth and justice.

The Church will begin to solve its problems and resolve its tensions, when, and only when, clericalism and its adherents reverse priorities and place truth and justice ahead of institutional image. Sipe’s web site

RESPONSE TO MSGR. BYRNE

David McGuire, Survivor

Msgr. Byrne,

As a survivor of clergy sex abuse in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, I appreciate the spirit of your message and want to thank you for that. I would, however, like to add my observations ... with all due respect. I do so with an intention of bridging the gap between you (a NY Catholic Insider) and me (a NY Catholic Outsider).

The spirit of accountability you express in your message is most uplifting to me and long sought after. The observation of upper administration's finger pointing to the individual priests rather than the Bishops is a good point. You also defend the community at large and absolve them of responsibility in this crisis. This is where we part ways.

The priests, Monsignors & bishops who chose to not control their sexual desires and abuse minors are at the core of the matter. The Bishops who minimized the issue and re-assigned the offenders thereby spreading the disease of molestation are offenders in their own right. In addition, I would assert that priests and lay Catholics who had knowledge and suspicion of the abuse are also to blame and should be held accountable. These are the people who can make a difference today.

As an illustration of this point, I will make you aware of my truth. I was sexually abused by Rev. Eugene Vollmer at St Thomas the Apostle in West Hempstead from approx 1980 – 1982. This priest is now secreted away in some undisclosed location where I'm sure the surrounding community has no idea of his proclivity for prepubescent boys. At the time of my abuse, Fr. Bob Smith was also a priest in that parish. While sharing a meal one Saturday afternoon, I blurted out a disclosure of the sexual relationship Fr. Gene & I had. Fr. Bob Smith is now a Pastor of St. James Parish in Setauket and continues to deny any knowledge of my abuse. He has done so directly to my mother who has asked him that direct question.

I hold myself accountable as well for not facing my fears at the time and standing up to the community to speak the truth about my abuser and possibly protecting his future victims. There is nothing I can do to change the past but I can create a past I can be proud of by speaking my truth today.

Msgr. Byrne – I find any member of your regiment dishonorable who is not doing everything in their power to get the truth out now. By this, I specifically mean that any person who is not actively supporting Assemblywoman Margaret Markey's bill is dishonorable. Any person who is not actively calling for full disclosure of records is dishonorable. Any person who had knowledge of the abuse and is still holding that truth secret is dishonorable.

As an abuse survivor I will not be satisfied with anything less than a repeal of the current NYS statute of limitations for sex abuse including a window for old cases. I believe this will be the only way the public will be given full knowledge of how far the protection of child molesters within your organization goes. Until there is FULL DISCLOSURE there will be dishonor. Anyone, ordained or otherwise, who does not call for such action today is dishonorable.

I thank you for your sentiments in this message. I also thank you for what you're doing to change a broken and diseased system. I want to encourage you to do more and to keep in mind that until the law changes, molesters are being protected. Please keep in mind that children are currently being abused because the truth has not been fully disclosed.

Dave McGuire