

**JOHN JAY 2011 STUDY ON SEXUAL ABUSE:  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

**William A. Donohue  
President  
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights**

*Bill Donohue holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from New York University. He has published widely, in books and articles, on contemporary social problems. He has also developed college courses on Victims of Abuse and Neglect, and has taught several courses related to this subject.*

*As president of the Catholic League, Donohue has written many articles on priestly sexual abuse and has discussed this issue on a number of radio and television shows.*

*What follows is a critical analysis of the 2011 report by John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010."*

## Overview

In the aftermath of the media blitz in 2002 exposing sexual abuse by Catholic priests, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) created a National Review Board and an Office of Child and Youth Protection to deal with this problem. The Review Board subsequently commissioned researchers from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to study what happened. In 2004, the first study, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons, 1950-2002*, was published. Now it has released its latest study on the causes and context of abuse.

The initial study pinpointed the timeline when the abuse crisis was at its peak, roughly from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, and provided rich data on a host of important variables. What it did not do was account for why this happened. This is the subject of the *Causes and Context* report. Unlike the initial study, this one is fraught with controversy. One reason for this lay with the nature of the inquiry: studies on the causes of social problems generally leave more room for interpretative quarrels with the data than is true of reports of a more descriptive nature. Another reason, more serious, is the reluctance of social scientists to state conclusions that are highly controversial and that run against the grain of the conventional wisdom in the academy. All of this will be addressed, but first a look at what this second study sought to uncover.

Chapter 1 presents the context in which the sexual abuse of minors by priests took hold. It is followed by an historical analysis of the problem. Chapter 3 gets to the thorny issue of accounting for causes. The fourth chapter deals with the way the Catholic Church responded to this matter, and the next one analyzes the rise and decline of sexual abuse. The sixth and last chapter records the conclusions and recommendations of the authors. A wealth of material is presented, including a good overview of the relevant social science literature on the subject.

The "Executive Summary" is a useful guide to what follows. The crisis peaked in the 1970s and occurred at a time of increased levels of deviant behavior in society. The authors cite the role played by the sexual revolution in shaping the environment, and for this they have been attacked by those on the left. The *New York Times*, for instance, opines that this amounts to "sociological rationalization," saying it sounds very much like a "blame Woodstock" explanation.

This is unfair. The authors were asked to put the abuse crisis in context, and it would have been delinquent of them not to cite the social and cultural milieu in which the problem emerged. Moreover, an explanation is not a justification. It should be clear by now that the cultural winds of promiscuity that hit the larger society in the 1960s and 1970s came smashing through the windows of the Catholic Church; it is not an insular institution. Mentioning this is not only defensible, it is good social science.

Celibacy as a cause is quickly dismissed, and that is because it cannot explain the rise and decline of the scandal. In a later section, the report astutely notes that "Celibacy has been constant in the Catholic Church since the eleventh century and could not account for the rise and subsequent decline in abuse cases from the 1960s through the 1980s." The logic is sound.

Importantly, pedophilia is discounted: less than 5 percent of the abusive priests fit the diagnosis of pedophilia, thus, "it is inaccurate to refer to abusers as 'pedophile priests.'" Later we learn that the authors set the age of puberty at eleven, though it must be said that the American Academy of Pediatrics uses the age of ten, and other reputable health sources say the onset of puberty begins at the age of nine. This warrants attention for good reason: the higher the age when puberty is said to begin, the lower the proportion of postpubescent sex that will be recorded. All of this figures into the discussion of pedophilia v. homosexuality.

Early on in the "Executive Summary" we get a glimpse of the controversy to come. "The majority of priests who were given residential treatment following an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor also reported sexual behavior with adult partners."

Now we know from the first John Jay study (and the data are cited several times in this one), that 81 percent of the victims were male, and that almost as many were postpubescent. If we can extrapolate from this, it suggests that acts of abuse were not only mostly of a homosexual nature (pedophilia being largely ruled out), but that the abusive priests also had sexual relations; the partners, as will become evident, were mostly of the same sex. Yet the study contends that sexually active homosexual priests were not more likely to abuse minors. This apparent anomaly will also be addressed in detail.

An interesting piece of evidence shows that prior to 1985, it was the parents of the abused who reported the molestation. Ten years later, most of the reports stemmed from adults who claimed they were abused a decade or two earlier. Now it's the lawyers who are bringing suit, almost all of which are about alleged incidents that took place decades ago. The delay in bringing the accusations become even more curious when one factors in something the authors of this study do not address: the increase in false accusations being made these days.

### *Comparative Data and Tainted Sources*

In the summary, and later in the report, the authors give credit to the Catholic Church for being the only institution in society to do a comprehensive report on the sexual abuse of minors. This complicates comparisons, of course. They attribute much of the progress to "human formation" courses in the seminaries. Whatever the reason, we soon learn something of great moment. It is said that the "incidence of child sexual abuse has declined in both the Catholic Church and in society generally, though the rate of decline is greater in the Catholic Church in the same

time period." This cannot be said enough, especially given the unfair stereotyping of priests and bishops.

Though comparisons with other organizations are hard to make, there are good data with the public schools. Charol Shakeshaft is rightfully cited for her yeoman work on sexual abuse of students by educators. It would have been helpful to report what the Virginia Commonwealth University professor has said about sexual abuse by public school employees as compared to priests. She estimates that "the physical sexual abuse of students in schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests." No one has been able to dispute her conclusion.

It was troubling to read the authors give credibility to advocacy groups that are reflexively opposed to anything the bishops do. For example, there is no organization in the nation that has been more unfair to the bishops than the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). Their animus is so consuming that when the Vatican issued worldwide guidelines on the proper way to handle abuse cases, SNAP issued a broadside against the proposals *the day before they were released*.

The report misrepresents this professed enemy of the Catholic Church as "a national movement of support for victims of sexual abuse by any church leader and, more recently, all victims of sexual abuse by any person in a position of authority." This is nonsense: almost all of its work is directed at the Catholic Church.

The same is true of Voice of the Faithful. Voice is a dissident Catholic group that has worked overtime to condemn practically every decision by the bishops. Just recently, the Catholic League exposed how Voice developed a fraudulent "survey" that sought to paint the priests of the Philadelphia Archdiocese in the worst possible manner. In the report, the authors mention a Voice "survey" of twenty priests who are at odds with their bishop. They actually admit that the "survey" was "distributed to a selection of priests known for their explicit action in support of victims and/or acknowledged for their support by the Voice of the Faithful

(VOTF) organization." Seasoned social scientists should know better than to cite such ideologically tainted data.

Citing BishopAccountability.org as a credible source is also problematic. This website, which tallies accusations against priests, admits that it "does not confirm the veracity of any actual allegation." Not surprisingly, *it attacked the John Jay report the day before it was issued.* Why? Because the authors cited some data from the Catholic Church.

### *Bishops Respond*

The bishops have commonly been criticized for not sufficiently responding to the problem of abusive priests. As it turns out, the report does much to question the validity of this charge. It provides plenty of evidence that when this issue became well known in the mid-1980s, several initiatives were forthcoming.

"In a public statement made in 1988," it says, "the General Counsel of the NCCB [now the USCCB] defined 'affirmative activities' for dioceses to undertake as a proactive response to the issue of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. These activities included the education of diocesan personnel about the prevention of abuse of children, the development of policies to guide responses to a report of abuse, and the importance of working to mitigate the harm to victims and families."

In 1992, the aforementioned recommendations were codified, and became known as the Five Principles. The next year saw the release of a report on priestly sexual abuse, and the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee of Sexual Abuse. Over the next few years, this committee issued reports on treatment centers for abusive priests. However, the Vatican, unlike the American bishops, was slow to respond. As the report notes, when Archbishop Pio Laghi learned of what was going on in the 1980s, he was "shocked, perplexed, and mystified by the entire phenomenon." Yes, many in the Vatican hierarchy were slow to understand the breadth and depth of the problem.

While the bishops were taking this issue seriously, much of what they tried to do, we now know, was in vain. To be exact, they were being briefed in the late 1980s and the early 1990s about the wrong problem, and were similarly misled about the right remedy. It must be stressed that this is not the conclusion of the authors—it is mine. But it is reached by reliance on the data contained in the report.

In the chapter on the organizational response to abuse, Chapter 4, the report says the bishops were offered several presentations by clinical psychologists about pedophilia at their meetings. But we now know that pedophilia was never the problem. So why didn't the authors flag this? It is not hard to surmise that to do so would be to raise questions about the role which homosexuality played. As we shall see, the authors did everything they could to downplay this issue.

In the same chapter, it makes it plain that therapy was being sold to the bishops as the right remedy. "Prior to 1984," it says, "the common assumption of those who the bishops consulted was that clergy sexual misbehavior was both psychologically curable and could be spiritually remedied by recourse to prayer." It also says that *after* 1985, "prompt psychological treatment for the priest was seen as the best course of action and became the primary intervention."

Well, it is painfully obvious by now that the psychologists oversold their competence. It is not hard to surmise that the reason why the authors do not flag this matter—they don't even include treatment in their concluding recommendations—has something to do with their reluctance to indict their own profession.

Both of these issues are critical. If pedophilia was not the driving problem, then it seems that both the psychologists and the bishops wasted a lot of time considering it. Similarly, if therapy was mostly a failure, then informing the bishops that the abusers were successfully treated was doubly troubling: it was precisely this advice that led many bishops to

reassign these supposedly rehabilitated priests; after they were transferred to a different parish, some of them offended again. These factors should have been stressed by the authors.

Regarding the utility of therapy, the report notes that "The use of treatment declines in the 1990s, and this decline reflects concerns about relapse and re-offense." This deserves commentary. If the decline in treatment coincided with a decline in the incidence of abuse, it suggests the failure of psychologists to treat the molesters. This doesn't mean that the psychologists were ill-trained; it means that the problem exceeded their ability to deal with it successfully. We don't blame doctors for not curing cancer, but all of us have a right to know the limitations of their expertise.

Another way the authors let those in the behavioral and social sciences off-the-hook, as well as abusive priests, is to claim that the professional literature did not quite come to grips with the problem of the sexual abuse of minors until recent times. Victimization, they say, was "little understood" at the time when the abuse crisis peaked, and there was "little developing knowledge around the concepts of sexual violation, victimization," and the like. Furthermore, "Priests may have been uncomfortable with their actions but would not have viewed them as criminal or harmful."

It strains credulity to maintain that sexual predators had to await the findings of social scientists before recognizing that what they were doing was wrong. According to this logic, in the 1950s, when the public, including priests, were really in the dark about the consequences of sexual abuse, there should have been more of it then than in subsequent decades. But no one believes this to be true.

More to the point, are we to believe that priests, of all people, did not know that sexual abuse was wrong? Did they not ever hear of the Sixth Commandment?



A more accurate rendering is afforded by Religious Sister of Mercy Sister Sharon Euart, a canon lawyer. She observes that "the Church's canon law has made provision for sexual abuse of minors to be a grave offense since the Middle Ages." In other words, the medieval Catholic Church did not have to await the findings of behavioral and social scientists—which would not be published for hundreds of years—to know that sexual abuse was a sin. The problem in the Church, as the "Murphy Report" on abusive priests in Ireland said, was that "The Church authorities failed to implement most of their own canon law rules on dealing with child sex abuse." Had they done so, in the U.S. as well, matters would have been different.

### *The Role of Homosexuality*

Despite many strengths, what seriously mars the report is its ideological reluctance to deal forthrightly with the role of homosexuality. We live in a time when the rights of homosexuals are ascendant, and talk of a negative nature is not only greeted with suspicion, it is silenced. This is especially true in higher education. It does not exaggerate to say that any professor who is associated with a study that implicates homosexuality as a factor in sexual abuse is setting himself up for trouble. This is unfortunate because unless we come to grips with this issue, our understanding of how this problem emerged will never progress.

Let it be said at the outset that it is not my position that homosexuality causes predatory behavior. Indeed, this argument is absurd. As I have said many times, while it is true that most gay priests are not molesters, most of the molesters have been gay. Nothing in the report changes my mind, and indeed there is much in it that fortifies my position.

Social scientists eschew singling out any one variable as the cause of human behavior, and that is why discussions of uncausality make no sense. Behavior is typically the product of multiple variables, which is why multivariate analysis is the norm. This does not mean, however, that all variables carry equal explanatory weight; they most certainly do not.

All it means is that to attribute behavior to one causative agent is not credible.

By way of example, consider the following. We know that the Irish are overrepresented among alcoholics. The data show that African Americans are overrepresented in the prison population. The Chinese are overrepresented among smokers. Italians are overrepresented among organized crime families. And so on. But no one seriously maintains that inclusion in any one of these racial or ethnic groups determines the negative traits associated with them. On the other hand, where overrepresentation (or underrepresentation) exists, it does so for a reason. It is the job of the social scientist to follow the evidence, and not be driven by ideological concerns.

Certainly, in the priesthood, homosexuals have been overrepresented among abusers. Unfortunately, there are indications that the authors of the report are skittish about being identified with this position, despite their own data. For example, in its discussion of sexual abuse in the Boy Scouts, it mentions that this organization "has been criticized" by "various civil rights organizations" for "prohibiting homosexual Scout leaders." This normative comment is revealing: by duly noting the criticism from elite circles, it tells us something about the concerns of the social scientists.

There are other give-aways as well. "Interestingly," the report says, "an increase in the number of male victims occurred during the peak years of the abuse crisis." Shortly thereafter, we learn that "Interestingly, the use of alcohol and drugs by abusive priests increased significantly during the peak years of abuse (1970s and 1980s), but only for male victims." What is most interesting about these two remarks is that the authors appear almost surprised by what they found.

From my perspective, it would have made more sense to say, "Unsurprisingly" than "Interestingly." Here's why. Four related events emerged at the peak of the crisis that account for what happened: (a)

there was an exodus of heterosexual priests after Vatican II, a large percentage of whom got married (b) the effect of this exodus was to leave behind a greater proportion of homosexual priests (c) a tolerance for sexual expression in the seminaries was evident at this time, leading many previously celibate homosexual priests to act out, and (d) there was a surge of homosexuals into the seminaries. It was the interaction of these four factors, I would argue, that accounts for the increase in male victims at the height of the sexual abuse crisis.

Similarly, they are struck by the fact that alcohol and drug use would increase at the same time the abuse crisis was peaking. But is this hardly surprising: from everything we know about molesters, substance abuse often accompanies sexual abuse.

In the concluding section of the report, it says, "The clinical data do not support the hypothesis that priests with a homosexual identity or those who committed same-sex sexual behavior with adults are significantly more likely to sexually abuse children than those with a heterosexual orientation or behavior."

How the authors came to this conclusion when it plainly admits that "81 percent of the victims [between 1950 and 2002] were male," and that 78 percent were postpubescent, is not only unclear, it is downright perplexing. It gets even more perplexing when we consider that the report takes the issue of pedophilia off the table. So if the abusers weren't pedophiles, and the victims were mostly adolescent males, wouldn't that make the victimizers homosexuals? What else could we possibly be talking about if not homosexuality?

The report says, "As generally understood now, homosexual behavior is the commission of a sexual act with someone of the same sex, in contrast to a heterosexual act, or sexual behavior engaged in by persons of different sexes." But has this not always been true? Why the need to state the obvious? More important, what accounts for their reluctance to state that most of the victims were abused by homosexuals?

We next learn something that weighs greatly on the social scientists. "What is not well understood is that it is possible for a person to participate in a same-sex act without assuming or recognizing an identity as a homosexual." Yes, it is entirely possible for a homosexual not to recognize that he is a homosexual. So what? Isn't it behavior, not self-perception, that objectively defines one's sexual orientation?

What follows next is critical. "More than three-quarters of the acts of sexual abuse of youths by Catholic priests, as shown in the *Nature and Scope* study, were same-sex acts (priests abusing male victims). It is therefore possible that, although the victims of priests were most often male, thus defining the *acts* as homosexual, the priest did not at any time recognize his *identity* as homosexual." It is a false segue to say, "It is therefore possible..." Such twisted logic suggests a failure to confront the obvious.

Let us grant that it is possible for gay priests to think they are not homosexuals. It cannot be said more emphatically that this changes nothing. If someone eats nothing but vegetables and does not consider himself to be a vegetarian, this is surely an interesting psychological issue, but it does not change reality. Subjectively, the vegetarian may think of himself as carnivorous, but his behavior belies his self-perception. Homosexuals, like vegetarians, are defined by what they do, not by what they believe themselves to be.

In the endnotes section (#254), the study says, "it is possible for a man to identify himself as 'heterosexual' because he is sexually attracted to adult women; however, he may commit an act of sexual abuse against a male youth." Let us concede the point. Yes, this may happen. But social science analysis, the authors well know, is informed by what is generally true, and is not driven by anomalies. In this vein, it would hardly change the status of a vegetarian if he were to experiment with hot dogs at a ballpark: he would not always be a practicing vegetarian, but it would not affect his master status.

The sexual identity dodge, and that is what it is, was previously noticed by Hoover Institution researcher Mary Eberstadt. After the abuse crisis hit the news in 2002, she astutely observed that "the only way to argue that gay priests are not largely responsible for the Church's man-boy sex crisis is to choke the life out of ordinary language itself."

Indeed, at that time, Eberstadt offered by way of example the kind of rationale that is strikingly similar to the line of defense employed by the John Jay professors today. "The involvement with boys is homosexual activity, but that doesn't mean the person who's doing it is homosexually oriented." She labels this defense, which was offered by a Jesuit psychologist, as "a typically contorted example" of denying the obvious.

This game is not new. In 1974, Father Donald Goergen, O.P., a member of the Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights, authored a book, *The Sexual Celibate*, wherein he spoke of the "healthy homosexual in heterosexual persons" and "healthy homosexuality in homosexual persons." Sexual identity, he said, is what one *feels*, and sexual maturity, he informed, was bisexuality.

Flawed though this fixation on sexual identity is, to the extent it has any heuristic value, it would have made sense for the authors to probe the sexual orientation of priests. Remarkably, buried on p. 100, we learn that "Data on the sexual identity of priests and how it changed over the years were not collected for this study." If sexual identity looms large in the authors' findings, and if it partly drives their reluctance not to see this as a homosexual crisis, then this kind of data should have been collected.

Another way of dodging the real issue is to discuss priestly sexual abuse in terms of ephebophilia, not homosexuality. An ephebophile is someone who is sexually attracted to adolescents, or to postpubescent persons. It is of such dubious merit that it is not recognized by psychiatrists as having clinical significance, something which the report notes. However, this does not stop the authors from treating it as if it bore useful fruit.

As we have seen, the report details that most of the abuse involved adolescent males, but it is reluctant to identify homosexuality as a problem. How convenient, then, to speak of abuse in terms of ephebophilia instead of homosexuality. The fact is that adult males who have sex with adolescent males are homosexuals. Dubbing them ephebophiles doesn't change reality.

One of the nation's leading students of priestly sexual abuse is Penn State professor Philip Jenkins. He once used the term ephebophilia in his writings, but by 2002 had come to the conclusion that "we should move away from the overly technical term 'ephebophilia.'" He explained his pivot this way: "I now believe that the word frankly communicates nothing to most well-informed readers. These days I tend rather to speak of these acts as 'homosexuality.'"

Jenkins attributed his conversion to Eberstadt. What she has to say about the issue rings true. "When was the last time you heard the phrase 'ephebophile' applied to a heterosexual man? The answer is almost certainly that you haven't. That is because 'ephebophile,' in the technical-sounding nomenclature of the scandal commentary, is a term whose chief attraction is that it spares one from having to employ the words 'homosexual' or 'gay' in attempting to describe exactly which sexual crimes the offending priests have committed." Nothing has changed since: the John Jay authors sport a preference for using this term because it allows them to address the problem without making mention of homosexuality.

Not only is ephebophilia shorthand for homosexuals who prey on adolescents, pedophilia is shorthand for homosexual priests who prey on children. St. Luke's Institute is the most premier treatment center in the nation for troubled priests, and according to its co-founder, Rev. Michael Peterson, "We don't see heterosexual pedophiles at all." If this is true, how can it be that the John Jay study failed to pick this up? To be exact,

if Peterson is correct, wouldn't that mean that virtually all the priests who abused prepubescent children had a homosexual orientation?

It was disturbing to read that more than a third of priest abusers were themselves abused during childhood. This is not inconsistent with the general population: those who were abused as children are more likely to become adult abusers than those who were never abused. It is also disturbing for another reason. The clinical data show that young boys of a homosexual orientation are far more likely to have been abused than their heterosexual cohorts. This alone suggests that homosexual adults are much more likely to abuse minors than heterosexuals.

### *The Elephant in the Sacristy*

One of the most important chapters in the report is Chapter 3, especially the part on "Behavioral Explanations: Causal Factors Based on Individual Experience." Though the authors are unwavering in their determination to see this as anything but a homosexual issue, some of the data they provide actually undermine their thesis. Eberstadt nicely identifies this dodge as "The Elephant in the Sacristy."

The authors gathered clinical data from treatment centers, places where troubled priests were assigned. What they found was that "three quarters of the priests whom we have data had sexual relations with an adult and/or minor after ordination." Given that the minors were mostly male, and beyond puberty, is this not clearly an issue of homosexuality?

Sometimes the goal of trying hard not to recognize the elephant in the sacristy becomes downright ludicrous. "Priests with pre-ordination same-sex sexual behavior who did sexually abuse a minor after ordination were more likely to have a male child victim than a female child victim." But of course. Should we not expect that homosexuals who were active prior to entering the seminary would choose boys to abuse if they were to engage in molestation? And should not data like this tell the authors something about the nature of the problem?

There's more. The paragraph that immediately follows is also noteworthy. "However, after considering pre-seminary and in-seminary sexual behavior separately, only in-seminary (not pre-seminary) same-sex sexual behavior was significantly related to the increased likelihood of a male child victim." In other words, those studying for the priesthood who had sex with other seminarians—that would make them homosexuals—were more likely to abuse a child (male, of course) than gays who were active before they entered the seminary and then stayed celibate. Which means that all eyes should turn to the seminaries, a subject slighted by the authors, but about which we will examine shortly.

The problem of focusing on the sexual identity of the priest, as opposed to his behavior, is evident in the finding that "Those who identified themselves as bisexual or confused were significantly more likely to have minor victims than priests who identified as either homosexual or heterosexual." But if these "bisexual and confused" priests chose to abuse mostly males—and they must have since 81 percent of the victims were male (and nearly 80 percent were postpubescent)—wouldn't that mean that these abusive priests were practicing homosexuality? Again, the emphasis on self-identity gets in the way of reality. Indeed, the attempt to skirt the obvious is not only disingenuous, it is bad social science.

The authors try to say that much of the abuse was situational, a function of opportunity. For example, they note that after girl altar servers were approved by the Catholic Church, there was a "substantial increase in the percentage of female victims in the late 1990s and 2000s, when priests had more access to them in the church." There is more to this than meets the eye.

The authors provide a chart that shows that between 1995 and 2002 there was an increase in the percentage of female victims. What they fail to mention is that the number of allegations made since the 1990s is so small that it distorts a fair comparison to use percentages. For example, between 2005 and 2010, the average number of new credible allegations



made against priests was 8.3. So to employ a percentage-based comparison to judge how things have changed between the years when abuse peaked, and more recent times, is to distort reality (if three of the eight victims were female, that would greatly inflate their percentage as opposed to twenty out of one hundred). Moreover, the sharp increase in the number of unsubstantiated or false allegations—it jumped by 42 percent between 2009 and 2010—should give anyone pause when drawing realistic comparisons (this was not noted by the authors).

If we look at the overall allegations being brought since the initial John Jay study in 2004, independent of when the abuse occurred, here is what we find (the following data are taken from the annual reports published by the USCCB): the percentage of male victims in 2005 was 81 percent; in 2006, it was 80 percent; in 2007, it climbed to 82 percent; in 2008, it jumped to 84 percent; in 2009, it held at 84 percent; and in 2010 it was 83 percent.

Importantly, we find that the most recent study, the 2010 Annual Report, shows that 66 percent of new allegations (independent of when they happened) are alleged to have taken place between 1960 and 1984. It also says, "The most common time period for allegations reported in 2010 was 1970-1974." This is approximately the same time pattern that is reported year after year, and these are precisely the years when the abuse crisis took hold. What matters greatly is that these are the same years when the percentage of homosexuals in the priesthood soared, and when sanctions for sexual expression were weak.

If having access only to boys accounts for the high number of male victims at the peak of the crisis, then this should have been a problem before things got out of control. But the report emphatically shows this was not the case. "A review of the narratives of men who were seminarians in the 1950s, and of published histories of the seminaries themselves does not reveal any record of noticeable or widespread sexual activity by seminarians." The reason it wasn't a problem is because most

priests put a lid on their libido in the 1940s and 1950s. When the lid came off in the 1960s, the crisis began.

There is also something unseemly about the opportunity-based argument. It suggests that if men don't have access to females, they will start hitting on men. This is patently sexist and flatly absurd. Men don't have much access to females in boarding schools and in the armed services, but virtually no one, save for homosexuals, finds himself tempted to choose other men to satisfy his sexual urges. Comparisons with the prison population are also flawed: the men housed there typically suffer from a host of deviant qualities.

There is too much evidence to plausibly conclude that there is no relationship between the overrepresentation of active homosexuals in the priesthood, and their overrepresentation in the sexual abuse scandal.

The report cites the work of Kinsey, but does not say that he was the first to identify a correlation between homosexuality and the sexual abuse of minors. In 1948, he found that 37 percent of all male homosexuals admitted to having sex with children under the age of seventeen. More recently, in organs such as the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the *Journal of Sex Research*, the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy and Pediatrics*, it has been established that homosexuals are disproportionately represented among child molesters. Even gay activists Karla Jay and Allen Young have admitted (see their book, *The Gay Report*) that 73 percent of homosexuals have preyed on adolescent or younger boys.

When the National Review Board released its findings in 2004, Robert S. Bennett, the head of the group, said that "any evaluation of the causes and context of the current crisis must be cognizant of the fact that more than 80 percent of the abuse issue was of a homosexual nature." Furthermore, the National Review Board explicitly said that "we must call attention to the homosexual behavior that characterized the vast majority of the cases of abuse observed in recent decades."

One of those who served on the National Review Board was Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins University. He has said that "This behavior was homosexual predation on American Catholic youth; yet it's not being discussed."

The account by Bennett and McHugh is similar to that of Roderick MacLeish Jr., the lawyer who pressed the case against the Archdiocese of Boston. He concluded that 90 percent of the nearly 400 sexual abuse victims he represented were boys, and that three-quarters were postpubescent.

Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist, has spent years treating sexually abusive priests. He says that "*every* priest whom I treated who was involved with children sexually had previously been involved in adult homosexual relationships." (My emphasis.) His experience is striking, but not unusual. Psychologist Leslie Lothstein, who also treats abusive priests, reports that "only a small minority were true pedophiles."

### *The Seminaries*

When the report was released, the *New York Times* focused on that part which said that "homosexual men entering the seminaries in noticeable numbers from the late 1970s through the 1980s" did so at a time when the abuse problem was leveling off; this calls into question those who claim that the crisis was driven by homosexuality.

First of all, the surge of homosexuals in the seminaries was evident in the 1960s. Furthermore, those who entered at this time, and became abusers, were quicker to do so than their predecessors. In the "Executive Summary," it notes that "Men ordained in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s did not generally abuse before the 1960s or 1970s." Yes, and that is because sexual behavior was not acceptable. Psychologist and ex-priest Eugene Kennedy says that when he was ordained in 1955, the Church did not lack for homosexual priests, but, importantly, "the culture was

intact." The big difference, he says, is that "there was not the acting out" that was later tolerated.

One of the reasons why the abuse peaked between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s has something to do with what the authors mention early on in the report. "Men ordained in the 1960s and the early 1970s engaged in abusive behavior much more quickly after their entrance into ministry." This was also the time when gays made their way into the seminaries in large numbers, and the Church dropped its guard.

Michael Rose, a critic from the right, wrote a book on the subject of priestly sexual abuse, and he maintains that "The big revolution in the seminaries happened in the late 1960s, when a lot of the disciplinary codes were thrown out the window in favor of a new, very much more liberalized, more university-like atmosphere with a lot of freedom and so forth."

Jason Berry, a critic from the left, also wrote a book on this subject, and he found much the same. "In the 1970s, as roughly one hundred Americans left the priesthood every month, most of them to marry, the proportions of homosexuals among men remaining in the ministry escalated." If this wasn't bad enough, consider what Richard Wagner found in his early study of sexually-active seminarians: he reported that 34 percent of his subjects called their sexual partners "distinctly younger."

Father Andrew Greeley uses the term "lavender Mafia" to describe what was going on at this time. He writes that seminary professors not only encouraged their students to attend gay bars, they said it was okay for them to sleep with each other. Things got so bad that Greeley later said the bishops must "clean out the pedophiles, break up the gay cliques, tighten up the seminary, and restore the good name of the priesthood."

Another liberal priest, Rev. Donald Cozzens, has spoken of the "gay subculture" that took hold, especially in the seminaries. The effect of this

condition, he said, was to deter "significant numbers of Catholic men from seriously considering the priesthood." This was certainly the case in seminaries like St. John's in Boston, a haven for practicing homosexuals and abusers in the 1960s. The gay presence was so strong that, according to the *Boston Herald*, they "established networks" that lasted for years.

### *The Resolution of Cognitive Dissonance*

How could all of this happen? How could priests molest minors during the day and look at themselves in the mirror at night? What enabled them to disconnect their beliefs from their behavior? The report comes close to saying how this came about, but stops short of providing an adequate answer.

The best explanations about this phenomenon were made during the 1950s. With good reason, the authors cite the work of sociologists David Matza and Gerald Sykes, and the contribution of psychologist Leon Festinger.

Matza and Sykes contended that most sexual abusers adopted "techniques of neutralization," methods that allowed them, among other things, to deny self-responsibility and to condemn the condemners. The report, to its credit, mentions how abusive priests "blamed church leaders for the abuse and/or the responses to the accusations." Indeed, they "not only condemned the hierarchical leaders of the church for their response to the scandal of abuse, they also held leaders responsible for 'poor socialization' to the life of the priesthood, and in particular for poor seminary preparation." In other words, the molesters blamed the bishops for their behavior.

Festinger offered a more sophisticated account. He said that when an individual holds contrary ideas, he suffers cognitive dissonance, a condition that is ultimately reconciled when one of the thoughts triumphs. More recently, sociologist David Finkelhor has picked up on Festinger's work by applying it to sexual abusers. "According to

Finkelhor," the report says, "abusers are able to excuse and justify their actions to themselves, thereby reducing the barriers of guilt and shame."

Unfortunately, the report doesn't develop this line of thinking further, though it could have. For example, in an earlier section, it notes that "Priests with positive views toward homosexuality were most likely to have post-ordination sexual behavior." It is implausible to think that these priests were unaware that what they were doing was sinful. Their cognitive dissonance found relief, it seems plain to conclude, not by changing their behavior, but by holding to the conviction that homosexuality was not sinful.

A priest from the Archdiocese of Boston explained one of the ways in which homosexuals resolved their cognitive dissonance. They would say things like, "Well, celibacy only applies to not getting married, so since we're not getting married, we can do whatever we want." Jason Berry reports that in a study of 50 gay priests, only two said they were not sexually active. More important, for this discussion, "Sixty percent said they felt no guilt about breaking their vows," and "Ninety percent strongly rejected mandatory celibacy." This was more than "defining deviance down," as Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it in 1992: this was a collective psychological somersault.

Another reason why sexually active homosexual priests did not experience guilt was their conviction that the Church's teachings on sexuality would eventually change. The Church has changed on many issues, the popular refrain goes, and eventually the *institutional* Church will come to see that many of its ideas about sexuality are anachronistic. They also comforted themselves with the belief that the laity were not abiding by many of the teachings on sexuality, suggesting that the Holy Spirit had not blessed them.

The report does not attempt to explain the etiological basis of these self-justifying notions. The evidence shows, however, that it began in the seminaries, beginning in the late 1960s. Quite simply, the resolution of

cognitive dissonance finds its roots in the dramatic increase in dissent that marked this period.

George Weigel put his finger on two major events that contributed to the toleration of dissent: the "Truce of 1968" and the publication of *Human Sexuality* by Anthony Kosnick. While no doubt other factors could be cited, no discussion of this issue can ignore these two factors.

After the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed the Church's teachings on sexuality, most especially its proscriptions against artificial contraception, dissent from the ranks of the priesthood exploded. Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle of the Archdiocese of Washington sought to discipline nineteen priests who were publicly dissenting against the encyclical. But he was rebuffed by the Vatican and had to remove the sanctions. Pope Paul VI feared a schism, which, ironically, happened anyway, if only in a *de facto* manner, and that is why the dissidents won.

The bishops were essentially put on warning: deal with dissident priests in a way that eschews a public controversy. This "Truce" was not lost on the dissidents, many of whom saw an opening to push the envelope. One of those who pushed the hardest was Father Anthony Kosnick.

Under the tutelage of the Catholic Theological Society of America, which commissioned Father Kosnick's work, *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, seminarians were now introduced to a radical interpretation of sexual ethics. Virtually all sexual expression was seen in non-judgmental terms: contraception, cohabitation, homosexuality, swinging, adultery—even bestiality—were treated as morally neutral acts. Gone was the Church's teaching that there are objective moral standards governing sexuality. The Vatican eventually censured the book, but the damage had already been done.

No one seriously maintains that a seminarian who later became an abuser did so because he read Kosnick's volume. It doesn't work that way. But to those seminarians who were dysfunctional, and who rejected the Church's

teachings on sexuality, digesting Kosnick's moral relativism surely helped to resolve whatever degree of cognitive dissonance they were experiencing. And we know how the psychological tension was reconciled—by throwing the Church's teachings overboard.

Catholic dissidents have been at war with the Catholic Church on matters sexual for over a half century, and many continue to push their agenda. Two pro-homosexual groups, Dignity and New Ways Ministry, not only condemn the Church's teachings, they have a history of welcoming known child molesters and promiscuous homosexuals like Paul Shanley into their ranks.

Dignity is utterly shameless. In the mid-1970s, the New York chapter proclaimed, "The evidence seems to indicate that DIGNITY is the work of the Holy Spirit, the vehicle through which the Spirit is welding Gay Catholics into an identifiable community within the Church." Father Enrique Rueda, who wrote a prescient book on this subject, *The Homosexual Network*, properly said this reveals "the subversive nature" of the Jesuit-founded group.

New Ways Ministry, run by a rogue priest and nun, announced in 1980 that the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality was "all too reminiscent of the Inquisition, the Reformation, witch burnings and Nazi Germany." So the proscription against homosexuality, first broached by Judaism, was now seen as something that only a Hitlerian would counsel. It is tempting, but way too simple, to say that these are the words of fanatics: this is the voice that gave ideological cover to abusers. The priest who was the co-director of the group, Father Robert Nugent, was at one time a consultant on sexual minorities for the United States Catholic Conference; it was the lay arm of the bishops' conference at that time.

The really sad thing about this chapter in the Church's history is the enormous support these dissident groups got from those who worked in the Catholic Church. Rueda names the bishops, priests, dioceses, religious orders, nuns, lay groups, seminaries, retreat centers, colleges,



high schools and theological institutes that lent a helping hand. That many dissidents remain working for the Church is known to every honest Catholic who knows anything about the subject.

The late Father Richard John Neuhaus attributed the sexual abuse scandal to a lack of fidelity. He was right. There is no way that priests who are faithful to the precepts of the Church's teachings on sexual ethics could possibly live a life of sexual recklessness. Only by jettisoning the teachings—casting celibacy and chastity as anachronistic—could they do so. Regrettably, such priests were not the only losers in this game of self-justification.