

A CRISIS OF FAITH

William A. Donohue

No figure in the Church sexual abuse scandal is more notorious than Rev. Paul Shanley. Though defrocked priest John Geoghan may be the biggest pervert (he is accused of molesting 130 children), Shanley is the real All Star of sexual deviants. Unlike Geoghan, he publicly advocated the merits of sexual deviance. What shaped Shanley more than anything else was an utter lack of faith.

To understand the crisis in faith, consider what some seminarians were being taught at the time. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, one of the most popular books used in the seminaries was *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*. Written by Rev. Anthony Kosnik, it is a very sophisticated case for moral relativism. For Kosnik, there was no such thing as truth or absolutes. It follows that it makes no rational sense to declare anything taboo.

Now imagine how sweet this must have sounded to the likes of Shanley. Although the bishops eventually withdrew the book, the idea that there is no reality save for what culture delivers was firmly embedded in the seminaries.

It is indisputable that Shanley has been advocating pedophilia, homosexuality, incest and bestiality for decades. We know this because the information comes straight from the files kept on him by the Archdiocese of Boston. After this was known, and after he publicly advocated sex between men and boys (he was at the formative meeting of the North American Man/Boy Love Association in 1978), he was promoted to pastor. NAMBLA's motto, by the way, is "eight is too late."

The person who got Shanley going was Humberto Cardinal Medeiros. In 1970, three years after accusations of sexual abuse by Shanley were reported to the archdiocese, Cardinal

Medeiros appointed Shanley his “representative for sexual minorities.” To be sure, Shanley was not selected at random for this bizarre position. He was selected because he could be trusted to do the job.

Throughout the decade, Shanley would lecture around the country on the merits of man-boy sex, incest and bestiality. When the bishop of Dallas, Thomas Tschoepe, heard Shanley promote pedophilia, he roared laughing, and he did so in front of third and fourth year seminarians. We know this because this is the testimony of a great priest, Father Joseph Wilson, currently serving in Queens, New York.

Thanks to Peggy Moen of the Wanderer, we know that Shanley believed there were 34 sexual minorities. No doubt those who exercise their sexual preference by fornicating with corpses (necrophiliacs) were among those whom he ministered to in an official capacity.

While this was happening, Shanley served as a chaplain to Dignity, a homosexual group that claims to be Catholic notwithstanding the fact that its members totally reject every Church teaching on sexuality. He was also selected by the United States Catholic Conference (until recently the civil arm of the bishops) to serve on the Young Adult Ministry Board. His role was to educate young people about the plight of sexual minorities.

In 1979, Cardinal Medeiros put an end to Shanley’s “special ministry.” Shanley’s response was to publicly condemn Medeiros for the cardinal’s admonition that gays should abstain from sex. Shanley branded this “virtually useless advice.” His boldness worsened when ten years later he criticized the revision of two new oaths issued by the Vatican: the Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity. When this was made public, the Archdiocese of Boston excused Shanley saying no priest had to take the new oath.

Shanley did what he did for several reasons. But it is wrong to dismiss him as simply a sick person (though he surely is). To do so lets him off the hook. Shanley knew exactly what he was doing. Difficult as it is for us to believe, he did what he did because he liked it. And he knew there would be no consequences.

To this something else must be added. He did what he did because his faith had collapsed. Worse, some in the hierarchy had lost their faith as well, which explains why they didn't have the fortitude to censure him. Had Shanley been an open advocate of racism or anti-Semitism, he would have been removed. But because his sins were sins of the flesh, and because sexual deviance was quietly tolerated, he continued to act with abandon.

Shanley should have been stopped decades ago. He openly defied Church teachings—rhetorically and behaviorally—and nothing was done about it. That it took the media to find him and the civil authorities to stop him is embarrassing.

So after the bishops meet in Dallas, and after the guidelines are written, there will still be something left on the table: the crisis of faith. There will be no real progress until this issue is squarely addressed.