

ASSESSING GAY PRIESTS' ROLE IN THE SCANDAL

Prior to the February Vatican summit on clergy sexual abuse, Vatican observer Edwin Pentin wrote that it was "not clear" whether "the role of homosexuality in the abuse crisis" would be addressed. It wasn't. And one thing is for sure: every effort to downplay the role of gays is being made.

A front-page story in the February 18 edition of the *New York Times* is typical of the way most of the media are covering this subject. "Studies repeatedly find there to be no connection between being gay and abusing children. Yet prominent bishops have singled out gay priests as the root of the problem, and right-wing media organizations attack what they have called the church's 'homosexual subculture,' 'lavender mafia,' or 'gay cabal.'"

Furthermore, Cardinal Blase Cupich, who was at the summit, says that while most of the problem is a result of "male on male" sex abuse, "homosexuality itself is not a cause." He says it can be explained as a matter of "opportunity and also a matter of poor training on the part of the people."

All of these statements can be challenged. First of all, not all studies have shown that there is no link between homosexuals and the sexual abuse of minors.

A good summary of the literature that shows the central role of homosexual priests in the abuse scandal can be found in an article by Brian W. Clowes and David L. Sonnier. The most recent research that challenges the conventional wisdom on this subject is the study by D. Paul Sullins, a sociologist who teaches at Catholic University of America. He found that the link between homosexual priests and sexual abuse was strong.

Let it be said emphatically that it is morally wrong to blame all gay priests or to bully someone who is gay, be he a priest or a plumber. It is also wrong to call on all gay priests to resign: such a sweeping recommendation is patently unfair to those gay priests who have never violated anyone.

However, it is not helpful to the cause of eradicating the problem of sexual abuse in the priesthood to dismiss a conversation about the obvious. We can begin by talking honestly about who the victims are.

Notice that the *New York Times* says there is no connection between homosexuality and abusing "children." This is a common way of framing the issue, and it is a deceitful one. Most of the victims were adolescents, not children. In other words, the problem is not pedophilia.

We know from one report after another, in both this country and abroad, that approximately 80 percent of the victims are both male *and* postpubescent. Ergo, the issue is homosexuality. This does not mean that homosexuality, per se, *causes* someone to be a predator (Cupich is technically right about that), but it does say that homosexuals are disproportionately represented in the sexual abuse of minors. We cannot ignore this reality.

The American Pediatric Association says that puberty begins at age 10 for boys. A study of more than 4,000 boys examined by a doctor, nationwide, also put the figure at age 10. The John Jay report on priestly sexual abuse found that less than 5 percent of the victims were prepubescent, meaning that pedophilia is not the problem.

The John Jay researchers try to protect homosexuals by saying that not all the men who had sex with adolescent males consider themselves to be homosexuals. But self-identification is not dispositive. If the gay priests thought they were giraffes, would the scholars conclude that the problem is

bestiality?

It was the John Jay researchers who first floated the “opportunity” thesis that Cardinal Cupich picked up on. This idea is flawed. Predator priests hit on boys not because they were denied access to girls, but because they preferred males. More important, there is something patently unfair, as well as inaccurate, about this line of thinking.

It suggests that many priests are inclined to have sex with minors—and will choose the sex which offers them the greatest opportunity. There is no evidence to support this unjust indictment. Also, girl altar servers date back to 1983, after Canon law was changed. They became even more common in 1994 when Pope John Paul II ruled that girls can be altar servers.

If the “opportunity” thesis had any truth to it, we should have seen, over the past few decades, a spike in altar girls being sexually abused by priests, but this has not happened. Indeed, 80 percent of the victims are still male and postpubescent.

The notion that “poor training” is responsible for the scandal raises the obvious question: If all seminarians, straight and gay, were trained the same way (they were not segregated), then why didn’t the “poor training” that the heterosexuals experienced lead them to sexually abuse minors?

Finally, every honest observer who has examined this subject knows there is a homosexual subculture in the Church. Two months ago, Pope Francis said “homosexuality is fashionable and that mentality, in some way, also influences the life of the church.” Previously, he spoke about the “gay lobby” in the Church. Moreover, a 2016 decree on training for priests spoke about the “gay culture.” Also, it was Father Andrew Greeley who used the term “lavender mafia.”

Pope Francis is not a “right-winger,” and neither was Greeley.

We need to stop, once and for all, playing politics with this issue and face up to some tough realities.