

# BENEDICT XVI INCURS WRATH OF CRITICS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on reaction to an essay released last week by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI:

If only he would just shut up. That is the consensus of liberal and dissident Catholics to the brilliant essay by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on the roots of clergy sexual abuse. They made it clear that their support for dialogue is a ruse.

The first sentence of the front-page news story in the April 12 edition of the *New York Times* set the tone: "In his retirement, Pope Benedict XVI is apparently tired of hiding." The next sentence notes that he previously "declared he would 'remain hidden to the world.'"

Get it? He should have stayed under his rock.

Why the anger? The *Times* says that his essay "amounted to the most significant undercutting yet of the authority of Pope Francis," a view also held by John Thavis; he used to pose as a non-partisan journalist for the Catholic News Service.

The Catholic Left, after decades of criticizing Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, have become very protective of Pope Francis. They are upset with Benedict for raising issues they prefer not to talk about. Like homosexuality.

Julie Hanlon Rubio, who teaches at the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, is angered at the retired pope's "willingness to blame a permissive culture and progressive theology for a problem that is internal and structural." Rachel Donadio of *The Atlantic* finds it "strange" for him to talk about the "destabilizing" forces of the sexual revolution. Similarly, Thomas Farrell at the website opednews finds such talk "rubbish."

It is fun to watch this dance. Usually, we are told that we cannot understand any social problem unless we come to grips with the environment that unleashed it. But when it comes to offering a root cause analysis of the clergy abuse scandal, we are told to focus on internal Church issues, not the cultural milieu in which it was embedded. In other words, we are expected to believe the scandal took place in a social vacuum.

Brian Flanagan at Marymount University says that to blame the 1960s and “a supposed collapse of moral theology” is “embarrassingly wrong.”

From Marquette University we learn that theology professor James Bretzke says it is wrong to say that “liberal theologians” fostered an irresponsible sexual ethics that helped to create the problem.

They are in denial. Are they aware of a book by Anthony Kosnik, *Human Sexuality*, which was supported by the Catholic Theological Society of America? Or how about a book by the same title by Crooks and Bauer? These three authors maintain that there is no such thing as a deviant sexual act, and both volumes were assigned reading in many seminaries in the 1970s. Wouldn't this suggest a collapse of moral theology?

Some try to say that the sexual revolution had nothing to do with the problem because clergy sexual abuse occurred before the 1960s. This is the position taken by *Washington Post* columnist David Von Drehle. It is also accepted by Andrew Chesnut; he teaches Catholic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Church historian Christopher Bellitto subscribes to this view as well.

It won't work. Every study on the subject has shown that there was no crisis until the 1960s. Obviously, there were cases of abuse in the previous decades, but most of those priests who had sick urges kept them in check, until, that is, there was no penalty for acting out. Just read what happened in Boston.

Some are chagrined because Benedict only spoke about the abuser, not the enabling bishop. Michael Sean Winters feels this way. Tom Kington of the *Los Angeles Times* shares this view, saying the essay was “incendiary” for not discussing what Pope Francis stressed, namely the role of clericalism.

At least Winters and Kington don’t look as clueless as Bellitto or David Gibson. The former says, “The essay essentially ignores what we learned there,” a reference to the February summit in Rome on this subject. Gibson, the director of Fordham’s Center on Religion and Culture, said that Benedict’s essay “runs against everything said and done at the February summit.”

Precisely. And for good reason—the summit never addressed why molesting priests acted out. It was content to discuss why some bishops made lousy decisions. Clericalism may account for why some bishops were enablers, but it is of no explanatory value understanding why abusing priests did what they did. It took Benedict to bring balance to the discussion.

It is impossible to honestly engage the issue of clergy sexual abuse without explaining the role of homosexual priests, though Benedict’s critics try to do so.

For example, we have the spectacle of New Ways Ministry, a totally discredited outfit, telling us it is a “red herring” to mention homosexuals. Jamie Manson at the *National Catholic Reporter*, which is also partly responsible for the crisis, tells us that Benedict’s “radically homophobic theology” is responsible for the homosexual subculture.

Finally, we have Massimo Faggioli from Villanova University. He tries to deflect the obvious—the pernicious role played by homosexual priests in the scandal. He provides a link to one of the John Jay reports on the subject, as if that settles the issue.

This is a familiar retort, and it is unpersuasive. The John

Jay researchers did an excellent job assembling the data—there is no reason to conclude that the two studies were deficient in terms of their methodology or data collection—but as with any study, conclusions drawn from the data are open to interpretation.

The researchers report that 8 in 10 of the molesting priests had sex with postpubescent males, and that less than five percent of them were pedophiles. There is only one word in the English language to describe such behavior: homosexuality.

Yet the researchers conclude that homosexuality is not the issue. How did they manage to skirt the obvious? They said not all the priests who had sex with adolescents identified themselves as homosexuals.

Now if the homosexual priests identified themselves as heterosexuals, would anyone in his right mind conclude that heterosexuals accounted for most of the problem? Self-identification is an interesting psychological variable, but it is not a substitute for drawing truthful conclusions based on behavior. A dwarf is still a dwarf even if he stands on stilts and announces he is no longer a dwarf.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI did the Catholic Church a great public service in outlining his thoughts on priestly sexual abuse, and there is nothing his detractors can do about it.