

BOGUS CHARGES AGAINST PRIESTS ABOUND

Rev. Michael P. Orsi

***Catholic Priests Falsely Accused: The Facts, The Fraud, The Stories* by David F. Pierre, Jr., Mattapoisett, Massachusetts:
www.TheMediaReport.com**

David Pierre is one of the country's leading observers of the Catholic Church abuse narrative. In *Catholic Priests Falsely Accused: The Facts, the Fraud, the Stories*, he presents case studies backed by hard data which clearly demonstrates some of the injustices foisted on Catholic priests and the Church.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) is identified by Pierre as a major culprit in advancing the destruction of innocent priests. He outlines the methods used by the group to manipulate clergy abuse charges and how they play the media. The organization, he says, provides talking points and staging tips for accusers and their attorneys at the workshops they hold at their yearly conference. SNAP's tactics, he says, have grossly exaggerated the clergy abuse problem in the Church. He contends, that with data garnered by expert crime investigators, it is not unreasonable for an observer to deduce that "approximately *one third*" of all accusations against Catholic priests are entirely false or greatly exaggerated.

It is important for Church officials to challenge and, if need be, litigate every accusation. The results of these investigations should be publicized. And, if the allegations prove to be false, the name of the accuser, if an adult, should be made public. Not to do so lets the lies live on and continue to undermine the Body of Christ. "According to a sworn declaration submitted to the Los Angeles County Superior

Court in November of 2010," Pierre writes, "attorney Donald Steier claimed, 'One retired F.B.I. agent who worked with me to investigate many claims in the Clergy Cases told me, in his opinion, about ONE-Half of the claims made in the Clergy Cases were either entirely false [or] greatly exaggerated.'"

Other culprits identified by Pierre adding to the abuse frenzy are plaintiffs' attorneys and Church insurance carriers. Attorney fees, which are usually up to forty percent on a settlement have made pursuing allegations, even false ones, very lucrative for this new breed of ambulance chasers. These attorneys realize that many claims will be settled out of court because insurers and the Church would rather pay out "large scale blanket settlements" than go to trial where litigation costs will be exorbitant. They also fear losing a case due to a jury prejudiced against the Church or sympathetic to those claiming victim status. This may, in fact, incur greater putative and compensatory damages.

Dubious claims of the widely discredited psychological theory of "repressed memories," have been used to put priests at a significant disadvantage in obtaining justice. In these cases, individuals claim that a priest molested them years earlier and assert that they repressed the memory due to the trauma. The alleged incident is often recalled, Pierre says, "through the suggestive questioning of an unprincipled therapist and, often under hypnosis." Naturally, hypnosis leaves people open to the power of suggestion. Many experts believe that repressed memory is simply bogus. Dr. James McGaugh, from the University of California, Irvine, an expert in the area of memory, states, "I do not believe there is such a thing as a repressed memory... And there's absolutely no proof that it can happen. Zero. None. Niente." Dr. Richard J. McNally, Director of Clinical Training in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University claims, repressed memory therapy is "the worst catastrophe to befall the mental health field since the lobotomy era."

Regarding Diocesan Review Boards, Pierre says, “they are very often composed of individuals who have profound sympathy for victims of abuse. These panels consist of child welfare advocates, social workers, therapists, child psychologists,” as well as “individuals who were actual victims of clergy abuse.” Perhaps this is why these boards tend to be less than sympathetic to accused priests. Another reason for these review boards’ bias may be the “credible” evidence standard that they use when determining whether a priest should be put on Administrative Leave. “When an accuser comes forward to allege abuse from decades earlier,” Pierre writes, “one can deem the accusation ‘credible’ simply because the accuser can show that he or she lived at a given time in the same general geographical area of a priest.”

Media bias needs to be met with the facts. For example, Pierre says, a book by Marci A. Hamilton—a professor at the Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, in New York City—entitled, *Justice Denied: What America Must do to Protect Its Children* (2008), excoriates the Catholic Church for its handling of the abuse crisis and accuses the Catholic leaders of orchestrating the sexual abuse of children. Yet, according to legal experts, the book contains “a number of outright falsehoods and misleading passages.” For instance, when attorney L. Martin Nussbaum and his wife, Melissa, reviewed Hamilton’s book for *First Things* in an article entitled, “MarciWorld” they noted that “Hamilton claimed, that in some states, a child abused at age seven would have only until the age of nine to sue the abuser. That is simply false in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.”

Pierre notes that, “Hamilton has represented SNAP and has done extensive legal work for the organization.” She is also, according to Pierre, closely associated with the Philadelphia district Attorney’s Office, which Pierre shows to have a particular animus toward the Church. He says, “the Philadelphia D.A.’s Office has not targeted any other

organization for its past abuses with the same prosecutorial zeal." Pierre then cites statistics that show public school teachers have a much higher rate of abuse than Catholic priests. Yet, they have escaped the same kind of scrutiny by Hamilton.

Hamilton is a strong advocate of dropping the "statute of limitations" for private institutions under the auspice of "protecting children." However, Pierre claims, "Hamilton has made it her crusade to lobby state legislatures to remove the statute of limitations in order to inflict maximum financial and institutional damage to the Catholic Church." Alarmingly, Pierre points out that, "public schools have a special immunity from being sued." As a government entity, they are shielded by the doctrine of "sovereign immunity," which only allows an accuser a limited window to make an accusation and limits lawsuit damages, making claims less profitable for attorneys and their clients.

It is important, Pierre believes, to aggressively market the fact that the Catholic Church now has the safest environment in the world for protecting children. Data collected from The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) indicates allegations of abuse of minors to be on average less than 10 per year since 2005 nationwide. The Church's safeguards and accomplishments need to be widely disseminated by Her authorities and related organizations.

The most troublesome accusations are those leveled against dead priests. Pierre reports that, according to CARA, 43% of all priests accused of abuse in 2010 were deceased. How can the dead defend themselves? The simple solution in many cases for a diocese is to simply pay out. And, unfortunately in some dioceses, the deceased priest's name is added to a diocesan website listing him as a pedophile or accused of being one. The intangible losses in doing this far exceed the monetary costs. The ruination of a priest's reputation along with the sorrow that it causes to his family and those whom he had

served who have fond memories of him— giving them their First Holy Communion, presiding over their marriage, or offering them advice and consolation in times of need— is a source of great discouragement among the faithful.

There is an old cliché, “the best defense is a good offense.” Church officials have been too reluctant to expose the lies about priests, the obvious anti-Catholic bias in the media, the greed and the anti-Catholicism of some in public office which feeds the abuse crisis. This has caused a decline in clergy morale and vocations to the priesthood. Large monetary settlements have hindered Catholic evangelization and charitable work and have led to the bankruptcy of some dioceses. But, worst of all, it has also caused a loss of confidence by many Catholics in the institutional Church.

A sure way to ameliorate the injustices perpetrated against priests and to rehabilitate the reputation of the Church would be to re-examine the cases of those priests found guilty due to false or dubious abuse claims filed against them. The widely reported case of Fr. Gordon MacRae, of the Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire, would be a good place to start. Pierre outlines it in his book. It is quite obvious that Fr. MacRae did not receive a fair trial according to the facts cited in a piece published in *The Wall Street Journal*. MacRae’s accuser, a fifteen year old boy, had a lengthy juvenile record and presented doubtful evidence in trial testimony. The judge even went so far as to order the jury to “disregard inconsistencies in Mr. Grover’s (his accuser) testimony.” Father MacRae, protesting his innocence, refused a plea bargain deal of two years in prison. Now he is serving a 67 year sentence. His own, now retired, bishop believes him to be innocent. What a moral boost this would be for the nation’s priests and for the Catholic laity if the Church in New Hampshire began a petition drive to have this case reopened!

In a chapter entitled, “Kathy Told a Story,” Pierre chronicles the tale of an Irish woman, Kathy O’Beirne, who wrote of the

abuse she sustained at one of Ireland's institutions that cared for young women, the Magdalene Home. She reports being severely abused by nuns and having been raped by a priest. "Her chronicle," says Pierre, "enthralled readers." It received rave reviews and achieved bestseller status. Except, the woman's siblings claim "Our sister was not in the Magdalene Home... Our sister has a self-admitted psychiatric and criminal history, and her perception of reality has always been flawed." A further investigation revealed Kathy's book to be a fraud. Nevertheless, this book continues to secure five star reviews in Amazon.com's U.K. site and has respectable sales in England and Ireland.

If the late Paul Harvey were able to comment on this book, he would have certainly said, "And now the rest of the story." This book is concise, easy to read, filled with verifiable data, and points out the problems with both the ecclesiastical and civil responses to the clergy abuse crisis.

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