

DESCENT TO THE GUTTER

Sexual abuse of minors is unfortunately a social problem that touches virtually every segment of the population where adults and minors interact on a regular basis. Nowhere is this less a problem today than in the Catholic Church: the norms it has adopted have led to a massive reduction in priestly sexual abuse since its peak in the early 1980s. But recent reports about old cases continue to surface, the latest being stories out of the Philadelphia archdiocese.

When journalists and commentators discuss sexual abuse, they rarely offer a graphic description of the sex act; they properly assume that readers get the gist of what occurred when they say someone was raped. [Note: the vast majority of priestly abuse cases did not involve rape.] But when it comes to priests, a different standard is evident: the most detailed descriptions are offered.

Without getting into the gutter with those whose prurient interests make ordinary voyeurs appear normal, it will not be repeated here exactly what was said.

Among the most offensive chroniclers was psychologist Mary Gail Frawley O'Dea: her anger, which was so over the top as to require professional treatment, wrote a piece in the *National Catholic Reporter* that is impossible to top. The *Philadelphia Daily News* went tabloid with its "made for *Hustler*" contribution. Maureen Dowd's affection for lurid accounts was on display in the *New York Times*, and it so impressed the increasingly unhinged Christopher Matthews that he read a selection from it on the air.

We know what's going on: get Catholics so riled up that they will demand the Church adopt the liberal agenda on sexuality. They just don't get it: it was the detour from orthodoxy that allowed the abuse scandal to take hold in the first place.