

NOT ALL SEXUAL ABUSERS ARE EQUAL

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It was Jesus who said that “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Nothing nuanced about that. But do Americans believe this to be true? It depends on who the abuser is.

Only a small minority of the less than 1.5 percent of priests in the past 40 years who have been removed from the priesthood for sexual abuse are pedophiles; almost all of the guilty had sex with adolescents or adults, not children. And almost all of the guilty had sex with males (the figure in Boston is 95 percent—see the *Boston Globe*, February 7). The sexual abuse scandal has, justifiably, been the source of much criticism, both among Catholics and non-Catholics. Also justified is the acute moral outrage that has been reserved for those who would dare abuse a child. But what has gone largely unnoticed is the selective nature of this outrage.

If the source of the outrage were the harm done to minors, then it should not make one iota of difference who the abuser is. Regrettably, it does. What matters to many is whether the offender is a priest or someone else. This has nothing to do with holding priests to a higher standard: priests should be held to a higher standard because we rightly expect more from them. But there is something very disturbing going on when priests who harm kids are condemned while others are roundly defended and even heralded for doing so. Consider what happens when celebrities are implicated in sordid conduct involving kids.

- Pete Townshend is a rock guitarist idol and co-founder of The Who. He was arrested on January 14, 2003, for possession of child pornography. Model Jerry Hall, formerly married to Mick Jagger, immediately said she was "an avid supporter" of Townshend; rock sensation Elton John told reporters, "I love Pete and my thoughts are with him."
- R&B star R. Kelly was arrested on January 20, 2003, on new charges of child pornography. But it had no impact on the sales of his new record. A music editor for a magazine explained, "It seems to imply that he can get away with it and people are comfortable with his behavior."
- Rob Lowe is one of the stars of the TV series, "The West Wing." Being arrested in 1988 for making a sexually explicit videotape of a 16-year-old girl did not hurt his career.
- Filmmaker Roman Polanski is being praised by many movie critics as a genius for his latest film, "The Pianist." Polanski was previously convicted of drugging a 13-year-old girl with pills and champagne and then raping her in his bathtub.
- When rock star Gary Glitter was spending time in jail in 1999 for downloading more than 4,000 images of children as young as 2 involved in sexual acts, the Pepsi Center in Denver was still playing his most famous song after every goal scored by the local hockey team.

- When comedian Paula Poundstone went back to work after pleading no contest to charges of child molestation, she told a packed house in New Jersey, "This is my first night performing since I've been a criminal." The *Bergon Record* said, "The audience roared."
- Pee Wee Herman was recently arrested for possession of child pornography; the cops also found 100,000 items of gay porn in his house. "Friends" star Courteney Cox and husband David Arquette rushed to his defense; Arquette dubbed Herman "a great guy."
- When Michael Jackson was the target of child molestation charges in 1993, Elizabeth Taylor said she believed "100 percent in Michael's integrity"; Jackson settled out of court for millions. After Jackson more recently admitted that he likes to sleep with boys, Taylor, in a general discussion of the famed singer, told Larry King "I love him." When asked why, she said, "We have such similar backgrounds."

There you have it. What a sizable segment of the public seems to be saying is that we ought to be able to forgive and forget when celebrities abuse children, but we need zero tolerance when priests do it. It's not the kids that matter—it's who the abuser is.

There's something else going on here as well. The New York-Hollywood axis of smut, and those who support it, want the Catholic Church to fail. What it comes down to is that these people do not want to be told that their promiscuous lifestyle

is sinful.

Sadly, this represents the Clintonization of our culture. In other words, shamelessness has been mainstreamed. Because it is nothing if not shameless that the same men and women who rush to put a medal around the neck of celebrities for sexually abusing children rush just as fast to put a millstone around the neck of priests who do so.