

THE ORDEAL OF FATHER GORDON MACRAE

This is an excerpt of Bill Donohue's article that was published last month online. Please see Father MacRae's website, www.thesestonewalls.com, for more information.

On September 23, 1994, Father Gordon MacRae was shackled and led out of Cheshire County Superior Court in Keene, New Hampshire. He had been convicted by a jury of sexual assaults that allegedly happened nearly twelve years earlier. The 41-year-old priest was sentenced to a prison term of 33 1/2 to 67 years.

MacRae says he is innocent. So do those who have looked into his case. Count me among them. "I did not commit these crimes," MacRae says. "In fact, no one did." Pointedly, he maintains that he wasn't the one on trial. "The priesthood itself was on trial. No evidence whatsoever was introduced to support the claims. My accuser committed a \$200,000 fraud, the amount in settlement he received from my diocese."

No one has covered this story better than Dorothy Rabinowitz, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*. MacRae's accuser, Thomas Grover, has a history of theft, drugs, and violence. More than anyone else, he is responsible for the ordeal that MacRae has endured. He provided not a single witness, even though the alleged offenses took place in populated areas; the places were so busy that it is unlikely that no one would notice if something were awry. Moreover, Grover was coached by professionals, people more interested in getting a priest than justice. His attorney put him in touch with a counselor who came in quite handy. She stood at the back of the courtroom during Grover's testimony, away from the sight of the jury, instructing him when to feign crying. On cue, he cried loudly, often at some length.

At the trial, Grover said MacRae sexually abused him when he was 15-years-old during five episodes. Rabinowitz captures the essence of what was really going on. "Why, after the first horrifying attack," she asks, "had Mr. Grover willingly returned for four more sessions, in each of which he had been forcibly molested? Because, he explained, he had come to each new meeting with no memory of the previous attack." If this is not preposterous enough, the accuser said he had "out of body" experiences that blocked his recollection. Just as we might expect, Grover conveniently changed his story many times.

Before the trial, MacRae had twice been offered a plea deal, but he turned them down. Midway through the trial, he was offered another opportunity. It sounded reasonable: plead guilty and the sentence is one to three years; refuse and risk spending decades in prison. He refused for a third time. The trial moved forward and he was found guilty. The sentence was obscene: it was thirty times what the state had offered in the plea bargain.

Why do I believe MacRae is innocent? We have been writing to each other for years, and I have read his account many times. The clincher year for me was 2012: recently discovered evidence emerged showing how manipulative his accuser is.

Grover's former wife and stepson say that he is a "compulsive liar," "manipulator," "drama queen," and "hustler" who "molded stories to fit his needs"; he could also "tell a lie and stick to it 'till his end.'" When he was confronted with his lies, he would lose his temper and sign himself into the psychiatric ward at a local hospital.

The former wife and stepson testify that Grover bragged how he was going to set up MacRae and "get even with the church." What the stepson said is worth repeating at length:

"Grover would laugh and joke about this scheme and after the criminal trial and civil cash award he would again state how

he had succeeded in this plot to get cash from the church. On several occasions, Grover told me that he had never been molested by MacRae...[and] stated to me that there were other allegations, made by other people against MacRae and [he] jumped on and piggy-backed onto these allegations for the money."

Grover's former wife, who acknowledges that he "never stated one word of abuse by [MacRae]," knew early on in their marriage that something was wrong. She had two daughters when they met, and both were frightened of him from the start. They saw him as a "sick individual who was obsessed with sex and teenage girls"; thus did they label him a "creep" and a "pervert." They recall that he was "constantly eying" and groping them. When they woke up in the middle of the night, they would sometimes find him in their room, between their beds, staring at them.

When the trial was over, and Grover got a check for over \$195,000 from the Diocese of Manchester, he photographed himself with \$30,000 in cash. He bragged to his buddies, with bags of cash in his hands, that he had succeeded in "putting it over on the church." That was in March 1997. In August, he took his former wife with him to Arizona where he blew it on alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, and other vices. In a three-day gambling spree, he went through \$70,000 and he even had a Nevada casino hunting him down for another \$50,000.

Please keep Father MacRae in your prayers. We can never give up hope.