POLITICS COLOR JOHN JAY STUDY

The following is an excerpt from Donohue's "John Jay Study on Sexual Abuse: A Critical Analysis." The longer version was sent to all the bishops and is available online at catholicleague.org.

In the aftermath of the media blitz in 2002 exposing sexual abuse by Catholic priests, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) commissioned researchers from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to study what happened. In 2004, the first studied the nature and scope of the problem, covering the years 1950-2002. Its latest study addresses the causes and context of abuse. Despite many strengths, what seriously mars the new report is its ideological reluctance to deal forthrightly with the role of homosexuality.

Both studies report that the crisis extended from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, peaking in the 1970s. This was a time of increased levels of deviant behavior in society, and the authors properly cite the role played by the sexual revolution in shaping the environment. This is not a justification—it is an explanation. It should be clear by now that the cultural winds of promiscuity that hit the larger society in the 1960s and 1970s came smashing through the windows of the Catholic Church; it is not an insular institution.

Celibacy as a cause is quickly dismissed, and pedophilia is similarly rejected as an explanatory variable. The report astutely notes that "Celibacy has been constant in the Catholic Church since the eleventh century and could not account for the rise and subsequent decline in abuse cases from the 1960s through the 1980s." The logic is sound.

Importantly, pedophilia is discounted: less than 5 percent of

the abusive priests fit the diagnosis of pedophilia, thus, “it is inaccurate to refer to abusers as ‘pedophile priests.’”

The bishops have commonly been criticized for not sufficiently responding to the problem of abusive priests. As it turns out, the report does much to question the validity of this charge. It provides plenty of evidence that when this issue became well known in the mid-1980s, several initiatives were forthcoming.

Unfortunately, much of what the bishops tried to do, we now know, was in vain. To be exact, they were being briefed in the late 1980s and the early 1990s about the wrong problem, and were similarly misled about the right remedy. It must be stressed that this is not the conclusion of the authors—it is mine. But it is reached by reliance on the data contained in the report.

The report says the bishops were offered several presentations by clinical psychologists about pedophilia at their meetings. But we now know that pedophilia was never the problem. So why didn’t the authors flag this? It is not hard to surmise that to do so would be to raise questions about the role which homosexuality played. As we shall see, the authors did everything they could to downplay this issue.

The report also makes it plain that therapy was being sold to the bishops as the right remedy. “Prior to 1984,” it says, “the common assumption of those who the bishops consulted was that clergy sexual misbehavior was both psychologically curable and could be spiritually remedied by recourse to prayer.” It also says that *after* 1985, “prompt psychological treatment for the priest was seen as the best course of action and became the primary intervention.”

Well, it is painfully obvious by now that the psychologists oversold their competence. It is not hard to surmise that the reason why the authors do not flag this matter—they don’t even

include treatment in their concluding recommendations—has something to do with their reluctance to indict their own profession.

Regrettably, the authors allowed political considerations to color their conclusions on the role homosexuality played in driving the scandal. Let it be said at the outset that it is not my position that homosexuality causes predatory behavior. Indeed, this argument is absurd. As I have said many times, while it is true that most gay priests are not molesters, most of the molesters have been gay. Nothing in the report changes my mind, and indeed there is much in it that fortifies my position.

“Interestingly,” the report says, “an increase in the number of male victims occurred during the peak years of the abuse crisis.” From my perspective, it would have made more sense to say, “Unsurprisingly” than “Interestingly.” Here’s why.

Four related events emerged at the peak of the crisis that account for what happened:

• there was an exodus of heterosexual priests after Vatican II, a large percentage of whom got married

• the effect of this exodus was to leave behind a greater proportion of homosexual priests

• a tolerance for sexual expression in the seminaries was evident at this time, leading many previously celibate homosexual priests to act out

• there was a surge of homosexuals into the seminaries. It was the interaction of these four factors, I would argue, that accounts for the increase in male victims at the height of the sexual abuse crisis.

The authors insist that homosexuality played no role in the abuse crisis, but their own data undermine this conclusion.

For example, they plainly admit that “81 percent of the victims [between 1950 and 2002] were male,” and that 78 percent were postpubescent. So if the abusers weren’t pedophiles, and the victims were mostly adolescent males, wouldn’t that make the victimizers homosexuals? What else could we possibly be talking about if not homosexuality?

“What is not well understood,” we learn, “is that it is possible for a person to participate in a same-sex act without assuming or recognizing an identity as a homosexual.” Yes, it is entirely possible for a homosexual not to recognize that he is a homosexual. So what? Isn’t it behavior, not self-perception, that objectively defines one’s sexual orientation?

Here is a good example of the flawed thinking on homosexuality that colors the study. “More than three-quarters of the acts of sexual abuse of youths by Catholic priests, as shown in the *Nature and Scope* study, were same-sex acts (priests abusing male victims). It is therefore possible that, although the victims of priests were most often male, thus defining the*acts* as homosexual, the priest did not at any time recognize his *identity*as homosexual.” It is a false segue to say, “It is therefore possible…” Such twisted logic suggests a failure to confront the obvious.

Let us grant that it is possible for gay priests to think they are not homosexuals. However, this changes nothing. If someone eats nothing but vegetables and does not consider himself to be a vegetarian, this is surely an interesting psychological issue, but it does not change reality. Subjectively, the vegetarian may think of himself as carnivorous, but his behavior belies his self-perception. Homosexuals, like vegetarians, are defined by what they do, not by who they think they are.

In the endnotes section, the study says, “it is possible for a man to identify himself as ‘heterosexual’ because he is sexually attracted to adult women; however, he may commit an

act of sexual abuse against a male youth." Let us concede the point. Yes, this may happen. But social science analysis, the authors well know, is informed by what is generally true, and is not driven by anomalies. In this vein, it would hardly change the status of a vegetarian if he were to experiment with hot dogs at a ballpark: he would not always be a practicing vegetarian, but it would not affect his master status.

The authors gathered clinical data from treatment centers, places where troubled priests were assigned. What they found was that "three quarters of the priests whom we have data had sexual relations with an adult and/or minor after ordination." Given that the minors were mostly male, and beyond puberty, is this not clearly an issue of homosexuality?

Here's another example of skewed logic. They say, "after considering pre-seminary and in-seminary sexual behavior separately, only in-seminary (not pre-seminary) same-sex sexual behavior was significantly related to the increased likelihood of a male child victim." In other words, those studying for the priesthood who had sex with other seminarians—that would make them homosexuals—were more likely to abuse a child (male, of course) than gays who were active before they entered the seminary and then stayed celibate.

The problem of focusing on the sexual identity of the priest, as opposed to his behavior, is evident in the finding that "Those who identified themselves as bisexual or confused were significantly more likely to have minor victims than priests who identified as either homosexual or heterosexual." But if these "bisexual and confused" priests chose to abuse mostly males—and they must have since 81 percent of the victims were male (and nearly 80 percent were postpubescent)—wouldn't that mean that these abusive priests were practicing homosexuality? Again, the emphasis on self-identity gets in the way of reality. Indeed, the attempt to skirt the obvious is not only disingenuous, it is bad social science.

The authors try to say that much of the abuse was situational, a function of opportunity. For example, they note that after girl altar servers were approved by the Catholic Church, there was a "substantial increase in the percentage of female victims in the late 1990s and 2000s, when priests had more access to them in the church."

However, if having access only to boys accounts for the high number of male victims at the peak of the crisis, then this should have been a problem before things got out of control. But the report emphatically shows this was not the case. "A review of the narratives of men who were seminarians in the 1950s, and of published histories of the seminaries themselves does not reveal any record of noticeable or widespread sexual activity by seminarians." The reason it wasn't a problem is because most priests put a lid on their libido in the 1940s and 1950s. When the lid came off in the 1960s, the crisis began.

There is also something unseemly about the opportunity-based argument. It suggests that if men don't have access to females, they will start hitting on men. This is patently sexist and flatly absurd. Men don't have much access to females in boarding schools and in the armed services, but virtually no one, save for homosexuals, finds himself tempted to choose other men to satisfy his sexual urges. Comparisons with the prison population are also flawed: the men housed there typically suffer from a host of deviant qualities.

There is too much evidence to plausibly conclude that there is no relationship between the overrepresentation of active homosexuals in the priesthood, and their overrepresentation in the sexual abuse scandal.