

POPE INTERVENES IN SCANDAL; MEDIA BLITZ HITS LEAGUE

On April 23-24, Pope John Paul II summoned U.S. cardinals to Rome indicating a real turning point in the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church. The Holy Father clearly understands the gravity of the problem and that is why he directly intervened in this matter.

Even before the cardinals met with the pope, some activists were anxiously seizing the moment to push their agenda. "Some are predicting that the Church in the U.S. will breakaway once and for all from Rome," we said, "while others are maintaining there will be an end to the ban on married priests and women's ordination." We countered saying "This kind of hyperventilation is not helpful and it sorely misunderstands the nature of the problem and what is likely to be done about it."

Indeed, we went further arguing that "The fundamental problem is a lack of discipline: misconduct with impunity has hurt the Church. There are some who say that a bishop cannot afford to lose a priest. It is high time to ask whether they can afford to keep some of them." Everyone now has their eyes fixed on Dallas when the bishops meet collectively on June 13, 14 and 15. It is at this meeting that necessary correctives will be determined.

The media repaired to the Catholic League for commentary in a way that was unprecedented. From the New York Times to the Los Angeles Times, as well as from newspapers from France and Australia, the Catholic League was tapped for its reaction. Virtually every television talk show contacted the league. To name just a few, we were called on by "The Today Show," "Hardball with Chris Matthews," "Hannity and Colmes," "Alan Keyes is Making Sense," "Wolf Blitzer Reports," "Your World

with Neil Cavuto,” “The Fox Report with Shepard Smith,” and “The NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw.” William Donohue was also interviewed for specials hosted by Peter Jennings of ABC and Garrick Utley of CNN.

We were mostly pleased by the news coverage but were unhappy with many columnists and cartoonists. Instead of focusing on those in the wrong, they took wide swipes at the Catholic Church. Thus did they promote a stereotypical view of priests. We will continue to defend the masses of priest who are good men while never defending the indefensible.

JUSTICE IN OKLAHOMA

An inappropriate joke about a Catholic priest is told at a function sponsored by the state of Oklahoma. A Catholic layman in attendance objects. Nothing is done. He contacts the Catholic League. An apology is forthcoming. Here's what happened.

At a “Partnership Series” substance abuse workshop, an instructor opened his seminar by telling an offensive joke about a Catholic priest who consumes alcohol and engages in sex. When a Catholic complained to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, he got nowhere. He was told the matter would be investigated. When that didn't happen, he contacted us.

William Donohue wrote to the commissioner of this department, Dr. Terry Cline, lodging a complaint. He said he was troubled that “a presenter at a state seminar who identified himself as a representative of the state of Oklahoma, the U.S. military and the Episcopal Church would tell a

bigoted joke.” Donohue also mentioned that the complainant got no satisfaction from Cline’s office despite assurances he would.

Dr. Cline wrote to Dr. Donohue extending an apology for what happened. He also enclosed a letter of apology written by the offending instructor to the person who complained. As a result of this incident, Dr. Cline said “it is our intent to highlight the importance of cultural and religious sensitivity in all presentations through our letter of agreement with speakers.”

WE HAD TWO CHOICES: SHUT UP OR SPEAK UP

William A. Donohue

The Catholic League had two choices in dealing with the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church: shut up or speak up. I decided we should speak up.

To shut up would have been to throw the floor open to every dissident voice in the Church. Moreover, bigots would have gone unanswered. So I decided it was better to jump into the ring so as not to allow the adversaries of the Church to carry the day. Fortunately, the overwhelming response from our members has been to approve of this stance.

It hasn’t been easy. Indeed, this has been the most difficult chapter in my professional life. But it’s worth it. This is, after all, the Church that I love. And by running from TV studio to TV studio, I have been able to reach millions of Americans, and not just Catholics. That’s the great advantage of having an office in mid-town Manhattan.

Our role in the scandal is twofold: a) to emphasize the good work done by most priests while refusing to defend how the Church has handled this matter and b) to fight those who seek to exploit this issue for partisan purposes. At times it can be taxing, but I believe we have carved out the right path. The credibility of the Catholic League would be nil if we made the mistake of being defensive and apologetic about the scandal. No, some in the Church dropped the ball big time.

There are something like 46,000 priests in this country and most are outstanding men who give their life to the Church. But as no less than Cardinal O'Connor himself once wrote, "some priests are evil." Yes, that was his wording. It is important to acknowledge this because some Catholics still think it is a sign of disloyalty to criticize the Church for any reason. I love my country and my religion and it is precisely because I do so that I jump on leaders who mess up. Disloyalty suggests putting a knife in the back of those whom we purportedly serve. That is not what is going on in this instance.

Those with their agendas love what's going on. I have confronted several of the dissidents on TV and every time I do I go right at them, charging that they don't believe a word the Church teaches on sexuality. So why should anyone be surprised that they are now asking for married priests, women priests and a complete overhaul of Church teachings on abortion, homosexuality, etc.?

Ending celibacy and allowing women to become priests would solve absolutely nothing. The problem, deep down, is a fundamental lack of discipline and accountability coupled with an astonishing lack of courage. It does not exaggerate to say there is more insubordination with impunity tolerated in the Catholic Church than at the New York Times. It is high time a giant STOP sign were placed in seminaries, parishes, Catholic campuses and diocesan offices.

It is not comforting to ask someone to find another job. But sometimes it must be done. Saying "no" does not come easy, especially to those ensconced in a culture of casualness. And that would include many in the Church. The therapeutic culture that we live in has done far more damage than it has good and it is about time everyone recognized it.

In the 1980s, I was speaking to a woman professor of psychology about a misbehaving student of mine. I told her how I handled him—I laid it on the line and told him to shape up or ship out. "Oh, that's great, Bill," she said. "Tough love." "Tough love?" I answered. "Gee, and I just thought it was common sense."

The problem with common sense is that it isn't a common property these days. It used to be that it was caught: it was part of catching norms, values and sensibilities that are a natural part of growing up. Nowadays, I guess, it has to be taught. Unfortunately, those teaching it too often lack the faculty themselves.

Over and over again, I have said to the media that what is needed to reform the Catholic Church is not a blue ribbon commission, nor further reliance on lawyers and psychologists. What we need is more common sense and the courage to act on our convictions.

This issue of Catalyst is different from any other. Instead of using our news releases as a basis upon which to write a story for Catalyst, I decided to present them just the way the media receives them. This way you get a chance to view the raw copy. Now you know how we entice the media to respond. Our news releases are informative, timely, short and provocative. That's what the media wants and that's what we deliver.

To those who despair, I remind them that now is not the time to throw the towel in. Now is the time to clean house and start anew.

A TIME FOR REDEMPTION

BY DAVID REINHARD

I think the Roman Catholic Church has turned the corner on its priest sexual abuse scandal. Yes, turned the corner.

True, the stories about pedophile priests—the crimes and cover-ups—will fill the news and fuel the outrage of Catholics, non-Catholics and anti-Catholics for some time to come. The courts, civil and criminal, will continue to mete out some measure of justice in these cases for a good while.

And commentators of all stripes, faiths and motivations will offer their opinions on what ails the Catholic priesthood. But, in recent weeks, the church has finally moved to right itself, and not because of any recent statements from the Vatican or American bishops, welcome as they may be. I've seen the first fitful steps at two churches in Portland [Oregon], and I'm sure many other Catholics have witnessed the same thing at their churches. It happens when a priest breaks from discussing the daily scripture readings and devotes his homily to today's all-too-routine headlines. It happens when a priest marshals the courage and grace to speak about the unspeakable—a priest's sexual abuse of children, what Philadelphia's Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua calls "the most depraved of moral aberrations."

How difficult it must be for these priests to address this with their congregations, particularly with altar boys or girls and other youngsters in attendance. It must be uncomfortable as, well, hell. Certainly, it is for the most faithful Catholics.

But silence will not suffice. Screening out unfit candidates

for the priesthood and maintaining zero-tolerance for priests who have sex with minors—a category that extends beyond pedophilia, which is about adult sexual attraction to prepubescent children—are important. It's encouraging that most dioceses have taken action. But sometimes talk is as important as action, particularly when the actions have occurred in the church's bureaucratic warrens and within secret legal settlements.

Facing this scandal head-on—finally speaking about the unspeakable—is, I think, vital for the priests and their parishioners, not to mention the church. Priests and parishioners need each other now more than ever. Their responses to the scandal are probably not so different.

That became clear—painfully and comfortingly—on a recent day when Father Paul Peri stood in the center aisle at St. Michael's in downtown Portland and poured out his heart. He wanted to talk about the proverbial elephant in the living room, the Catholic topic everyone and no one was discussing at church services. So he talked to the congregation.

He talked about how sad he was for the victims of this abuse. He talked about how angry he was at those who had brought shame on the church and, yes, the media's hyping this story out of proportion. He talked about the shame he feels and his worry that this scandal will turn away men seeking the priesthood. He talked, as well, about the priests he knows.

They're probably not so different from the 40,000 other priests across the nation. They get up each day, celebrate Mass, teach and minister to the poor, the lonely, the dispossessed. They're not without sin, but they are without scandal. They live in the light, not the darkness. Yet they are not the public face of the Catholic clergy these days—Boston's defrocked priest John Geoghan is—and the scandal of this maddening reality was Peri's own cross to bear this Lent.

He ended on an upbeat note that day, but it was not Peri's hopeful words that seemed to move his flock. It was the mere discussion of "the issue" and the fact that his feelings—his sorrow, anger, shame, and frustration—mirrored their own. Did the tears come from witnessing Peri's pain or from a relief that our common scandal was brought out of the darkness and into the light?

Parishioners, of course, cannot know what it means to be a priest these scandal-filled days. If you're a priest, how does anyone know you haven't molested a child? How do you defend yourself against suspicions when the crime itself occurs in private? You almost have to prove something didn't happen; you almost have to prove a negative.

It's an impossible burden that makes an often lonely calling lonelier. In the current atmosphere, the clerical collar becomes a kind of choker. As one priest told me, "You stand up there and feel people who don't know you suspect you of being a child molester."

This has been a season of suffering for the Catholic clergy and laity. You hear or read the stories of clerical sexual abuse, as well as reports that molester-priests were shuffled from one parish to another. You're outraged on almost every level. You know this goes on in other institutions. The news is full of reports of sexual abuse in other religions and helping professions. There's scant evidence that pedophilia is any more prevalent in the Catholic Church than in the larger population.

But the gap between the church's moral teaching and these acts—the hideous behavior and the church hierarchy's apparent tolerance of it—is great. It makes the church a natural and legitimate target of special outrage. You know these pedophile priests are a relative handful of men who've served in the priesthood over the years. You know these cases most often go back decades when pedophilia was seen more as a moral

failing—"go and sin no more"—than an intractable psychological pathology.

But you also know that a single instance of sex abuse is one too many, particularly when it's committed by an alleged man of God and facilitated by the church's actions; particularly when it alienates a young person or family from God's love.

If Peri's homily put the current scandal in human context, Father Emmerich Vogt's homily a few days later at Portland's Holy Rosary Priory placed today's news in a historical and cultural context.

This is not the first time that scandal has rocked the church. In fact, said Vogt, the church was born in the scandal of Judas. "Judas priests" have been with the church throughout history and continue to this day—not only in today's pedophile priests, but in priests and other religious figures who soft-pedal the church's moral teaching on abortion, homosexuality, adultery, illegitimacy and pornography. Even the papacy has had its scandal. Pope Alexander VI's four illegitimate children in the 15th century are but one example.

This certainly isn't the first time Catholics have been called on to speak out against scandalous clerical behavior. As Vogt noted, St. Francis de Sales was asked to do so in his day. "Those who commit these types of scandals are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder," said the 17th-century bishop. Their terrible example destroys the faith of others in God.

The church might be a divine institution, but it's filled with imperfect humans who are inevitably products of their time and culture. And look at our era's sexed-up atmosphere. What should we expect? Our priests come from our culture's families. Vogt said it's mystifying to witness a secular culture that celebrates or tolerates all of today's degradation now zeroing in on the church's sex scandal.

Yes, the stories of abusive priests command attention.

Nobody's more eager to bring justice to these priests than the parishioners who love their church and children, or the priests who are unfairly tarred.

But, as a Catholic, the attention often seems outsized to me. Is the church being singled out for special scrutiny here? Is it because the church has resisted the postmodern moral order? Is it because the church maintains an unshakable belief in absolute truth and opposes all of today's media-friendly hobbyhorses—abortion, relaxed sexual mores and all the rest? Is it because there are many other agendas at work?

What else to conclude when Catholics and non-Catholics offer up as fixes such things as ending priestly celibacy or opening the Catholic priesthood to women? In New Jersey, an Orthodox rabbi will soon go to trial on charges of groping two teen-age girls. In South Carolina, a Baptist minister is serving a 60-year prison sentence for sexually abusing 23 children. In Maryland, a former Episcopal priest was convicted recently of molesting a 14-year-old boy. In Portland, the Mormon Church announced last fall a \$3 million settlement in a lawsuit brought by a man claiming he was abused by a high priest in the early 1990s. Celibacy and the all-male clergy didn't lead to the sins of these religious leaders.

And yet, however disproportionate the current targeting of the Catholic Church may be, this sad reality remains: Some Catholic priests violated their vows and their parish's children, and the hierarchy didn't respond in the best interests of its children. Priests and parishioners together must say, "Enough." Today's Judas priests must find no sanctuary in the Catholic Church.

Past scandal, Vogt assured his flock, has always produced good men and women to renew the church. We've seen the first stirrings of this in places like St. Michael's, Holy Rosary and other parishes across the country.

Yes, the sex-with-minors scandal is infuriating, depressing and embarrassing. But there's worse to endure. As St. Francis de Sales also said about scandal in the church, "While those who give scandal are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder, those who take scandal—who allow scandals to destroy their faith—are guilty of spiritual suicide."

Yes, the church will have to carry this cross well beyond Lent. But Catholics are ever a hopeful people who believe in the redemptive power of suffering. We are, this day reminds us, an Easter people.

David Reinhard is an associate editor for the Oregonian newspaper. This article originally appeared in the March 31 edition of the Sunday Oregonian.

NEW BOOK ON PIUS XII

Sister Margherita Marchione, Ph.D., has a new book on Pope Pius XII that we would like to recommend. *Consensus and Controversy: Defending Pope Pius XII*, draws on extensive documentation from the war years. It can be purchased from Paulist Press for \$24.95 plus shipping and handling. Call toll free at 1-800-218-1903.

APOLOGY NOTED

In my March "President's Desk" article, I wrote about the Copia art exhibit. In doing so I mentioned how I didn't care a fig about Catalonian traditions (the offending artist is Catalonian). One of our members, Dr. Josep G. Llauro, is Catalonian and was offended by my comment. I want to apologize to him for appearing insensitive to his heritage.

— *William A. Donohue*

SWEEPS WINNERS

The first prize winner of the Spring Sweepstakes was C. Romano of Fallbrook, California. Second prize was claimed by June Moore of Holly Springs, North Carolina. Urban Fuerst of Delphos, Ohio, picked up the third place prize. Congratulations to all three and many thanks to all those who participated in the Spring Sweeps.

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY GENERAL SEEKS TO TEAR DOWN CHURCH-STATE WALL

Catholic League News Release
March 8, 2002

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY GENERAL SEEKS TO TEAR DOWN CHURCH-STATE WALL

Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly has announced an ambitious plan to deal with the problem of child molestation by priests in the Boston Archdiocese. He proposes to involve his office in the recruitment, selection, training and monitoring of priests. Catholic League president William Donohue commented on his plan today:

"On February 13, John Roberts of the Massachusetts ACLU was quoted as saying that the climate that has been created over the problems in the Boston Archdiocese reminds him of 'the old McCarthy era.' We now know who the new Joe McCarthy is—Attorney General Thomas Reilly. In fact, Reilly is worse than McCarthy. McCarthy was best known for his 'guilt by association' tactics. Reilly takes 'guilt by association' to new heights by assuming that any young Catholic man interested in pursuing the priesthood must subject himself to the scrutiny of the state.

"The Catholic League has thus far stayed out of this controversy because it is not our job to police the Church. We are here to defend individual Catholics and the institutional Church against defamation and discrimination. In short, we know our place. It's too bad Attorney General Reilly doesn't know his. But if he pursues his power grab he'll quickly learn what it is: some judge will put him in his place. That's after Reilly is introduced to the First Amendment."

Note: Subsequent to this news release, Attorney General Reilly reversed himself saying he would not go forward with his plan.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER DOESN'T JUSTIFY USING RICO

Catholic League News Release

March 22, 2002

RIGHTEOUS ANGER DOESN'T JUSTIFY USING RICO

It is alleged that thirty-two years ago a man (whose identity is unknown) was sexually abused by former bishop Anthony O'Connell; O'Connell recently resigned as Bishop of Palm Beach after admitting he abused a teenager, Christopher Dixon, in the 1970s. The man who is filing suit is suing O'Connell and the three dioceses where he worked: Jefferson City, Missouri; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Palm Beach, Florida. The bishop and the three dioceses are being sued under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

"If I were abused by a priest I would sue him. Fortunately, almost all the priests I know are good men. But some, as Cardinal O'Connor admitted, are evil.

"Righteous anger, however, doesn't justify the use of RICO. G. Robert Blakely, the Notre Dame professor who wrote the law, said it was aimed at organized crime. Notwithstanding its intent, RICO has become one of the most free-wielding legal clubs of our time. It has been used by the ACLU to punish pro-life activists who were simply invoking their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Interestingly, although RICO was written to stop the kind of racketeering that exists in the pornography industry, the ACLU has recommended against using it on the war on pornography. In short, this is the wrong remedy for an admittedly outrageous crime.

“As the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church unfolds, it is important that people cool their jets. Just as it is wrong for the guilty to go free, it is equally important that the innocent not be punished. To sue the three dioceses where O’Connell worked is wrong: the men and women who work there should not pay for the sins of their former priest. Casting the net too wide is just as bad as dropping it altogether.”

PRIESTS UNDER SIEGE: THE MEDIA’S ROLE

Catholic League News Release

March 22, 2002

Reports are surfacing that many Catholic priests are under siege in the wake of the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. Catholic League president William Donohue commented on this phenomenon today:

“Virtually every priest I know is very angry over the sex abuse scandal in the Church. They are good men who would never commit or countenance evil acts against children or adolescents. But they also object, quite rightfully so, to feeling under siege. Take, for example, the instances cited today in the *New York Post*’s front-page story. Priests are being verbally attacked in public and are the object of invective. Similar stories have come to my attention.

“The media have an obligation to expose scandal, whether it be in the Catholic Church or in government. Most have acted responsibly. But some are actively feeding the problem. For

example, in the 'Page Six' section of today's *New York Post*, there is a vicious cartoon showing a priest in the confessional smoking a cigarette, with a bottle of booze next to him and his pants down around his ankles. On the other side of the screen is a boy who asks, 'Anything yuh wanna confess to me?' Evidently, the *New York Post* hasn't figured it out: the very problem of priests under siege it decries is a function, in part, of its own tolerance for Catholic-baiting.

"Speaking of cartoons, cagle.com lists hundreds of professional cartoons. The ones that depict Protestants, Jews and Muslims are mostly innocent jabs. The ones that depict gays are either innocuous or deride anti-gays. And then there's Catholics. On the front page it lists a special section called 'Pedophile.' There are 18 cartoons of a sweeping nature condemning all priests.

"On September 11, 29 Muslims attacked the U.S. And the first thing out of every leader's mouth was to admonish Americans not to blame all Muslims for the deeds of a few. Fine. But when it comes to a tiny minority of rotten priests, it's okay to slam them all. Which only proves that anti-Catholicism is the nation's biggest prejudice."