

WHY THE SCANDAL WILL CONTINUE

William A. Donohue

The *Boston Globe* broke the story on the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in January 2002. Two years later, it is evident the scandal will not go away. Don't get me wrong—it is neither enabling bishops nor molesting priests who are prolonging the scandal—it is a diverse group of people who have an ideological, emotional or pecuniary interest in making sure the clock keeps ticking.

To be more specific, there are Catholic bashers in the media who won't let go of it. Working alongside of them is another band of ideologues—Catholics in our own ranks for whom the scandal is manna from heaven: they are the “I-told-you-so” gang of reformers who are seizing the moment to advance their agenda. Some of the victims' advocates, as well as some of the victims themselves, are so emotionally invested that they are impervious to reason; nothing can comfort them. Even worse are those psychologists who—in their own sick way—wallow in this kind of stuff. And, of course, there are some lawyers who are so inflamed by hate and greed that only an exorcism could cure them.

When news of the scandal was first breaking, it made sense to think that more bad news would soon follow. Similarly, immediately after Cardinal Law resigned, many Catholics voiced concerns that the scandal may not have run its course. These people are not a problem. The ones who are a problem are precisely those who, for reasons listed above, have a vested interest in milking the scandal for all it is worth. Here's a sample of their despair over the last two years.

Edward Greenan is the Rhode Island coordinator for Voice of the Faithful. Dick Ryan is an active member and promoter of the group from Long Island. One of his counterparts in

Syracuse is Jane Fraser. All have told the press that “this is just the beginning.” Margery Egan, talk-show host in Boston, waxes romantic with her refrain, “[this is] the beginning of bringing the Church home.”

Then there are those who smugly remark to the media that “this is only the tip of the iceberg.” Those who prefer this phraseology include: Widener University professor William R. Stayton; Ohio victims’ attorney Bob Steinberg; dissident Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether; national Voice of the Faithful leader Steve Krueger; Virginia Voice of the Faithful spokesman Wayne Koch; and Susan Archibald, president of the victims’ group Linkup.

Rodney Ford, an alleged victim who has gotten plenty of media attention, likes to say that the crisis in Boston “will never end.” Similarly, Father Thomas Doyle, an embittered priest, predicts “there is no end in sight.” Outdoing both of them is Dr. Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, a sex-abuse psychologist and advisor to the bishops: “You will see some kind of a bubble in 2005, when the people who were abused in the 1990s come forward.” It remains to be seen whether her bubble will burst in 2006 when 2005 turns out to be a bust.

Then there are the Catholic experts who never tire of telling us that the scandal is a systemic failure. It is not a matter of human failing, they instruct, it’s emblematic of an institutional failing so deep as to require radical surgery. This is the perspective of such popular dissidents as Notre Dame priest Richard McBrien, ex-priest Eugene Kennedy, ex-priest James Carroll, ex-priest Daniel Maguire, ex-priest Richard Sipe and ex-seminarian Garry Wills. (Their mostly “ex” status fits perfectly with the picture of despair profiled in this piece.) In sum, they want us to believe that it’s the barrel that stinks—not a few rotten apples.

In temperament and outlook, these people remind me of some of the college professors with whom I worked for 16 years.

Personally and socially dysfunctional, they were alienated from their students, their colleagues, their country, Western Civilization and God. That is why they were perennially depressed. One of the tell-tale signs of such people is an inability to smile, save for those instances when it's done at someone else's expense.

So the scandal is not about to go away anytime too soon. There is a veritable cottage industry of Catholic bashers, dissidents, victims' advocates, psychologists and lawyers who will see to it that this is dragged on *ad infinitum*. It is not a conspiracy in the sense that this is planned; rather, it is a coming together of some totally dispirited souls over a particularly unhappy chapter in the Catholic Church.

Frank Sinatra had the best advice of anyone. Of adversity, he shrugged, "That's Life." When it strikes, he said, "I just pick myself up and get back in the race." Somebody needs to sing that song to the malcontents, lest they stay down for the count.

Merry Christmas to everyone. Including those who need to get back in the race.