

# Bread Rising

A REPORT FROM TERRY DOSH

Volume 13, No. 4, June 2003

## Culture of deceit undergirds clergy sex abuse

*By A W Richard Sipe, nationally recognized expert on clergy sex abuse in an address to the national convention of LINKUP in Louisville KY 22 February 2003.*

Welcome to the eye of the storm. From this vantage point of tranquility I invite you to consider with me the meaning of the devastation we have already witnessed, and to anticipate the tsunami the future holds. Especially let us contribute to an understanding of the dynamic that makes abuse possible where it must never be allowed to exist.

### The perfect moral storm

The Catholic Church in the United States, and perhaps worldwide, is involved in a crisis of monumental proportions. There is no escape for us. We are in it, but we did not cause it. We know it, but we cannot control it.

Perhaps the Church is not yet as aware as you and I are that this conflict is the perfect moral storm. **Three independent but interrelated forces—Sex, Money and Moral Authority—are colliding with hurricane force to threaten the long established assumptions and operations of the Church.**

Certainly our experience forces us to question the Church and its operations. But we are together here because we stand against abuse of minors, the vulnerable, and all believers always and everywhere.

Many responsible lay men and women have raised questions about the financial accountability of the Church. I know money has to be a concern. I know the amount of cash settlements only in the small proportion of abuse cases in which I have been a consultant, but that figure is over one hundred million dollars. And I am only a bit-player in this great ongoing conflict.

In this conflict bishops have risked their credibility and damaged their moral authority across the board, not just in sexual matters. Vast numbers of Catholics simply do not trust the power structure of their church.

### The sexual dimension of conflict.

Let no one say that we are anti-religion, anti-Catholic, anti-clergy or anti-celibacy. We are not! We know that there are good priests. We know the church does good works. We offer our efforts for the betterment of that church many of us call our spiritual home.

However, when a patient is facing cancer, those trying to cure do not stand around, praising the fine eyesight, good hearing and sound heart. It is crystal clear that if those who care fail to treat the main disease, those well functioning systems and the whole organism will be lost.

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The Catholic Church has cancer. And that cancer is its culture of deceit. Sexual abuse of minors by bishops and priests is but one symptom of the disease process.

Sexual abuse of minors and the vulnerable by clergy—our primary concern—cannot be isolated in reality from other sexual activity of bishops and priests who are self-guaranteed to be sexually abstinent, sexually safe. **Much of the trust, reverence, and moral authority granted to Catholic clergy are predicated on the assumption that they are celibately honest.**

In your 1992 conference in Chicago you could already identify that sexual abuse of minors was merely the tip of an iceberg that, if explored, would lead to the power structures that support the behavior. No agency has been more effective in exposing that structure than the *Boston Globe*.

What is more, you knew that if abuse of minors by priests were adequately explored, other non-celibate activity was bound to come into question. How is celibacy really practiced by those bishops and priests who profess it? That topic is no longer avoidable for consideration and research.

In your 1994 Collegeville conference you faced the fact that wherever abuse by a priest occurred, some superior "gave permission" either through easy forgiveness or by some sexual activity himself. Proof is being produced daily, reluctantly.

Today we must say that sexual abuse in the Catholic Church does not proceed from the bottom up—from candidates for the priesthood. **Sexual corruption is conferred from the top down—from men in power.**

Abuse would have no standing or durability if this were not so. Experience proves it. The complete extent of the pattern has yet to be exposed.

Today we are prepared to identify and explore another element that keeps sexual activity a corrosive element within the church—its culture of deception. This ethos attempts to cover the network of sexual secrets and liaisons at the pinnacles of power. **Understanding this culture of deceit comes very close to identifying the core of the sexual crisis.**

This culture of sexual deceit denies in word what it knows to be true. It covers what it does. **This culture teaches what it does not believe.** It affects the lives and welfare of everyone not just the abused.

### A culture of deceit

Sex, more than any other reality, exposes the Church's culture of deceit. By what right do I claim that such a culture exists? What evidence do we have? Church history is the strongest witness for the prosecution.

We must realize that Catholic clergy do constitute a culture apart. Ordinary men, yes. Representing a wide variety of personality

*See Culture of Deceit, continued on p 2*



types, yes. But they form a mono-sex culture. Besides, each is educated in a required curriculum. All are united by one doctrine. All serve under the same discipline.

In the United States with a population of 300 million people, fewer than 50,000 men constitute this group. **Fewer than 400 bishops control uncounted billions of dollars in assets.** The church forms a formidable base of influence.

Does this culture do good works? Unquestionably! Does it wield great power? Untold. The church will endure. The culture of the clergy can, and is sexually corruptible, and reformable. It is elements in the culture that support that corruption.

Secrecy is primary among these elements. **Secrecy and accountability cannot co-exist.** When a man is created a cardinal he kneels before the Pope and takes a vow. He promises fidelity to Christ and the gospel. He vows obedience to the pope and unfailing communion with the Roman Catholic Church. Then comes the one practical directive at the heart of the commitment. The cardinal promises "never to reveal to anyone whatever has been confided to me in secret and the revelation of which could cause damage or dishonor to Holy Church"

The criterion for secrecy is not charity. It is not justice. The vow taken by the cardinal is the opposite of a vow to tell the truth in defense of God, Church or humanity. **The criterion for secrecy is harm or dishonor to the Church.**

In the past 10 years I have worked with over 40 lawyers, most of them Catholic. Repeatedly I have been chagrined as they registered their dismay and disappointment that so many clergy—bishops and priests—lie. Many have asked me for some explanation. "How come?" Is there an explanation for this kind of behavior that they never expected from a bishop?

After reviewing many documents and depositions, I have to agree that some bishops lie. I have tried to explain it in terms that suggest that they are resorting to a rationalization, called in moral theology, a "mental reservation." This means that one can prevaricate if the person asking the question has no right to know the true answer, or telling the truth would do incalculable harm.

I have also observed another frequent clerical subterfuge: subsuming under the

rubric of "confessional" (sacramental), information that does not deserve to be in that category. Another explanation is that the clergy identify themselves so closely with the organization that they cloak themselves with its supernatural stature; they submerge what should be their own conscience into an ethic that values their own "reputation and corporate good above all."

Certainly there has to be some rationale for the way victims of abuse and abusive clergy have been treated. Unfortunately, even these sincere attempts at charity will not adequately explain or cover the multitude of sins committed by bishops against the truth of sexual abuse by clergy.

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Many bishops state in deposition that they were never aware of any problem before 1985. This was the year of the 92-page report of Doyle, Peterson and Mouton, which detailed the serious nature and potential consequences of the problem. However, in 1992 the then President of the U.S. Bishops Conference, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk wrote that the report "presented no new issue of which the NCCB was unaware or presented information that required some materially different response."

Another example of this attitude occurred when Bishop John Ricard, then auxiliary bishop of Baltimore, was chided by one of his priests for a misstatement. The bishop defended his action: "Look, Father, I only lie when I have to." He is not the only bishop to utter those exact words.

### **The public relations lie**

This attitude is woven into the fiber of response from the official church about sexual violations. Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokesperson for the U.S. Catholic Conference, stated on national TV (ABC Feb 2002) that she believed that "99<sup>44</sup>/<sub>100</sub>% of priests keep their celibacy." When the interviewer, incredulous, asked if she really believed that, she staunchly affirmed, "I do." Did she believe that? That would make her grossly uninformed or deluded.

Did she not really believe it? What would be her justification for the deceit?

I am well aware that the line between personal information and public exposure demands delicate deliberation. An account from the Desert Fathers of the 4th century tells about a famous Abbot who violated his celibacy. He felt that he could not confess his sin publicly lest he dishearten his disciples and give scandal. So he prayed, fasted vigorously, isolated himself from all communication, even refusing to participate in any public spiritual activity for one year.

It may be difficult for moral leaders to expose their sexual foibles or reveal facts about the sexual network of knowledge and association in their power circle. However, **public confession has not harmed the spiritual witness of St Augustine.**

But "Public Relations" are not an excuse for the official church to lie when the fate and welfare of so many are at stake, to say nothing of its own integrity.

A sad, and as yet unsolved, chapter of the sexual abuse saga in the United States is the story of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. This man probably did die a saint as his close friends attest. Without doubt he did many wonderful things for the Church in America.

In the media frenzy that surrounded the allegation against him of sexual abuse, an impertinent reporter asked the cardinal "Are you living a sexually active life?" A simple "No" would have been sufficient. But the Cardinal said, "I am 65 years old and I have always lived a chaste and celibate life."

However defensible in the arena of public assault, I knew that the statement was not unassailably true. Years before several priests who were associates of Bernardin prior to his move to Chicago revealed that they had "partied" together; they talked about their visits to the Josephinum Seminary in Ohio to socialize with seminarians.

It is a fact that Bernardin's accuser did not ever retract his allegations of abuse by anyone's account other than Bernardin's. If, as reported, three million dollars were paid in handling the scandal, certainly there are still informed people in Chicago who know at least part of the story. And the story is complex. **It holds repercussions far beyond Chicago and one allegation.**

I speak of this only as an example, as a clue to a mystery. This should not be sensation-



alized. Rather it should be an occasion for the Church to divine an important pattern of its sexual operation. The principle players must speak for themselves. But getting to the heart of the Church's sexual crisis is like solving a mystery. **It is important for the Church's integrity that truth not be stifled by silence and subterfuge.**

There are clues beyond victims. There are clues beyond documents. You who courageously have been willing to tell your stories provide many clues about the culture of deceit. Unfortunately other clues have had to be wrested from unwilling testimony and uncooperative witnesses.

There have been a few heroic priests who have given witness to how the sexual system of the church works. One courageous bishop said years ago what we all know now, that one reason the American bishops have been slow to deal with sexual abuse of minors is because some of them have been involved themselves.

### **The lie of feigned ignorance**

Abundant court documents and press releases from bishops assert, "I did not know. Things are different now; we know more."

Which bishop only recently learned that sex with a minor—or any one else for that matter—is non-celibate behavior? When did bishops learn that it is reprehensible, dangerous and immoral, to ply youngsters with alcohol? Have any bishops only recently learned that exposing children to pornography is more than simply poor pastoral care? Who, even in 1950, did not know that sexual activity with a minor was a crime?

Some bishops may not have been aware of the extent nor the intensity of the damage sexual violation by a priest causes. Some bishops may not have been aware of the progress psychiatry made in understanding abuse as an addiction. They did not need to. Fidelity to their stated responsibility as guardians of the celibacy of priests and the care of souls were adequate guidelines for action. Respect for civil decency and law are not suspended by devotion to secrecy.

### **Key questions need to be asked**

Under what circumstances will the church reveal the real number of abusing clergy? What will it take for the church to account for all the financial costs of their neglect? What toll does denial and opposition to the revelation of celibate failure take on the Church's moral authority? Can the Church

afford to be honest? More importantly, can it afford not to be honest? What will it cost all of us to maintain opposition to the exposure of facts?

Fr Steven Rossetti, a good priest concerned with the problems of clergy, was asked by a group of six victims of Fr James Porter, "What will it take for the church to change?" He responded without hesitation, "The church will not change until it is threatened with bankruptcy." Perhaps he was correct.

### **The lie of positive affirmation**

Have you ever heard the words? "Trust us, we will take care of it." Or "You wouldn't want to cause a scandal would you? What about: "It would hurt your family if they knew." Or even: "Are you sure you didn't cause this?" "Where were your parents?" And a real duzzie: "Seven-year-olds have a conscience. They have to share the responsibility." Do such words inspire trust?

Cardinals and bishops have announced that their goal is transparency and accountability. These are fine words, noble ideals, worthy goals. The hierarchy has proudly asserted that they pledge "complete cooperation" with the legal authorities.

But talk to district attorneys. Consult attorneys general. **They say that bishops simply do not cooperate.** Bishops fight turning over documents every inch of the way, by every means possible. One district attorney said the fight goes "page by page." They are fighting to cover up. Their energy is expended to secrete, not to reveal. Transparency and accountability proclaimed by bishops are words. No, let us name them for what they are: lies. They are part of the culture of deceit.

### **The genealogy of abuse**

Why is the fight so furious? Why is the struggle to keep facts buried so vigorous? Important clues exist in the genealogy of abuse. I have been able to trace victims of clergy and bishop abuse to the third generation. Often the history of clergy abusers reveals that the priest himself was abused, sometimes by a priest. The abuse may have occurred when the priest was a child, but not necessarily.

Sexual activity between an older priest and an adult seminarian or young priest sets up a pattern of institutional secrecy. When one of the parties rises to a position of power his friends are in line also for recommendations and advancement.

The dynamic is not limited to homosexual liaisons. Priests and bishops who know about each other's sexual affairs with women are also bound together by draconian links of sacred silence.

**A system of blackmail reaches into the highest corridors of the American hierarchy and the Vatican, and thrives because of this network of sexual knowledge and relationships.** Secrecy flourishes, like mushrooms on a dank dung pile, even among good men in possession of the facts of the dynamic, but who cannot speak lest they violate the Scarlet Bond.

I have interviewed at length a man who was a sexual partner of Bishop James Rausch. This was particularly painful for me since Rausch and I were young priests together in Minnesota in the early 1960s. He went on to get his social work degree and succeeded Bernardin as secretary of the U.S. Bishops Conference. Later he became the bishop of Phoenix.

It is patently clear that he had an active sexual life. It did involve at least one minor. He was well acquainted with priests who were sexually active with minors—priests who had at least 30 minor victims each. He referred at least one of his own victims to these priests.

What was his sexual genealogy? What are the facts of his celibate/sexual development and practice? Did those who knew him know nothing of his life? Perhaps so! But he was in a spectacular power grid of bright men when he served at the U.S. Bishops Conference office in Washington DC, or later, when he worked with his chancery officials as bishop of Phoenix.

Let me be perfectly clear. I am not saying or implying in any way that these men were partners in "crime" with Jim Rausch. But I am saying that when any one sets out to solve a mystery, one has to ask people who knew the principal, "What, if anything, did you know or observe about the alleged perpetrator?"

The church's hardened resistance to dealing honestly with the problem of sexual abuse on their own has compelled the civil authorities to move in, ask the questions, investigate allegations. **The official church in America has been its own worst enemy, creating mysteries and doubts rather than clear answers that inspire confidence.**

Even bishops, innocent of sexual violations themselves, by their silence, concealment of

*continued on back page*



facts and resistance to effective solutions choose to be part of a genealogy of abuse and reinforce a culture of deceit.

One reason the work of the *Boston Globe* has been so effective is because they have sought out the facts. Every member of the original five-member spotlight investigative team is a Catholic—not anti-church, not anti-Catholic, not anti-celibacy. Their agenda was a search for the data, the facts—beyond emotion or prejudice.

### The task ahead

The stated goal of your conference is to help victims of clergy abuse. You are victims, not alleged victims. You have come here to learn ways to help yourselves and your families. But also you want to understand and help solve the bigger problem. You can. You already have.

No one can expect you to approach these tasks without emotion. You are burdened with the grief of loss and betrayal. You are understandably angry, even furious. Saint Augustine said that anger is the beginning of courage. Let us turn our anger and indignation into a transforming courage. You have already been partners with the courage of the free press that has told your stories. Let us take a cue from the factors in those stories that have had power, namely, the facts.

False allegations of abuse are harmful to everyone because they are not based on fact. But lack of sufficient evidence also does not establish fact. Resolution of conflict and allegations by the expiration of the statute of limitations is not a vindication of the abuser. **The facts remain even if justice is denied.**

**The church has tried and is still trying vigorously to keep facts secret.** Church lawyers in deposition have asked me, "What should the church have done to deal with the problem of abuse?" My answer is constant: "Tell the truth."

- You can generate a great deal of good if you insist that your lawyers in settling your cases do not agree to seal the facts of your case.
- Push for exposure of the records of all abuse cases in your diocese or religious order.
- Support the work of grand juries, district attorneys, and public officials investigating abuse by clergy. See to it that church investigations are as assiduously conducted.
- Support bishops and priests who have proven that they can operate outside the scarlet bond of secrecy.

One horrendously abused victim said. "The bishops are cowering behind their crosiers, trying to impress the unsuspecting and gullible with the flash of their pectoral crosses and empty sounding apologies." This is too harsh a generalization, but it does speak to the growing distrust many Catholics have for church authority at this time.

Apologies, no matter how heartfelt will not stem the course of the storm. Only a shift in the winds of the clerical culture of denial and secrecy will do that. That will come; if not from within the system, it will come from without. That is the nature of this storm.

*Bread  
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Editor and Publisher Terence Dosh, PhD  
4124 Harriet, Mpls, MN 55409 • 612-827-1818  
doshx001@tc.umn.edu  
published eight times a year; subscription, \$19.

### *Sex, priests and power: anatomy of a crisis*

by A W Richard Sipe (Brunner/Mazel)  
220 pp. \$24.95 (or \$18.20 from Amazon.com)

Though published in 1995, this classic text's relevance to today's crisis shines through every page. Nobel laureate Herbert Hauptman comments: "With objectivity, compassion, and uncompromising honesty, Richard Sipe combines rational discourse with 20th century knowledge of the behavioral and life sciences to devastating effect in order to expose and illuminate the root causes of the current crisis in the Catholic Church concerning priestly sexual behavior and widespread abuse of power.

"He argues that the centuries-old Church practices of secrecy, hypocrisy, and the denigration of women, driven by the need to attain and retain its position of power, have made inevitable the present crisis that the Church does not concede exists. Sipe concludes that only by honestly confronting the reality will the Church be able to restore its credibility and begin to resolve the current crisis"

A tragic element to the storm around us is that good clergy are submerged in the culture of deceit. Forces beyond their control buffet and harass them. And yet they are supposed to be the captains leading us to shelter from the storm. **Where are their voices? Their orders cannot be heard unless they are shouting facts.**

But the next round of the storm is going to be harsher, bigger, more dangerous, and powerful. Facts beyond fear, facts beyond vested interests, facts beyond scandal, facts beyond our personal stories. Facts—the sacred truth—are the only safe harbor for all of us, including the clergy. Let us batten down our hatches in safe harbor. ■

*When I am frightened by what I am to you,  
then I am consoled by what I am with you.*

*For you I am a bishop;  
with you, I am a Christian.*

*The first is an office, the second a grace;  
the first, a danger, the second, salvation.*

—St. Augustine.

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