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# Ecclesial False Consciousness

by

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The first part of the etiology of the clerical sexual molestation problem is highlighted in the key findings of the John Jay census report and the National Review Board. There is now solid documentation on the problem of pederasty with prominent homosexual roots that suggests either a small but very sexually aggressive group, or a much larger but less aggressive group. In either situation, the presence of either configuration of clerical homosexuality is a formidable obstacle to advancing the teachings of Christ in a morally hostile world.

In this second part, we point to what is arguably at the core of the problem, which is a deep-seated attitude about the nature and purpose of the spiritual life, betrayed by the disproportionate responses of some bishops to the egregious predatory behavior of their priests. Only when the scandal broke out into the open were the bishops forced to take decisive action to remove these problem priests. However, the attitudes of many bishops with respect to the sexual behavior of the clergy remains sympathetic – a sympathy that suggests a diminishing of the nature of purpose of the spiritual life and its relationship to sexual behavior. Recall that the major policy changes on addressing the pederast priests occurred in the June 2002 Dallas protocol, subsequent to the public outcry for reform. The bishops as a whole were forced to act; they did not act of their own insight and volition. Even still, the reform only addressed the criminal features of the crisis – an indispensable step to be sure – but notably not the broader moral or spiritual features on the relative importance of chastity to the spiritual life of the priest and the laity.

Our examples below are from the statements or actions of Church leadership both before and after the crisis which illustrate a careless attitude about the relationship between sexual behavior and the vocation of the priesthood, in particular, and about the spiritual life in general. Engels once noted that capitalist institutions were devised to create in the proletariat a sense of false consciousness over the nature and purposes of capitalist actions. This false consciousness would permit capitalist

exploitations to continue without interference from the workers. It is debatable whether Engels' description was fitting for his time, but it unfortunately is an apt description of many bishops who deflect any acknowledgement that the scandal of sexual sin is a profound impediment to the priest's pastoral obligations and his spiritual effectiveness.

- A bishop remarked to the parishioners on the hasty resignation of the priest – a successful fundraiser recently discovered to have been involved in clandestine gay affairs for years – that he had “served well and done a great amount of good amongst God’s people at St. Patrick’s (Parish) as he struggled with this addictive behavior.”<sup>1</sup>

- In another Midwestern diocese, the bishop recently defended his judicial vicar arrested for misdemeanor sexual assault on a male undercover policeman: “Father McGrath has been an excellent and much loved priest, serving the people of [the] diocese well in both administrative and pastoral capacities.”<sup>2</sup>

- Another bishop recently made an unprecedented and egalitarian maneuver of polling the parishioners of several rural Indiana parishes if they wished to embrace a pastor within weeks of the curate’s truck stop arrest for criminal sexual solicitation – a pre-emptive apology if you will. The parishioners declined.<sup>3</sup> Several years earlier, this same priest resigned his pastorate and left town with his housemate when an audit found in the parish books large accounting irregularities.

- Yet another bishop joined “friends throughout California and beyond in thanking him for the energy and gifts he has shared far and wide. Our prayers and good wishes go with him.” His thanks went out to a fellow bishop who resigned in the wake of a suit by a diocesan priest who was subjected by his bishop to several years of sexual servitude.<sup>4</sup> The diocese settled with the priest for \$535,000.

- The same bishop upbraided as “inappropriate”, an irate congregation’s demand that the resigned bishop be thrown in jail for leaving the diocese 30 million dollars in the red, and covering for his homosexual lover’s embezzlement of parish funds – the same man who had filed suit against the bishop.

- One bishop reflects on the problem of AIDS in the priesthood: “I would never ask a priest how he got it, just like nobody asked me two years ago how I got cancer of the colon. But I would provide

for him. I would not write him off and say, 'Because you've got AIDS and because there are doubts about how one can acquire it, therefore you're not a good priest'."<sup>5</sup>

- Several bishops have recently been found to be involved in homosexual activity, and two of them have been on the bishops conference Standing Committee for the Selection of Bishops.<sup>6</sup>

- Educated estimates are that over 300 priests and at least one bishop have died of AIDS since 1985, which places the rate of AIDS-related deaths between four and eight times the rate in the adult male population in the United States.<sup>7</sup> If these estimates hold true, the level of AIDS deaths among priests is twice the John Jay Report estimates on the level of predatory serial sex offender priests.

- An ex-priest-gone-bad recounts his stay in a private church-supported clinic for priests that provided in strict moral neutrality a weekly gay men's support group. He has since gained theological insights into the uncomfortable juxtaposition of "...a church which still teaches that masturbation is "a grave moral evil" encourages even its priests-gone-bad to indulge in the liturgical equivalent: saying Mass alone."<sup>8</sup>

- One bishop recently noted that the sexual problems within the clergy have been known and tolerated, and encouraged, for at least a generation. Those who protested were driven into the ecclesial wilderness.<sup>9</sup>

- One bishop stepped down in a hasty acceptance of his mandated resignation after it was disclosed that he had paid hush money from the diocese funds of over \$400,000 to a former gay lover-seminarian. Originally, the bishop protested that the money was actually his to give, and was not the property of the diocese.<sup>10</sup> Keeping up appearances, he remains active in the diocese and lists himself as "Archbishop Emeritus" on his website.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the diocesan website biography indicates that he retired under normal circumstances; there was no comment on the disposition of the \$400,000.<sup>12</sup> The bishop is a professed religious, and has taken a vow of poverty.

- Over the last four years, seven bishops have resigned their positions immediately upon disclosure of pederastic behavior in the 1970s.

- One bishop still remains in good standing after his resignation from office, having been disclosed that he had been involved in numerous homosexual affairs, one was reported with a 16-year-old male prostitute.<sup>13</sup>

- Perhaps the briefest and most famous illustration of the sexual apology (recently disclosed in civil proceedings) was written in 1996 to a notorious and life-long child molester, whose victims numbered in the hundreds, Fr. John Geoghan: "Yours has been an effective life of ministry, sadly, impaired by illness."<sup>14</sup> This letter informed Geoghan, that he could no longer engage in any form of public ministry.

- In a case of demonic insult added to injury, parents, pastors, and students were punished again for the sins of the chancery (the same that harbored two of the most notorious boy molester priests of our time) mandating of all schools and CCD programs a sex-abuse prevention program, in response to the sex abuse crisis. The Talking About Touching program was authored by a group of sex-educators with ties to a Seattle-based homosexual activist group, COYOTE, (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), and contains sexually explicit material "designed" for children as young as six. Although the Boston diocese has settled abuse lawsuits with hundreds of male plaintiffs in the most recent wave of filings, no minor females have been involved to date. TAT is mandated for both boys and girls.<sup>15</sup>

At its core, the pederasty calamity is part of a larger paralysis of the Western Church in confronting the aggressive pagan sexuality of the 20th century. The crisis passed through its acute phase perhaps thirty years ago and has settled into a chronic and generally untreated condition. We say that the condition is still untreated because, being largely managerial in form, the institutional reforms to come out of the Dallas protocol of the last two years will not help solve the core spiritual and intellectual problems which remain shrouded in the sexual apology.

The apology is consistent with the sexual ethos of our culture where sexual self-realization is essential to human happiness, and is in radical opposition to sexual self-denial. The therapeutic mentality is in service to sexual self-realization. Phillip Rieff famously warned in 1966, in his *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, that the therapeutic culture would drive out the spiritual culture. The therapeutic culture continues as a secular evangelization with an ever-widening scope of influence; at all points moral, the therapeutic culture was in fundamental opposition to Christianity because it rejected the efficacy of guilt, expiation, and repentance as the vehicles for

personal transformation. The point of therapy was to eliminate guilt – or as the running joke amongst some psychoanalysts would have it, that the point of therapy was to undermine the cult of our lady of perpetual guilt.

The sexual apology not only displays the spiritually corrosive influence of the therapeutic cult, it also evinces the collapse of common sense. Undoubtedly, sexual sin was known far in advance of any criminal behavior. As is characteristic of many addictive behavior patterns, the problem is known to others long before there was felonious behavior that gave rise to the public disclosure. These behaviors were not accidents, they were part of a web of behaviors, deeply ingrained habits, readily knowable or known by those in close supervision, about which there was an implied cooperation and consent.

The moral common sense of prudence suggests that if pastors were concerned about the spiritual implications of sex, they would have acted well before the behavior migrated into criminal activity. Instead, many bishops have blamed the ignorance of the clinical professions for eruption of the crisis. If only the professions knew then what they know now, we are assured, that different decisions would have been made. This justification ignores the problem of sin and the evidence in common sense to the common man that sexual sins are very easy to fall into and very hard to escape once fallen. (It also ignores the perceptible shift of the clinical professions to de-criminalize pedophilia.) Perhaps the theologically sophisticated rationalize that clergy perform most sacraments absent personal holiness – the sacrament gives grace, *ex opere operantis* – the state of the priest or action of the recipient do not necessarily affect the transmission of grace. True enough, but there is nothing to prevent the person from tearing down on the one side what the sacrament builds up on the other. Consider that the sexual proclivities of our doctors have something to do with the practice of medicine. Most people have the common sense to know that whatever good is done by the dose of medicine, can be undone in a dozen ways by the character of the doctor. The sexual apology carries little weight in the art of medicine.

Character does especially matter for healers. Long before hospitals employed professional ethicists, Hippocrates recognized the integral relationship between sexual purity and the practice of healing. He put into his oath that was sworn before the gods, the injunction: In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art... When I enter into a house, I will seduce neither freeman nor slave.

The pagan Hippocrates – who had no benefit of divine revelation and had only his wits, his good habits, and an understanding of natural law – was able to make the unmistakable connection between sexual behavior and the spiritual life. In turn he notes how impurity drives out the ability to heal. Whatever the art of medicine may provide to heal can be used to maim or to kill, especially when it comes to sex. Even more does this

principle apply to the spiritual realm. Sin is always in service to the quest of self-realization. This should be expected in that self-realization easily becomes the apotheosis of self, in radical opposition to self-denial; the self-realization takes from others to inflate the self, the self-denial draws from the self to give to others. Sexual pleasure is at or near the center of activity; one surrenders to it, or one is in continual self-denial.

The character trait of sexual self-restraint and abstinence – epitomized by the presumed virginity of celibacy, and once thought to be an indispensable component of spiritual integrity – is now undercut by the sexual apology. The price is steep. As people intuitively understand, those who are unwilling or unable to control sexual urges, have no moral credibility on most other matters. The sexually wounded healer wounds others in his care well short of criminality – he is not to be trusted, indeed, he doesn't trust himself on any matter that requires fortitude, which in turn demands self-denial being in radical opposition to the cult of self-realization.

Our focus on psychology draws attention to the point where the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of the crisis merge. In particular, the problem of pederasty and the benign neglect on the problem of homosexual clergy would never have reached its current level if the bishops' attitude had been keenly aware of the spiritually corrosive effects of sexual behavior and the material conditions that feed sexual behavior. Instead, the current attitude has been enabled by an uncritical view of the therapeutic mentality. Psychology practice facilitated the development of the crisis in clergy treatment clinics that in some cases were hot tubs of sexual self-realization. But on a much broader front, psychological theory helped usher in the philosophy that reduces the spiritual life to the level of emotional life, where counseling psychology displaced confession, prayer, penance, and the "mortification of the flesh" in seminaries and in diocesan and parish rectories. The usurpation of many traditional ascetical practices was a fait accompli of contemporary philosophy of psychology, which convinced large segments of the clergy that these traditional ascetical practices were anti-scientific and obscurantist.

Only Pius XII has issued an address that specifically mentions the proper boundaries of psychology for the Christian. Since Pius XII in his 1958 address *Applied Psychology*<sup>16</sup> there has been no significant analysis by the bishops or by Rome of the theory or the practice of psychology. The only large-scale analyses on clerical psychology, commissioned then by the NCCB in 1967, made no attempt to assess the psychological features of the exemplary celibate set forth in Paul VI's *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967). Because of its importance in misdefining the clerical problem, we give close attention to the NCCB study in the next section.

There has been no institutional response from the Church on the problem of psychology. Virtually all of the Catholic universities and

colleges in the US today promote undergraduate or graduate psychology programs indistinguishable from their secular counterparts which are openly anti-Christian. Sex-education programs and drug abuse resistance training programs that are widely taught in Catholic elementary and secondary schools are based on secular psychology theory. The topic of psychology in Catholic education could itself fill an entire book, but suffice it say at this point that the faculty and the students of these programs are completely unequipped and unprepared to address questions on spiritual life, the relationship of the emotional life to the spiritual life, and the moral formation of man as an integral component of his emotional life. All of these topics, which have an obvious relationship to sexual behavior, would have been standard fare to the medieval student of Thomas Aquinas, and are completely unknown to Catholic psychologists today, and would be dismissed as obscurantist and anti-scientific.

The theoretical origin of the crisis occurred in the unlikely area of the natural philosophy of the sciences over a century ago, when clerical pederasty and overt homosexuality was by all accounts very rare. It was then that the behavioral sciences and the ethics of utilitarianism formed a merger about which the Church has had little say and of which the intellectual advisors of the bishops have been completely unprepared for the consequences of the infiltration into the Church. If in the last two centuries there was ever a need for the Church to look very carefully at the intersection of science and religion, it is in the behavioral sciences, especially psychology. Alas, very little analysis has been done in this regard. In that many bishops and religious superiors have out of ignorance, naivete, or bad will turned to modern psychology over the last fifty years as a way to bring their charges "up with the times", the current crisis is a predictable outcome.

As with many scientific innovations, there will be two parts, one theoretical, and the other practical. There are a number of practical parts to contemporary psychology that have been beneficial to society and to the Church – detection and treatment for serious psychopathology come to mind. However, most therapeutic theory of modern psychology has carried moral relativism into the Church's inner sanctuary, in the training of priests, the content of their sermons, their treatment when disturbed. It has created a therapeutic mentality, a way of viewing the moral universe that is opposed to traditional Christian doctrine.

If the theory of modern therapeutic psychology is taken to heart, there is no basis or desire for responding spiritually in any traditional meaning of the term. Because significant segments of the Church adopted this mentality, problems that were relatively rare became common. Commentators such as Jason Berry point to the code of secrecy as the main source of the pederasty crisis in particular.<sup>17</sup> Berry and his fellow pundits miss the penitential point altogether. As we saw in the previous chapter, the

data are now in, sex abuse did not become a significant feature of clerical misconduct until the 1960s, at the same time when it became prominent in the broader culture. Within the Church, the useful spiritual defenses against pagan sexual onslaughts were unknown to the clergy or disdained.

The spiritual defenses were unknown or underutilized, but the popular and eloquent defenses of individuals were erected (and remain today) by luminaries such as Henri Nouwen, who, in his *The Wounded Healer*, constructed an image of the priest, himself wounded in spite of it all bring others to spiritual health. But rather than providing only the insight into the priest who struggles with moral lapses, Nouwen's work, and perhaps Nouwen himself (periodically tortured by homosexual inclinations<sup>18</sup>) provided justification for his readership for frank violation against sexual purity. Sex had been demystified, and what followed was neither penitence nor innocence, but spiritual blindness. By 1973, Karl Menninger asked "Whatever became of sin?" and the Catholic churchmen in America had little to say – they had been demystified.

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## References

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3. From the Amy Welborne web log that references the *Indianapolis Star*: <http://www.indystar.com/articles/6/149839-2976-009.html>, May 26, 2004, "Public Indecency Indy Priest Might be Assigned to Parishes," "In a letter to members of the three parishes, Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein emphasizes that no final decision has been made on the appointment of the Rev. Ronald M. Ashmore as administrator and sacramental minister of the churches...Buechlein said he wanted comments from the parishioners to be collected by the parish councils, which are to meet today with two priests involved in the staffing issue. The archbishop is in Rome for a meeting with Pope John Paul II; Buechlein said in the letter that he hopes to make a final decision in early June."
4. "Archbishop William Levada of San Francisco will oversee the Santa Rosa Diocese until a new bishop is appointed. Levada issued a statement saying Pope John Paul II on Wednesday 21 July 1999 accepted the bishop's resignation, finishing

a process that was begun by Ziemann in April. The archbishop described himself as a lifelong friend of Ziemann's and said he joined 'friends throughout California and beyond in thanking him for the energy and gifts he has shared far and wide. Our prayers and good wishes go with him'. "Bishop Ziemann Quits: Resignation Stuns Close Associates," Thursday, July 22, 1999. Mike Geniella *The Press Democrat* [http://www.pressdemocrat.com/evergreen/diocese/072299\\_quits.html](http://www.pressdemocrat.com/evergreen/diocese/072299_quits.html)

5. By Judy L. Thomas, *The Kansas City Star*: 01/29/00 22:15. Quotations from Bishop Raymond J. Boland of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

6. Diogenes: CWR 9/15/04. "sweet dreams: Last night's bedtime reading was the NCCB Membership Directory for the year 2000, Page 215 makes mention of (former) bishops Kendrick Williams and Joseph Hart, who have the distinction of being Dash-2 ("because of health or other grave reason") retirees. In both cases, the other grave reasons were boys. One other thing: both Williams and Hart were both members of the NCCB's Standing Committee for the Selection of Bishops. Probably just a coincidence."

7. "High AIDS Toll Among Priests Has Been Obscured, Paper Says." *Washington Post* (01/31/00) P. A4 "According to the Kansas City Star newspaper, AIDS has killed hundreds of American Roman Catholic priests since the mid-1980s. The newspaper revealed that the death rate for priests who have AIDS is over four times the general population's rate. While the death certificates of priests may list other causes of death besides AIDS, Bishop Raymond Boland and other priests spoke that they knew of priests with AIDS and of those who died from AIDS-related illnesses. The case of Bishop Emerson J. Moore who went to Minnesota in 1995 shows that he died from AIDS."

8. Christopher Schiavone & Janice Page 12/8/2002. "Broken Vows" *The Boston Globe*. "But most of us were at Southdown for other reasons (than pederasty), which our regimen of group therapy, spiritual direction, and personal counseling endeavored to address in psychologically sound though morally neutral ways. A gay men's support group met weekly. For many of us, it was the first time we had publicly identified ourselves as gay. Others in the community were also known to have been homosexually attracted or active, but they eschewed the support group, often out of fear. That's how it was at Southdown – each man and woman was permitted to pursue a path to wellness in a way and at a pace that seemed most natural.

"[http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/stories3/120802\\_schiavone.htm](http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/stories3/120802_schiavone.htm)

9. Vanessa Ho (2004) "Local Archbishop a Man of Drive and Mystery," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Tuesday, October 12, 2004, "While the rest of the country was reeling from war protests in the 1960s, Alex Brunett was a young academic dean stirring up his own protest at a Roman Catholic seminary in Michigan.

"As he tells it, his students included a 'large colony of homosexual people' who liked to go to gay bars at night. This upset Brunett so much that he complained

loudly to his archbishop and tried to block the ordination of some students. In return, he was deemed 'counterproductive', booted out and sent back to parish work.

"It was a humbling time for the future archbishop of Seattle, but 40 years later, the Most Rev. Alexander J. Brunett is feeling a twinge of vindication.

"In an interview with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, he said many of the country's clergy sex-abuse cases involve priests ordained in the '60s, the same time he was not only fighting open homosexuality at his school, but drugs and hippie subculture, too."

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/194798\\_brunett12.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/194798_brunett12.html)

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13. Ryan, former bishop of Springfield, Illinois.

14. Letter of Bernard Cardinal Law, to John J. Geoghan, December 12, 1996.

<http://www.bishop-accountability.org/ma-boston/archives/PatternAndPractice/0233-Geoghan-II-01921.pdf>

15. "Suffer the Children: The Disaster of 'Talking About Touching'," by Mary Jo Anderson; <http://www.crisismagazine.com/apriI2004/anderson.htm>

16. Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the Rome Congress of the International Association of Applied Psychology, April 10, 1958

17. J Berry, "The Power of Purifying Memory" *National Catholic Reporter Online*, October 15, 2004.,

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18. Michael Ford, (1999). "Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J. M. Nouwen," New York: Doubleday. A sympathetic account of the life of Nouwen. See ch 17 "Icons" for Nouwen's correspondence with homosexual artist and ex-Franciscan monk, R. Lentz.