

# **Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Decade of Crisis, 2002-2012**

Santa Clara University

May 11, 2012

## **A RADICAL LOOK AT TODAY AND TOMORROW**

*Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.*

I want to begin by sharing the nature of my involvement in the phenomenon of sexual abuse by Catholic Clergy. I chose the word "phenomenon" intentionally because I do not believe any of the commonly used descriptors -- "crisis," "scandal," "problem," come even close to naming what this has been and what it is today.

My name is Tom Doyle. I was ordained a Dominican priest in 1970, forty two years ago. I received my doctorate in Canon Law in 1978. I first became involved in the issue of sexual abuse of minors when I had a position at the Vatican embassy in Washington. My initial experiences involved not former Father Gilbert Gauthe from Louisiana, but two bishops, both of whom are now deceased. The year was 1982 but my most intense involvement, shared with Fr. Dr. Michael Peterson and attorney Ray Mouton, began in 1984 and has not ended.

I would like to begin by stating my conclusion. Since 2002 the revelations of widespread sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy and religious men and women have spread to Europe, Latin America and to some Asian countries. In the US the Catholic bishops have created a number of programs and policies and have

aggressively implemented their "Zero Tolerance" policy. In spite of these policies and the expensive public relations efforts they have implemented, the attitude of the bishops as a collective group has not only not changed but it has gotten worse. Their disdain for the victims has become more and more obvious. The true measure of their understanding of the horrific nature of the issue and their commitment to change is not the programs, policies, documents or speeches they generate but their unqualified attitude of compassion toward the victims and this is scandalously lacking. The bishops simply don't get it or if they do get it, they don't care.

I have been directly and intimately involved in most dimensions of this travesty. I have been asked by accused priests to help with canonical and fraternal support. I have given workshops and seminars to groups of diocesan and religious priests. I have been an expert witness and a consultant in over a thousand civil and criminal cases throughout the United States, in Canada, Ireland, England, Belgium, Australia and New Zealand. I have been a consultant to or expert witness for several of the grand jury investigations in the U.S. including the Philadelphia grand juries of 2005 and 2011 and most recently I testified at the criminal trial in Philadelphia. I have served as a consultant or expert witness for the government commissions in Ireland beginning with the Ferns Commission and for the Cornwall Inquiry in Canada.

The real truth about what has happened and what continues to happen is not found in any reports or so-called audits provided by church sources but in the documents obtained from dioceses and religious orders by victims' attorneys or surrendered in the course of grand jury or similar official investigations. In 2010 I was asked to address the special commission of the Belgian parliament. Over

these 30 years I have met and spoken with thousands of persons involved in one way or another.

I am sharing all of this for no other reason than to illustrate the extent of my experience and the context from which I make the remarks that follow.

The most important experiences I have ever had as a Christian and as a priest have been the times spent with victims of sexual violation and spiritual betrayal by Catholic priests and bishops. With nearly every victim I have had the privilege of knowing, by far the most painful moment for me has been when I have apologized for what we, the clergy, have done to them. Without exception, every man and woman has told me that it was the first time anyone from the clergy has done so. It is not a matter of parroting meaningless phrases such as "I'm sorry for your suffering" or "I apologize for the pain you have endured," or "I regret if mistakes were made" as the pope and some bishops have phrased it. For me the only honest way to express this important sentiment has been to say, "I am deeply sorry for what we have done to you and deeply ashamed that we, the clergy, have hurt you in such a profoundly shameful manner."

The most heart-breaking moments have been the many times I have been with parents who have shared with me the indescribable pain they experienced when they learned that their little boy or little girl had been sexually violated by a Catholic cleric.

These experiences that have changed my life and have reached to the core of my being. These are the experiences that should have been the norm for the bishops but sadly, they have been the very rare exception.

In spite of the assurances from Church officials that the worst is behind us, this is clearly delusion and not reality. Until the primary focus shifts from the

hierarchy, to the victims, there will be no fundamental honesty in the Church's response and nothing will change. Until the security of creating policies and programs aimed at protecting the children of the future is superseded by the risk of reaching out with honest, unqualified compassion to the victims of today, there will be no true healing and no authentic movement forward. Until the efforts to blame the secular culture, the media, the sexual revolution, anti-Catholicism, victims' lawyers, Woodstock or Janis Joplin are abandoned and replaced with a fearless, probing examination of the clerical culture and the hierarchical exercise of power, the collective hope that this terrible nightmare will someday be "the worry of a distant past" will never happen.

With respect to Tom Plante and Kathleen McChesney, I do not agree with their statement at the beginning of chapter One that the "crisis" began on January 6, 2002 in Boston. It was and is not a crisis and it did not begin in Boston.

The sexual violation of minors and adults by clerics of every rank has been a tragic part of the Catholic Church from the first century. The scandalous evidence of this is found in the Church's own official documentation. The tragic chapter of this saga written in our own era did not begin in 2002 or in 1984. Those were moments of revelation and exposure of a culture that had been hidden not too far beneath the Church's surface. The difference between the present and the past is this: whereas in prior centuries the institutional Church maintained control over the response to waves of revelation, in our era it is not the pope and bishops who are shaping the continuing history of clergy sexual abuse and hierarchical cover-up, but the victims.

What we have seen publicly exposed since the fall of 1984 has not been a "crisis" of sexual abuse by clergy. A crisis is a happening with a beginning and an

end that is responded to either effectively or clumsily by the relevant powers. This has been the revelation of the dark and toxic dimension of the institutional Catholic Church. The focus has been on the sexual violation by Catholic deacons, priests, bishops and cardinals as well as men and women religious.

But this tragedy is not fundamentally about sex. It is about the abysmal and treacherous abuse of power --- ecclesiastical power, church power, power that has been given by the Creator only to do good but power that has been selfishly perverted by those to whom it has been entrusted and which has brought some of the most despicable harm imaginable to the most innocent and vulnerable members of Christ's Church. The harm has been sexual, emotional and physical but I believe that in the end, the most devastating harm has been the assault on the spirit.

A fundamental flaw inherent in every dimension of response has been the concept of the Church reflected in the response. The image that consistently comes through from the papal speeches to the scripted apologies of bishops to the various protection programs, is the traditional though seriously flawed image of the *Church as institution*, governed by the hierarchy, all celibate male clerics, none of whom have ever experienced parenthood. The persistent struggle of the pope and the bishops to maintain control over this nightmare that never ends is painfully obvious: a struggle to exonerate themselves, a struggle to direct and determine every aspect of the response and above all, a struggle to maintain some semblance of superiority over the victims. We are constantly reminded of the grave harm done *to the Church* and of the hope that someday the image and integrity *of the Church* will be restored. We are constantly reminded that the bishops acted as they did out of a misguided belief that they were acting *for the good of the Church*. But the *good of the Church* has been *their* good and not the good of the victims or even the Christian community.

The fundamental fault from the earliest centuries to the present has been the failure to respond not as a papal monarchy, but as what the church really is, *The People of God*.

We are constantly reminded of the many ways that dioceses and religious orders have worked to protect the children of today and tomorrow. The National Review Board, the diocesan review boards, the child protection offices, the background screening protocols, the mandatory awareness programs -- are more than simply commendable but are a remarkable movement to change the meaning and reality of child safety in our society. But none of these endeavors would have happened had they not been forced upon the institutional Church by the victims, the media, the courts and the angry public.

There is however a dark side to the self-congratulatory picture painted by today's hierarchy. Efforts to change state laws to ensure justice and healing to all victims and to put more perpetrators out of commission are vigorously and sometimes viciously opposed by the bishops in every State where such legislation has been introduced, and this opposition comes at the cost of millions of dollars donated by the remaining faithful. The excuses given for this organized sabotage are so self-serving they are not worth mentioning. The true reason is the fear of even more exposure and the appearance of more victims.

In spite of messages of compassion directed at victims and in spite of Pope Benedict's direct orders to the bishops to do all in their power to heal, victims who have the courage to go to court are most often subjected to embarrassing, humiliating, brutalizing and revictimizing treatment not only by the lawyers hired by the bishops but often by their public relations firms and by clerics themselves.

The victims will not be told by the institution that enabled their abusers what efforts they may use in their attempts to heal. They go to court, contrary to the libelous remarks of some, especially the apparent unofficial mouthpiece of at least the archbishop of New York, Bill Donohue, not because they and their lawyers want to bleed the Church of its money but because the civil courts have been the only venue that has consistently provided justice and validation of the terror suffered by these men and women. In reality a massive drain is the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on defense lawyers to fight victims and the equally exorbitant amounts spent on public relations firms hired to create the illusion that the Church is doing what it was founded to do.

The most recent egregious example of this hypocrisy has been directed at the main source of hope and recovery for countless victims; the concerted attempts to destroy SNAP and defame its leaders for no other reason than the fact that they have had the courage to stand up to and challenge the integrity of the institutional Church.

The recent John Jay study on causes and contexts provided important data that placed the sexual abuse from one chronological period into a broader socio-cultural context but this study didn't come close to examining the true causes. These causes are in the sacrosanct domain the institutional Church goes to every length to protect but it is the domain where we will begin to find the answers: the clerical sub-culture and the narcissistic hierarchical elite that has allowed this nightmare to happen and has failed to comprehend the profound depth of the damage done, not to the Church as institution, but to the most important persons among God's people, the victims.

This dark and toxic side of the Church will only began to fade when popes, bishops, priests, religious and laity understand that when we say "Church" we refer not to the hierarchy, the government or the power structure, but those harmed, abused, marginalized and rejected by a Church that that forgot that before all else it is the People of God.