

HOW TO SPOT A PRIEST ABUSER OR WHERE WAS THE OTHER NINETY PERCENT?

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The American bishops and even the pope have taken a lot of flack for the sexual abuse crisis in the United States. Every Grand Jury Report and even the Report from their own National Review Board plus the John Jay Report they commissioned laid responsibility (read blame) at their doorstep.

The National Review Board asked the question. *Why did Church leaders respond to the problem of sexual abuse so poorly for so many years?* And they answered it. "Perhaps even more troubling than the criminal and sinful acts of priests who engaged in abuse of minors was the failure of some bishops to respond to the abuse in an effective manner, consistent with their positions as leaders of the flock with a duty to protect the most vulnerable among us from possible predators." (P. 8)

Nobody seriously disputes that bishops knew what was going on.

When one reviews the numbers of the abused minors (probably 100,000) and the number of known and unnamed bishops and priests who abused, there appears to be enough neglect, confusion, and ignorance to go around.

Bishops and religious superiors are fighting for their dignity, credibility, and benefices in the courts and media. Massive public relations are aimed at the hearts of the faithful. The outcome of the battle is still in question.

Putting together all the studies and facts about clergy abuse in this country it is safe to say that between 6 and 10 percent of Catholic clergy have been sexually involved with a minor at least once in the past 55 years. Or let's put it in the positive. We can be pretty confident that 90 percent of the priests and bishops during that period were not sexually involved with minor.

The NRB's Report went on to list eight ways in which the church leaders demonstrated "cooperation with evil." Every report written has pointed out that bishops consistently chose the preservation of image over the care of souls.

But what of the 90 percent of brother priests who lived among the abusers?

Many priests and bishops say that the abuse scandal caused by only a portion of the clergy has put a pall over every priest; made every priest a suspect; made many priests ashamed to wear their collar in public.

But should the demonstrated neglect and cover-up by authority rest only on the shoulders of bishops and superiors? Is the body of Catholic priests absolved of complicity in the scandal?

That is a question each needs to answer for himself.

When some priests got complaints about another priest's behavior, they said, "I'll take care of it" (the most common response recorded when victims or parents complained about abuse to a pastor, chancellor or bishop). Some did report abuse to authority and then absolved themselves from further concern. Some had suspicions, heard rumors, witnessed indications of trouble, and passed them off as none of their business. They could gossip with a buddy, but information was kept inert in the inner circle lest it give scandal and get a fellow priest in trouble.

Why was the body of the clergy, their bishops' helpers, so complacent and uninvolved in monitoring the harm by and of their fellow clergy?

We here offer some points for meditation, education, and encouragement to priests (and people) who do care to be involved in protecting the vulnerable from harm and want to assist priests of integrity fight sexual abuse by clergy.

- All of the following example categories are registered in Church files or taken from court documents in cases of priest abusers.
- Most people are somewhat shy about their sexual life. Priests are especially so because complete abstinence is expected of them. If lay people are subject to denial and blindness about sexual activity of clergy because they idealize them, priests often need to deny sex in the ranks to protect themselves from the guilt and embarrassment they feel for any of their own slips and faults. If that is the situation, a priest should deal with it. He should educate himself and rededicate himself to celibacy.
- It is common knowledge that clergy are not adequately educated about sex and celibacy within the system. But every priest's sexual/celibate life is his own responsibility in spite of the fact that bishops and superiors have a canonical responsibility of oversight. He has no right to blame anyone else. If he takes full accountability for his own celibate practice and sex education he will be prepared to protect the priesthood and his flock from abuse.
- Pedophilia is a special kind of sexual urge. Men whose preferential sexual objects are children are called pedophiles. Men who prefer sex with adolescents are termed epebophiles. But one should not get hung up or frightened by terms. We need to look at people, their actions, and not labels or we will lose focus. What we want to be alert to is potential harmful tendencies (even in ourselves) or behavior in men who may have many winning qualities and even superior assets. But some men can be a danger to others, themselves, and the church because they receive sexual gratification and satisfaction from fantasies and physical contact with minors.

- Actions follow fantasy. Fantasies are often prompted by the use of photographs, pornographic art or writings about sexual activity with minors. Some of these materials can be used in the process of grooming and seducing a victim.
- Although it is not possible to know another person's fantasies there are indicators of a priest's sexual development and interests:
- Frequent or habitual abuse of alcohol or drugs by a priest is often of sign of celibacy-in-trouble and sometimes a marker of an abuser of minors.
- Any priest who gives alcohol or drugs to a minor is a suspect for abuse.
- A priest who is clearly socially more comfortable with minors—especially if restricted to one gender or age group—rather than companions of his own age or status raises suspicions about his affective life and sexual intentions, especially if he spends excessive time with one or another minor.
- Priests who have an overly rigid personality and an unreasonable inflexibility may harbor sexual secrets, including abuse of minors.
- Clergy who are irresponsible with church funds can be and often are sexually immature.
- Any sex education of minors by a priest not conducted in public and open to scrutiny and observation is suspect.
- A priest who shares his room at night or sleeps in the same bed with a minor is a suspect for sexual abuse.
- Priests who recreate nude with minors or encourage them to get nude are open to suspicion.
- A priest who gives substantial material gifts to a minor raises legitimate suspicions about his sexual integrity.
- Priests who collect sexually explicit materials like magazines, photographs, DVDs, videotapes, books, and slides of minors are suspect for abuse.
- Priests who use the Internet to contact minors for sex or to download child pornography are already committing a crime even if they have not yet touched a child.
- Predators often keep and store their sexually explicit materials or letters and can use them in the seduction of a minor.
- Priests who abuse frequently take pictures of minor victims in various stages of undress. They can also keep diaries and records of their victims and their exploits.
- Photos of victims (the priest may think of them as cherished friends) are frequently kept and treasured, often to revive fantasies.
- Photos or videos of the priest with minors in compromising situations are used for recurrent stimulation and at times as vehicles for control or blackmail of the victim.
- Priests who frequent pornographic bookstores, XXX movies, and peep shows are seriously endangering their celibacy. These activities can set them up to exploit minors even if that is not their preferential mode of sexual release.
- Priests often have friends, clerics or lay, who share similar interests in sex with minors. The Internet has facilitated opportunities for like-minded men to share their interests and contacts.

- Priests who keep extremely irregular hours, spend excessive time at the homes of unknown companions, “disappear” on their days off or vacation with minors, or in areas where child prostitution is prominent can be suspect for abuse and need to make an open account for their time and activities.

Clergy in general have neglected the vigilance that celibate practice demands. Were it not so the crisis of sexual abuse of minors could not have existed in the American church for as long and extensively as it has. Because one is himself free of guilt for abusing a minor can he claim guiltlessness for his denial and tolerance of his brother priest's abuse?

In many cases the red flags and danger signs of abuse of minors are obvious and all over the place once a colleague opens his eyes to what is in plain sight.

It is not noseey, out of line, or intrusive to care about the bond that unites the priesthood as surely and intrinsically as a marriage bond—the commitment of celibacy. Perhaps celibate fidelity is more necessary for preserving the church from the greatest moral violation—hypocrisy—than any other dedication.

Celibacy is the Church's public promise and assurance that every priest is sexually safe and trustworthy. It is not simply an individual trust, but a reciprocal bond between the Catholic Church and its people. The assurance of the celibacy of Catholic clergy is exchanged for the trust, respect, belief, support, obedience, and allegiance of the faithful. The faithful in turn receive comfort, forgiveness, and salvation.

That exchange could be redefined, but as of now it exists as a corporate responsibility and involves priests as well as bishops.