



Father Gerald Fitzgerald founded the Congregation of the Servants of the Paraclete (sP) in 1947¹. Its goal was to minister to struggling and “fallen” priests.² From their base in Jemez Springs, New Mexico this fledging group of dedicated religious housed, rehabilitated, treated, and provided refuge for priest “guests” with a wide range of behavioral and personality needs and disorders. They quickly expanded to international sites.³ Fitzgerald

gave reports to three popes, consulted with bishops from around the world and interacted with troubled clergy many that had alcohol and sexual problems.⁴

His correspondence and files record the state of knowledge the Church had about sexual abuse of minors in the United States, its incorrigibility, and the danger it posed to children and for scandal in the Catholic Church.⁵ Despite the fact that he opposed secular treatment modalities—AA, psychiatry and psychology—his followers espoused them and even trained in the treatment of sexual disorders⁶. As a result the Paraclete center became the first facility in the world specifically treating sexual disorders of clergy.⁷

From time to time we will duplicate here in entirety some of Fr. Fitzgerald’s correspondence on the site beginning with this 1964 letter sent from Rome. The following is a selection outlined by Tom Doyle.⁸

1952: Letter to Bishop Robert Dwyer of Reno, NV, (later archbishop of Portland, OR) about priests afflicted with sexual disorders that cause them to abuse young boys. This letter indicates that Fr. Fitzgerald had already treated a “handful” of men charged with such abuse. He shared his recommendation that such men be laicized since they would

¹ The first mass was celebrated on January 5, 1947 at Jemez Springs.

² *A Prophet for the Priesthood*, John Hardon, S.J., 1998.

³ In the U.S. to 3 centers in NM; St. Louis, MO (2); Nevis, MN; VT (at one time a sP seminary); Rome, Italy; England; Scotland; France; Africa; South America (2); and the Philippines.

⁴ Cf. the 1964 letter to Bishop J.A. Durick attached.

⁵ Fr. Fitzgerald’s files were unsealed by a Santa Fe judge in 2008.

⁶ Fr. William Perri and Fr. Michael Foley went to San Francisco to train in human sexuality and for the management of sexual disorders. Fr. Foley became superior General in 1981.

⁷ The Albuquerque Center was established in 1978. Fr. Michael Peterson, M.D. established a sexual disorders program at St. Luke’s Institute in 1985. Of 132 admissions and evaluations conducted at the hospital in the first year of the program 75 involved psychosexual disorders. The director of St. Luke’s hand delivered a report to the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, D.C. in 1986.

⁸ Cf. Tom Doyle’s outline of Fr. Fitzgerald’s correspondence, June 8, 2008. Also http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2008/07_08/2008_07_01_Ebeling_TomDoyle.htm

never be free of the temptation to act out. This letter is remarkable in that it clearly assesses both the disorder and the risks. He warns against the very solutions that many bishops resorted to in the ensuing years:

Hence, leaving them on duty or wandering from diocese to diocese is contributing to scandal or at least to the approximate danger of scandal....We find it quite common, almost universal with the handful of men we have seen in the past five years who have been under similar charges - we find it quite universal that they seem to be lacking in appreciation of the serious situation. As a class they expect to bound back like tennis balls on the court of priestly activity. I myself would be inclined to favor laicization for any priest, upon objective evidence, for tampering with the virtue of the young, my argument being, from this point onward the charity to the Mystical Body should take precedence over charity to the individual and when a man has so far fallen away from the purpose of the priesthood the very best that should be offered him is his Mass in the seclusion of a monastery. Moreover, in practice, real conversions will be found to be extremely rare. Many bishops believe men are never free from the approximate danger once they have begun. Hence, leaving them on duty or wandering from diocese to diocese is contributing to scandal or at least to the approximate danger of scandal.” (Sept. 12, 1952,).

1957:

Fr. Fitzgerald wrote to Bishop Matthew Brady of Manchester NH on September 26, 1957:

‘From our long experience with characters of this type, and without passing judgment on the individual, most of these men would be clinically classified as schizophrenic. Their repentance and amendment is superficial and, if not formally at least sub-consciously, is motivated by desire to be again in a position where they can continue their wonted activity. A new diocese means only green pastures.’

1957:

Fr. Fitzgerald wrote to Archbishop Edwin Byrne (Santa Fe) that he thought it unwise to “offer hospitality to men who have seduced or attempted to seduce little boys or girls.” He went on to utter an eerie prophecy of the future: If I were a bishop I would tremble when I failed to report them to Rome for involuntary laicization. Experience has taught us these men are too dangerous to the children of the parish and the neighborhood for us to be justified in receiving them here....They should ipso facto be reduced to lay men when they act thus.

1957: *Fr. Fitzgerald again wrote to Bishop Matthew Brady of Manchester NH about a priest who repeatedly sexually abused young teen-aged girls. In his letter he says:*

“We feel that the protection of our glorious priesthood will demand, in time, the establishment of a uniform code of discipline and of penalties. We are amazed to find how often a man who would be behind bars if he were not a priest is entrusted with the cura animarum. Whereas a more positive position, such as Your Excellency is taking in

this case, would seem to add up to the prevention of these weak and irresponsible men from trailing their unlovely interpretation of the priesthood here and there throughout the country.” Fr. Fitzgerald stated that such men should not be allowed to function in any ministry in any diocese.

1959:

Pope John XXIII addressed a letter to Fr. Fitzgerald in which he commended the members of the Paraclete Fathers for the work they were doing with offending priests.

1960:

In a letter to the superior of a religious order, Fr. wrote:

“Father, in God’s name, get this man laicized as quickly as possible. This extreme type will never be converted...Men who sin with little children certainly fall under the classification of those who “it were better had they not been born.” (Aug. 11, 1960)

(Note: The 1960 letter is scanned in at City of Angels 11.)

1961:

Fr. Fitzgerald wrote to Bishop Ernest Primeau of Manchester, NH, who was attending the Vatican Council. His letter urged involuntary laicization for priests with sexual problems:

I am in hopes that this matter will be given serious consideration by the proper committee in the Ecumenical Council. My argument would run like this: obviously this priest has not the capacity for priestly chastity. Therefore not because he wishes it but to protect the good name of the Church, he should be reduced involuntarily to the lay state. (June 30, 1961)

1962:

Fr. Gerald had been in communication with the Congregation of the Holy Office, now known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. At the request of the prefect, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, he prepared a report dated April 11, 1962. In this report he discussed the various types of sexual problems of priests, including sexual abuse of minors:

“On the other hand, where a priest for many years has fallen into repeated sins which are considered, generally speaking, as abnormal (abuse of nature) such as homosexuality and most especially the abuse of children, we feel strongly that such unfortunate priests should be given the alternative of a retired life within the protection of monastery walls or complete laicization.”

1963:

Fr. Fitzgerald addressed a letter to Bishop Vincent Hines of Norwich, Connecticut concerning a priest in his care. He said in reference to bishops who have allowed sexually abusive priests to continue in ministry:

“Personally I would want to spend the rest of my life on my knees asking God’s mercy, for I know no more terrible threat than the words of Our Lord: ‘those who tamper with the innocence of the innocents - it were better if they had never been born.’” (May 7, 1963.)

1963:

Fr. Gerald had a private audience with Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) and on August 27, 1963 submitted a report to the pope at the pope’s request. Concerning priests who sexually abuse minors he said to the pope:

“Problems that arise from abnormal, homosexual tendencies are going to call for, not only spiritual, but understanding psychiatric counseling. Personally I am not sanguine of the return of priests to active duty who have been addicted to abnormal practices, especially sins with the young.....Where there is indication of incorrigibility, because of the tremendous scandal given, I would most earnestly recommend total laicization.”

1964:

In 1964 Fr. Fitzgerald wrote to Bishop Joseph Durick of Nashville, who was attending the Vatican Council at the time. Fr. Gerald was trying to alert the Vatican authorities and the Council itself about the problem of sexually abusive priests. In this letter he draws attention to the growing numbers of such problems:

“May I take this occasion to bring to your attention what is a growing concern to many of us here in the States. When I was ordained, forty three years ago, homosexuality was a practically unknown rarity. Today it is rampant among men. And whereas seventeen years ago eight out of ten problems here [at the Paraclete facility, Via Coeli] would represent the alcoholic, now in the last year or so our admission ratio would be approximately 5-2-3: five being alcoholic, two would be what we call “heart cases” (natural affection towards women) and three representing aberrations involving homosexuality. More alarming still is that among these of the 3 out of 10 class, 2 out of 3 have been young priests.

Fr. Gerald retained his opposition to providing hospitality and help to priests who sexually abused minors. Although the documentation clearly points to the fact that he attempted to treat such priests sent by bishops, he also continued his search for a solution to these problems. In addition to his constant commitment to laicization, even if against the priest’s will, he also had a plan to set up a retreat on a remote island in the Caribbean in which he would house such priests for the remainder of their lives. He mentioned this idea in a letter written in 1957 to Archbishop Byrne, his ecclesiastical sponsor and co-founder of the Paracletes:

“May I beg your excellency to concur and approve of what I consider a very vital decision on our part - that we will not offer hospitality to men who have seduced or attempted to seduce little boys or girls. These men Your Excellency are devils and the wrath of God is upon them and if I were a bishops I would tremble when I failed to report them to Rome for involuntary laicization....It is for this class of rattlesnake I have always

wished the island retreat - but even an island is too good for these vipers of whom the Gentle master said - it were better they had not been born - this is an indirect way of saying damned, is it not? When I see the Holy Father I am going to speak of this class to his Holiness." (The 1957 letter is scanned in at City of Angels 11.)

The Paraclete Fathers provided the most widely used resource to bishops for treatment of priests with problems for many years. By his own admission Fr. Gerald had encountered many priests accused of sexually abusing children very early on in his career. In addition to his letters to bishops and Vatican officials, there are other sources that demonstrate that the problem was not unknown or non-existent to the Catholic hierarchy from the mid-forties to the present.

1959:

The Oblate Fathers (OMI) sponsored a one day seminar at the Oblate College in Washington D.C., attended by about 50 seminary rectors and clergy staff members. The presenter was Dr. Norman T. Bowes, a psychiatrist and consultant to religious communities and dioceses. According to the bulletin of the National Catholic Educational Association, January 1960, "Dr. Bowes based his lecture on psychological assessments made over a twelve year period on approximately 3000 seminarians, priests and religious.

Areas of conflict found among those examined were reported in their order of frequency:

- 1) sexual maladjustments;
- 2) three types of scrupulosity;
- 3) problems in interpersonal relationships;
- 4) mother-fixation complex;
- 5) obsessive-compulsive personalities;
- 6) depressive components;
- 7) affect-laden individuals."

1960:

Dr. Norman Bowes published (through St. Paul Publications, a Catholic publisher), a book titled *Professional Evaluation of Religious Aspirants*. The book contained much of the information that grew out of his findings in examining 3000 aspirants to priesthood and religious life.

1961:

The Sacred Congregation for Religious issued an official document entitled, "Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders," 2 Feb. 1961. The document states that one of the common causes of "defection' or departure from the priesthood is "...sexual tendencies of a pathological nature..." which refers to homosexual tendencies.

Later in the document reasons for dismissal are listed. The following statement is found:

“Advancement to religious vows and ordination should be barred to those who are afflicted with evil tendencies to homosexuality or pederasty, since for them the common life and the priestly ministry would constitute serious dangers.”

1966:

Bishop Schenk of Duluth wrote an open letter to all bishops asking if anyone would be interested in the priestly services of a priest of his diocese who had been treated at the Paraclete facility in New Mexico for “psychosexual problems.” He admitted in the letter that he had taken in some former patients of the Paraclete Fathers but that the ventures had turned out miserably.

1967:

The first public discussion of priest sexual abuse of minors took place at a meeting sponsored by the National Association for Pastoral Renewal held on the campus of Notre Dame University in 1967. All U.S. Catholic bishops were invited to attend that meeting.

1967:

A priest named Fr. (George Neville) Rucker of Los Angeles was arrested in El Segundo CA for alleged sexual molestation of a nine year old girl in January of that year. He was arrested again in April and another complaint was filed by the parents of another nine year old girl. The arrest records were not sealed and the information was known to the priest’s bishop and other bishops in the region.

1972:

Dr. Eugene Kennedy Dr. Victor Heckler published a psychological study of U.S. priests commissioned by the U.S. Bishops’ Conference. His findings concurred with those of Baars and Terruwe and concluded that American priests were

*7% psychologically and emotionally developed
18% psychologically and emotionally developing
66% underdeveloped
8% maldeveloped.*

Kennedy and Heckler stated that the underdeveloped and maldeveloped priests (74%) had not resolved psychosexual problems and issues usually worked through in adolescence.

“Sexuality is, in other words, non-integrated into the lives of underdeveloped priests and many of them function at a pre-adolescent or adolescent level of psychosexual growth.”

1975:

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles received the first of a series of complaints about sexual misconduct with minors by Fr. Eleutario (Al) Ramos who died in 2004.

1981:

Fr. Michael Andre Moody, a priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, was convicted (1-9-81) of "lewd conduct" for sexually abusing a minor male on June 30, 1980.

1981:

Fr. Donald Roemer of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles was charged with a felony and pleaded guilty to sexual abuse of a minor. The case received widespread media coverage.

1981:

The summer edition of The Catholic Lawyer, the official publication of the Association of Diocesan Attorneys, published an article by Edward D. Holtz, General Counsel of the Archdiocese of Omaha, entitled "Diocesan Liability for Negligence of a Priest."

1982:

Bishop Joseph Madera held a mandatory educational meeting for all of the clergy of the Diocese of Fresno, CA at which legal, psychological and pastoral experts discussed clergy sexual abuse. This workshop followed upon the arrest of a priest in the diocese for sexual abuse.

1983:

The revised Code of Canon Law was promulgated, which included a canon (1395, 2) which explicitly named sex with a minor by clerics as a canonical crime.

1984:

"Respondeat Superior - Diocesan Liability for the Torts of its priests," was presented as a paper by Bob Gibbons at the annual meeting of the Texas Catholic Conference (September, 1984). The paper discussed cases of clergy sexual abuse of minors.

1984:

The Times of Acadiana published a series of articles by Jason Berry exposing the mishandling of the case of Fr. Gilbert Gauthier in Lafayette Louisiana.

1985:

In January Rev. Mel Balthazar was sentenced to seven years for child molestation in a Boise, Idaho court. The presiding judge said at sentencing: "I think the church has its own atonement to make as well. They helped create you and hopefully will help to rehabilitate you."

1985:

February, 1985 - Fr. John Salazar of Los Angeles sexually abused a minor boy. He was later charged with other similar counts for actions he perpetrated during the ensuing months. On July 30, 1987, Salazar was sentenced to prison following conviction. Following his release from prison (1991) he was hired by the Catholic bishop of Amarillo, Texas and assigned as pastor to a remote parish. He again abused young boys, was tried, convicted and sentenced to life in prison in 2004.

1985:

*In May a comprehensive report entitled *The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner*, commonly known as “*The Manual*” was written by Michael Peterson, Thomas Doyle and F. Ray Mouton.*

The 100 page detailed handbook was prepared in on the initiative of the three authors with the support and input of a number of influential bishops. The U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, though aware of the manual, dismissed it as unnecessary claiming that it already possessed all the data contained in it and had policies and procedures in place by 1985.

1986:

Dr. Jay Feierman, a psychiatrist formerly associated with the Paraclete Fathers, testified that he had treated over 600 priests for sexual problems over the previous ten years at the Paraclete facility (1976-1986).

1986:

*The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) sponsored a conference in Ohio called *A Consultation on Male Sexuality in Men’s Religious Orders*. One of the talks was entitled “*When sexual problems become crises; Incidents of Sexual Misconduct and Church personnel - A Legal Perspective*.” (October 29, 1986).*

1993:

Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) issued the first of eleven public statements on clergy sexual abuse in a letter directed to the Bishops of the United States. The bishops formed the first ad hoc committee to study the sexual abuse issue. The committee published a three-part manual in 1994, 1995 and 1996 successively.

1994:

*The Vatican published the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which contains a remarkable paragraph about child sexual abuse: “*Connected to incest is any sexual abuse perpetrated by adults on children or adolescents entrusted to their care. The offense is compounded by the scandalous harm done to the physical and moral integrity of the young, who will remain scarred by it all their lives; and the violation of responsibility for their upbringing.*”*

1995:

The late Bishop Bernard Flanagan, former bishop of Worcester MA, stated in a deposition (June 6, 1995) that in 1971 he had heard of clergy sexual abuse in dioceses other than his own and that bishops were privately discussing this issue.
