

THE CAUSES AND CONTEXTS STUDY of the JOHN JAY COLLEGE

Reflections by Thomas Doyle, J.C.D.

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HISTORICAL FACT: *Catholic clerics have sexually molested tens of thousands of children and vulnerable adults throughout the history of the Catholic Church in the U.S.*

HISTORICAL FACT: *Throughout the history of the Catholic Church in the U.S. Catholic bishops have consistently responded to this problem in an irresponsible and ineffective manner.*

QUESTIONS: *WHY?*

When the John Jay College first started its work I was 98% skeptical that it would be yet another exercise in hierarchical deception and dishonesty. I had been convinced of the absolute need for in-depth research as to causes for the plague of abuse and the consistent though totally dishonest response of the hierarchy from the pope on down. From 1985 until 2002 this need was totally ignored by the official church though a number of reputable scholars began to seriously look into the issue. The essential questions have been, at least in my estimation:

1. Why has the Catholic priesthood attracted so many sexually dysfunctional men?
2. Why have the bishops consistently and almost uniformly responded in a manner that is manifestly unchristian and contrary to the basic moral principles held by the Church?
3. Why has the hierarchical leadership from the papacy on down to local bishops been unwilling or unable to grasp the enormity of the problem?
4. Why has the hierarchy *not* responded in a pastorally sensitive manner to the countless victims?

I believe the key question for any believer is this: *Why have the bishops and far too many of the priests responded to the sexual abuse scandal in precisely the opposite way that the Christ whom they preach would have responded?*

The bishops have been presented with these and other questions for years and have generally ignored them. I do not believe they even know how to cope with a fissure of this magnitude. Between 1985 and 2002 they did practically nothing in response to calls for deeper study into the problem. For the most part their energies were thrown into efforts to defend themselves and counteract the waves of negative publicity. Their priority was to protect themselves from civil liability. Responding to victims was never a priority in fact it was never even on the list.

The enormous pressure on the bishops and on the Vatican following the 2002 revelations in Boston was certain to produce at least minimal results. The National Review Board Report from 2004 was a credible beginning. The Dallas Charter and the Essential Norms were the product of this pressure. Both are woefully inadequate and respond in what is obviously a highly self-serving manner by dealing with the perpetrating clerics but ignoring the more basic question which is the bishop-led cover-up. The Charter and Norms also do nothing in response to the dire need for pastoral response and spiritual healing.

The recurring question to the authorities of the Church has been *why?*. The quality and credibility of most “official” and semi-official responses has ranged from irrelevant to ridiculous. Some have responded with a deflection: *But it's only a tiny minority of priests!* Others, including the popes, have tried to shift blame to secular society, the media or the sexual revolution. From within the fortress of doctrinal reaction have come the dogmatic conclusions that the problem is rooted in emerging notions of human sexuality epitomized by widespread disobedience to the ban on birth control. Many of the inadequate responses mask fear of seeing the hard truth about an idealized organizational Church. Others reflect a painful insecurity rooted in the revelations of the gross inadequacy of leaders in whom they had invested unconditional trust. Nearly all of these explanations are self-serving and none of them represent the need to face the honest but devastating truth of what has happened around us. Most of these explanations proved one thing: *that there is an absolute need to look deeply into every facet and dimension of this complex and often mysterious phenomenon.*

All of this is a prelude to the entrance of the John Jay College into the fray. They won a contract to conduct sociological research into the problem. They gathered numbers...numbers of accused priests, numbers of victims, numbers of bishops' responses. That is their area of specialty. The sources for their numbers were the bishops. There is no other source for finding the number of reports, victims, known abusers etc. The JJC researchers had no guarantee that the bishops would uniformly produce honest responses. The numbers the bishops gave up provided a frightening landscape. But...it became known in time that some of the bishops lied about the numbers of reported cases. They...the bishops in question....determined which reports were credible and which were not. Such a procedure, the bishops' internal investigations and evaluations, lacks any credibility. The JJC people knew the shortcomings they were dealing with and did the best with what they had. The final report of the first phase, issued in February of 2004, was not complete because there remained lingering questions about the accuracy of the number of reports, perpetrators and cases. On the other hand it was much more accurate than was expected and consequently, much more frightening.

The second phase is "Causes and Context." Many believed that this phase would look deeply into the broad scope of information and come up with insightful conclusions as to why it all happened. Such a belief was unrealistic because that goal was beyond the expertise of the research team. The final product of the JJC in this phase will be helpful information that will assist other scholars in other areas in conducting the additional research that is needed.

At the outset many, including myself, misunderstood the mandate and goals of the John Jay study on both levels. Once I received a more accurate picture of what they have been about I have revised my expectations. I believe now that it is unrealistic to expect the John Jay report in

this latter phase of their research to provide the definitive answers to the more fundamental questions that remain unanswered. They themselves realize that they cannot produce the answers to many of the essential questions. However their conclusions can provide invaluable information that will assist other researchers in other fields to delve more deeply into the entire complex phenomenon of Catholic clergy sexual abuse.

I predict the report will be met with disappointment which will provoke anger and hostility on the part of many who have expected much more. I also believe that this anger is and will be misplaced. It is not only useless but counterproductive to direct anger and hostility to the John Jay College researchers. They have acted competently within the scope of their mandate. If there is anger and disappointment it is rightly directed at the U.S. bishops. They have known all along that this on-going issue requires in-depth research and a willingness to take the enormous risk of not only sponsoring this research but providing the needed data for the researchers. This is a risk precisely because the results will not vindicate the bishops. On the contrary the results will, in all probability, clearly demonstrate deep problems in several areas of Catholic life. These areas include:

- 1) The Catholic philosophy of human sexuality
- 2) The theory and practice of pastoral care
- 3) The nature and role of authority
- 4) The role of the office of bishop
- 5) The structure of the institutional Church as a stratified society
- 6) The adequacy or lack thereof of the Canon Law system
- 7) The very meaning of "Church."

Research on these and related questions has been on-going for many years as has been discussion on many levels about the need for such research. The sexual abuse "crisis" is far from ended, contrary to the statements of the bishops and the hopes of rank and file Catholics. Victims of abuse from decades ago continue to come forward having been finally empowered to step outside their individual prisons of shame and fear. Though the bishops and many of their supporters continually try to devalue these claims because they refer to incidents that occurred years ago, the fact remains that these people were viciously abused as children or adolescents and remain deeply wounded. The steady emergence of such cases from the cover of history points to a problem that was not an occasional exception but a facet of the very culture of the Catholic Church, embedded in its clerical elite.

The steady stream of what some call "historic cases" demonstrates more than anything else, the absolute need for research. The Catholic "faithful, who make up well over 99% of the institutional Church, and the secular societies that respect the institutional Church and show it such varied degrees of deference, deserve answers. Those who support the hierarchy and who look to them for guidance deserve to know why the anointed leaders of the world's largest religious denomination have systematically allowed such vile evil to exist in its very midst.

A number of reputable scholars in various disciplines have recognized the key questions and started to look deeply into the complex society and equally complex history of the Church for answers. In 1995 two books were published which stood out as beacons in the quest for

answers: Sex, Priests and Power by A.W. Richard Sipe, and In the Name of All That's Holy by Anson Shupe. Three years previous Jason Berry published Lead Us Not Into Temptation which has proven to be the most complete and accurate rendition of the early years and direction of the present phase of the crisis. It has also been the source of brilliant insight into the many "whys" and a catalyst for continued research.

These authors are representative of the kind of scholarship that is needed. Historians must delve into the primary sources and provide a non-revisionist version of how the Catholic Church unfolded over the centuries, especially in regard to its sexual philosophy. Scripture scholars and theologians are needed who can look deeply into the doctrinal presuppositions that support the institutional Church's definition of itself and justification for its method of government. Experts in legal theory must look fearlessly at the Church's Canon Law system in search of valid reasons why it has failed to be a vehicle for justice for the Church's own victims.

The final report of the John Jay study should not be seen as a conclusion or as a source for definitive answers. It will not bring relief from the pain endured by so many. It will not provoke a radical about-face by the nation's bishops. However it represents progress in sifting through the mass of information that provides significant documentary evidence of what has happened. The findings of the study will justify the absolute need to move forward fearlessly to the real question: *Why!*