

WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE'RE
GOING — HOW SURVIVORS HAVE CHANGED
HISTORY

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

Annual SNAP Conference, Chicago, Illinois

August 2, 2014

HOW SURVIVORS HAVE CHANGED HISTORY

A letter sent by the Vicar General of the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana to the papal nuncio in June, 1984, was the trigger that set in motion a series of events that has changed the fate of the victims of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and clergy of all denominations. The letter informed the nuncio that the Gastel family had decided to withdraw from a confidential monetary settlement with the diocese. It went on to say they had obtained the services of an attorney and planned to sue the diocese.

This long process has had a direct impact on much more than the fate of victims and the security of innocent children and vulnerable persons of any age. It has altered the image and role of the institutional Catholic Church in western society to such an extent that the tectonic plates upon which this Church rests have shifted in a way never expected or dreamed of thirty years ago.

I cannot find language that can adequately communicate the full import of this monstrous phenomenon. The image of a Christian Church that enabled the sexual and spiritual violation of its most vulnerable members and when confronted, responded with

institutionalized mendacity and utter disregard for the victims cannot be adequately described as a “problem,” a “crisis” or a “scandal.” The widespread sexual violation of children and adults by clergy and the horrific response of the leadership, especially the bishops, is the present-day manifestation of a very dark and toxic dimension of the institutional Church. This dark side has always existed. In our era it has served as the catalyst for a complex and deeply rooted process that can be best described as a paradigm shift. The paradigm for responding to sexual abuse by clergy has shifted at its foundation. The paradigm for society’s understanding of and response to child sexual abuse had begun to shift with the advent of the feminist movement in the early seventies but was significantly accelerated by the mid-eighties. The paradigm of the institutional Church interacting in society has shifted and continues to do so as the forces demanding justice, honesty and accountability by the hierarchy continue their relentless pressure. The Catholic monolith, once accepted by friend and foe alike as a rock-solid monarchy, is crumbling.

The single most influential and forceful element in this complex historical process has not been the second Vatican Council. It has been the action of the victims of sexual abuse.

There are a few of us still standing who have been in the midst of this mind and soul-boggling phenomenon from the beginning of the present era. We have been caught up and driven by the seemingly never-ending chain of events, revelations, and explosions that have marked it from the very beginning and will continue to mark it into the future.

It has had a profound impact on the belief systems and the spirituality of many directly and indirectly involved. My own confidence and trust in the institutional church has been shattered. I have spent years trying to process what has been happening to the spiritual dimension of my life. The vast enormity of a deeply engrained clerical culture that allowed the sexual violation of the innocent and most vulnerable has overshadowed the theological, historical and cultural supports upon which the institutional Church has based its claim to divinely favored status. All of the theological and canonical truths I had depended upon have been dissipated to meaninglessness.

Some of us who have supported victims have been accused of being dissenters from orthodox church teaching. We have been accused of being anti-Catholic, using the sexual abuse issue to promote active disagreement with Church positions on various

sexual issues. These accusations are complete nonsense. This is not a matter of dissent or agreement with Church teachings. It is about the sexual violations of countless victims by trusted Church members. It is not a matter of anti-Catholic propaganda but direct opposition to Church leaders, policies or practices that enable the perpetrators of sexual abuse and demonize the victims. It is not a matter of defaming the Church's image. No one has done a better job of that than the bishops themselves.

For some of us the very concept of a personal or anthropocentric god has also been destroyed, in great part by an unanswerable question: *If there is a loving god watching over us, why does he allow his priests and bishops to violate the bodies and destroy the souls of so many innocent children?"*

Those of us who have been in twelve step movements are familiar with the usual format recommended for speakers: we base our stories on a three-part outline – *what it was like before, what happened, and what it is like now*. This is the format I want to use as I look back on thirty years and try to describe where I think we have been and where we are going. Much to the chagrin of the hard-core cheerleaders for the institutional Church, there is no question that the victims and survivors of the Church's sexual

abuse and spiritual treachery have set in motion a process that has changed and will continue to change the history of the Catholic Church. The Catholic experience has prompted members of other denominations to acknowledge sexual abuse in their midst and demand accountability. It has also forever altered the response of secular society to the once untouchable Churches.

What It Was Like Before.

The basic facts need no elaboration. The default response to a report of child, adolescent or adult sexual abuse was first to enshroud it in an impenetrable blanket of secrecy. The perpetrator was shifted to another assignment. The victim was intimidated into silence. The media knew nothing and if law enforcement or civil officials were involved, they deferred to the bishop “*for the good of the Church.*”

A small number of perpetrators were sent to special church-run institutions that treated them in secrecy and in many instances, released them to re-enter ministry. The founder of the most influential of these, Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald, firmly believed that no priest who had violated a child or minor should ever be allowed back in ministry and should be dismissed from the priesthood. He made his unequivocal beliefs known to bishops, to the prefect of

the Holy Office (1962) and to Pope Paul VI in a private audience in 1963. He was ignored.

What Happened

The Lafayette case involving Gilbert Gauthé was the beginning of the end of the default template. I suspect that none of the major players in the case had any idea of the magnitude of what they were involved in. I was one of them and I certainly could never have imagined how this would all play out.

The Lafayette case sparked attention because of the systemic cover-up that had gone on from before Gilbert Gauthé was ordained and continued past his conviction and imprisonment (see *In God's House*, a novel by Ray Mouton, based on the events of this case). Jason Berry was singlehandedly responsible for opening up the full extent of the ecclesiastical treachery to the public. Other secular media followed suit. The story was picked up by the national media and before long other reports of sexual abuse by priests were coming in from parishes and dioceses not only in the deep south but in other parts of the country (Required reading! *Lead Us Not Into Temptation* by Jason Berry).

The report or manual, authored by Ray Mouton, Mike Peterson and I, is the result of our belief that the bishops didn't know how to proceed when faced with actual cases of sexual violation and rape by priests. Many of the bishops I spoke to at the time admitted they were bewildered about what to do. None expected the series of explosions that were waiting just over the horizon. I asked several if a document or short manual of some sort would help and the responses were uniformly affirmative. Some of the bishops I consulted with were men I had grown to respect and trust. I believed they would support whatever efforts we suggested to deal with the developing, potentially explosive situation. Peterson, Mouton and I did not see it as an isolated, one-time "problem." Rather, we saw it as a highly toxic practice of the clerical culture that needed to be recognized and rectified.

Some of the men I consulted with and to whom I turned for support and guidance, in time became major players in the national nightmare. The two most prominent were Bernard Law and Anthony Bevilacqua, both men whom I once counted as friends.

It was not long before I realized that the major force of opposition was the central leadership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the General Secretariat in particular. We

had initially hoped the Bishops' conference would look at the manual and consider the action proposals that accompanied it. The main blockage was, I believe, at the level of the general secretariat and the executive leadership. It was bad enough that they simply ignored the effort to help but they delivered a serious blow to their credibility when they made public statements to the effect that they knew everything that was in the manual and already had programs and protocols in place. When questioned by the media about this they were forced to admit that these protocols and policies were not written down.

Throughout this period the three of us were hopeful that the opposition was not representative of the entire hierarchical leadership. We wanted to believe that the pushback from the Conference was the reaction of a small group and that it was based on a turf battle between the Bishops Conference and the Papal nuncio. Our realization that the reactionary attitude was more extensive began when the bishops, through the office of the general council, publicly accused Mouton, Peterson and I of creating the manual and the making the recommended action proposals because we saw the growing problem as a potential source of profit and hoped to sell our services to the various dioceses. At this point the three of us had to accept the painful

reality that episcopal leadership was far more interested in their own image and power than in the welfare of the victims. It was becoming very clear that in the Church we were trying to help, integrity was a scarce commodity.

At the recent Vatican celebrations for Saint John XXIII and former pope John Paul II, George Weigel and Joaquin Navarro-Valls created an outrageous fantasy about the role of John Paul II, claiming that he knew nothing until after the 2002 Boston debacle. This was a blatant lie. John Paul II was given a 42 page detailed report on the sex abuse and cover-up in Lafayette LA during the last week of February 1985. It was sent as justification for the request from the papal nuncio that a bishop be appointed to go to Lafayette to try to find out exactly what was going on. The report was carried to Rome by Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia precisely because the nuncio wanted it to go directly to the pope and not be sidetracked by lower level functionaries. The pope read the report and within four days the requested appointment came through. The bishop in question was the late A.J. Quinn of Cleveland who turned out to be a big part of the problem rather than a part of the solution.

Quinn visited Lafayette two times and accomplished nothing. We were suspicious of his intentions by the end of 1985 and quite certain by 1986. In 1988 he wrote to the nuncio: *“The truth is, Doyle and Mouton want the Church in the United States to purchase their expensive and controvertible leadership in matters relating to pedophilia...The Church has weathered worse attacks...So too will the pedophile annoyance eventually abate.”* (Quinn to Laghi, Jan. 8, 1988). Archbishop Laghi didn’t buy it, evident from his cover letter to me: *“While I do not subscribe to the conclusions drawn in this correspondence, I want you to know of some of the sentiments expressed in some quarters...”* (Laghi to Doyle, Jan. 18, 1988). In 1990 Quinn addressed the Canon Law Society of America and advised that if bishops found information in priests’ files they did not want seen they should send the files to the papal nuncio to be shielded by diplomatic immunity. Quinn, a civil lawyer as well as a canon lawyer, was then subjected to disbarment proceedings as a result of his unethical suggestion.

The papal nuncio, the late Cardinal Pio Laghi, was supportive of our efforts and was in regular telephone contact with the Vatican. There were very few actual written reports sent over although all of the media stories we received were transmitted to the Holy See. Cardinal Silvio Oddi, then the Prefect of the

Congregation for the Clergy, visited the nunciature in June and asked to be briefed. I was deputed for the task. By then we had more information on the rapidly growing number of cases in all parts of the country. I recall that by that time we were aware of 42 cases, which I naively thought was a very significant number. I prepared a lengthy report that was not only detailed but also graphic in its content. I read the report to the cardinal and responded to his many questions. At the end of the meeting at which only he and I were present, he announced that he would take this information back to the Holy Father. *“Then there will be a meeting of the heads of all the dicasteries [Vatican congregations] and we will issue a decree.”* I understand that he did take the information to the pope but there never was a meeting of the heads and no decree ever came forth.

Our efforts to get the bishops’ conference to even consider the issues we set forth in our manual, much less take decisive action, were a total failure. Looking back from the perspective of thirty years direct experience, I believe they acted in the only way they knew how which was completely self-serving with scandalous lack of sympathy for the victims and their families. There were individual bishops who were open to exploring the right way to proceed but the conference, which represented all of the bishops,

was interested in controlling the fallout and preserving their stature and their power.

We sent individual copies of the manual to every bishop in the U.S. on December 8, 1985. By then we still had hope that perhaps someone would read it and stand up at the conference meetings and call the bishops' attention to what we had insisted was the most important element, namely the compassionate care of the victims.

In October 1986 Mike Peterson had flown to the Vatican to speak with officials at the Congregation for Religious and the Congregation for Clergy. He was in a better position than anyone else to expose this issue to them because he knew how serious and extensive the problem of sexually dysfunctional priests was from his experience as director of St. Luke Institute. He returned from Rome dejected, angry and discouraged. I remember picking him up at the airport and going to dinner. They not only were not interested but brushed his concerns off as an exaggeration of a non-problem. Mike was willing to keep trying with the American bishops. He arranged for a hospitality suite at the hotel where the bishops were having their annual November meeting. He invited every bishop to come and discuss the matter of sexual abuse of

minors by the clergy. There were over three hundred bishops present. Eight showed up.

Between 1986 and 2002 there were several important developments in the unfolding history of clergy sexual abuse. I would like to mention a few that influenced the historical process.

1. The bishops addressed the issue secretly in their annual meetings. The direction was consistent: defense of the dioceses and the bishops. There was never any mention of care for the victims.
2. The media continued to cover the issue from coast to coast generally showing sympathy for the victims and outrage at the Church's systemic cover-up.
3. Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the US bishops in June 1993 which clearly revealed his attitude.
4. The bishops formed a committee in 1993 and produced a four-volume handbook. The handbook and the committee had no appreciable impact.

5. There were increasing cases of sexual abuse brought before the civil courts. There were also several very public explosions during this period: the Thomas Adamson related cases in St. Paul; St. Anthony Seminary, Santa Barbara CA; St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary WI; Fr. James Porter, Massachusetts; the Rudy Kos trial, Dallas, 1997. None of these jarred the bishops loose from their arrogant, defensive position and none served as a sufficient wake-up call for the broad base of lay support for the bishops.

6. The “problem” which John Paul II declared was unique to the United States, was amplified in other countries: Mt. Cashel, St. John’s Newfoundland, 1989; Brendan Smyth and the fall of the Irish government in December 1994; the exposure and forced resignation of Hans Cardinal Groer, archbishop of Vienna, September 1995. So much for the U.S. as the scapegoat!

7. SNAP was founded by Barbara Blaine and The Linkup by Jeanne Miller in 1989.

8. The first gathering of clergy abuse victims took place in Arlington IL in October 1992, sponsored by the Linkup. The main speakers were Jason Berry, Richard Sipe, Andrew Greeley, Jeff Anderson and Tom Doyle.

9. In 1999 John Paul II ordered the canonical process against Marcial Maciel-Degollado, founder and supreme leader of the Legion of Christ, shelved. In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the truth of Maciel's crimes against minors and removed him from ministry. In 2009 the Vatican announced that Maciel had led a double life, having six possible children with two women.

The pope made a total of 11 public statements about clergy sexual abuse between 1993 and his death in 2005. The letters showed little comprehension of the horrific nature of the problem and no acknowledgement of the bishops' enabling role. The culprits were, in the pope's eyes, secular materialism, media sensationalism and sinful priests. He never even acknowledged much less responded to the thousands of requests from individual victims.

The U.S. bishops issued a handful of press releases and a number of intramural statements, most of which came from the office of the General Council. To their credit their general counsel sent out a memo to all bishops in 1988 which contained suggested actions which, had they not been ignored by the bishops, might have made a significant difference.

The bishops' approach in the U.S. and elsewhere followed a standard evolutionary process: denial, minimization, blame shifting and devaluation of challengers. The bishop's carefully scripted apologies expressed their regret for the pain suffered. Never once did they apologize for what they had done to harm the victims. Likewise there was never any concern voiced by the Vatican or the bishops' conference about the spiritual and emotional damage done to the victims by the abuse itself and by the betrayal by the hierarchy. It became clear by the end of the nineties that the problem was not simply recalcitrant bishops. It was much more fundamental. The barrier to doing the right thing was deeply embedded in the clerical culture itself.

January 6, 2002 stands out as a pivotal date in the evolution of the clergy abuse phenomenon. The Boston revelations had an immediate and lasting impact that surprised even the most cynical.

I was not surprised by the stories because I had been in conversations first with Kristin Lombardi who wrote a series based on the same facts for the Boston Phoenix in March 2001 and later with the Globe Spotlight Team. The continuous stream of media stories of what the bishops had been doing in Boston and elsewhere provoked widespread public outrage.

The bishops' cover-up of sexual abuse and the impact on victims were the subject of special reports by all of the major news networks and countless stories in the print media. Newsweek, Time, U.S. News and World Report and the Economist all published cover stories about the "scandal." The number of lawsuits dramatically increased and the protective deference on the part of law enforcement and civil officials, once counted on by the clerical leadership, was rapidly eroding. Grand jury investigations were launched in three jurisdictions within two months with several more to follow. It was all too much for the bishops to handle. They could not control it. They could not ignore it and they could not minimize it or make it go away.

The most visible result of the many-sided pressure on the hierarchy was the Dallas meeting. This was not a proactive pastorally sensitive gesture on the part of the bishops. It was

defensive damage control, choreographed by the public relations firm of R.F. Binder associates. The meeting included addresses by several victim/survivors (David Clohessy, Michael Bland, Craig Martin, Paula Rohbacker), a clinical psychologist (Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea), a lay theologian (Scott Appleby), a Catholic author (Margaret O’Brien Steinfels). The tangible result of the meeting was the *Charter for the Protection of Young People* and the *Essential Norms*. The impact of *Charter* and the *Norms* has clearly been mixed. The lofty rhetoric of the bishops in the charter has not been followed up with action, to no one’s surprise.

The Essential Norms have not been uniformly and consistently followed. As proof we can look to the steady number of exceptions from 2002 whereby known perpetrators are either allowed to remain in ministry or are put back in ministry. The National Review Board showed promise at the beginning, especially after the publication of its extensive report in 2004. This promise sputtered and died as the truly effective members of the board left when they realized the bishops weren’t serious, and were replaced by others who essentially did nothing but hold positions on an impotent administrative entity that served primarily as an unsuccessful public relations effort to support the bishops’ claim that they were doing something.

Sexual violation of minors by clerics of all ranks has been part of the institution and the clerical culture since the days of the primitive Christian communities. Over the centuries the stratified model of the Church, with the clergy in the dominant role and the laity relegated to passive obedience, has held firm and allowed the hierarchy to maintain control over the issue of sexually dysfunctional clerics who, by the way, have ranged from sub-deacons to popes.

The paradigm shift, evident in the institutional Church since the years leading up to Vatican Council II, laid the foundation for a radically different response in the present era. The victim/survivors, their supporters and the secular society have shaped and guided the direction and evolution of the clergy sexual abuse nightmare. The Vatican and the bishops throughout the world have remained on the defensive and have never been able to gain any semblance of control. Those very few bishops who have publicly sided with the survivors have been marginalized and punished. The general response has been limited to the well-tuned rhetoric of public statements, sponsorship of a variety of child-safety programs, constant promises of change and enlightenment and above all, the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in attorneys who have used every tactic imaginable and many that are

not imaginable to defeat and discredit victims and prevent their clients from being held accountable. The apologetic public statements, filled with regret and assurances of a better tomorrow, are worthless from the get-go, rendered irrelevant and insulting by the harsh reality of the brutal tactics of the bishops' attack dogs.

While the institutional Church has essentially remained in neutral, various segments of civil society have reacted decisively. Between 1971 and 2013 there have been at least 72 major reports issued about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The early reports (three in the seventies) were about sexual dysfunction in general among the clergy but since 1985 they have been about sexual abuse of minors. Some of these have been commissioned by official bodies and are the result of extensive investigations such as the U.S. Grand Jury reports, the Belgian Parliamentary Report and the Irish Investigation Commission Reports. They come from several countries in North America and Europe. A study of the sections on causality has shown a common denominator: the deliberately inadequate and counter-productive responses and actions of the bishops.

The unfolding of the events in this contemporary era can be divided into three phases: the first begins in 1984 and culminates

at the end of 2001. The second begins with the Boston revelations and extends to the beginning of 2010. The present phase began in March 2010 when the case of Lawrence Murphy of Milwaukee revealed that the Vatican was directly connected to the cover-up. In this case, in spite of the pleas of an archbishop (Weakland) and two bishops (Fliss and Sklba) that Murphy, who had violated at least 200 deaf boys, be laicized, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with Ratzinger as Prefect, refused. Instead, he allowed the culprit to live out his days as a priest.

The three phases are arbitrary demarcation points based on the level of exposure of the Church's true policies and actions. The difference is only in the depth and extent of information discovered about the bishops' responses to decades of reports of sexual violation by clerics.

In 1993 and 1994 Pope John Paul II attempted to persuade the world that sexual abuse by clergy was an American problem, caused primarily by media exaggerations, materialism and failure to pray. At the conclusion of his first public statement on sexual abuse, a 1993 letter to the U.S. bishops, he said, "*Yes dear brothers, America needs much prayer lest it lose its soul.*" It is ironic that this comment came from the leader of an organization

that had not so much lost but gave up its soul. By 2014 there was no doubt anywhere that geographic boundaries are irrelevant. This highly toxic dimension of the institutional Church and its clerical sub culture has been exposed in country after country on every continent except Antarctica, where there are no bishops, no priests, and no minors. The presence of God is found in a few scientists, some U.S. military and a lot of penguins.

The focus had finally shifted to the Vatican. In September 2011 the Center for Constitutional Rights assisted in the filing of a case before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. In January 2014 the U.N. Commission on the Rights of the Child delivered a blistering criticism of the Vatican's response to sexual abuse by clerics. In May 2014 the U.N. Commission on Torture issued a report equally critical of the Vatican's handling of sexual abuse claims and its opposition to U.N. policies. This is truly momentous. The world's largest religious denomination has been called to account by the community of nations.

What Its Like Now

The foregoing paragraphs have provided a sparse but factually correct description of the second element of the 12 Step presentation, "*What Happened.*" Now I would like to shift the

focus to “*What Its Like Now.*” Any conclusions at this point, thirty years later, are obviously very temporary since this is not the end of the issue but simply a milestone along the way.

I’d like to summarize by asserting that in spite of all that has happened since 1984, **I do not believe there has been any fundamental change in the hierarchy.** It may be true that individual bishops have either changed or have been compassionately supportive all along but in general the hierarchy is behaving today just as it did in 1985. The dramatic events in St. Paul-Minneapolis are the latest example of this intransigence. After all that has been revealed over these thirty years, one would think that the constant exposure of the official Church’s duplicity and dishonesty as well as the vast amount of information we have about the destructive effects of sexual abuse on the victims and their families, would cause some substantial change in attitude, direction and behavior. The bishops and even the pope have claimed they have done more to protect children than any other organization. There may be some validity to this claim but what is also true is that there has not been a single policy, protocol or program that was not forced on them. In 30 years they have not taken a single proactive move to assist victims or extend any semblance of compassionate pastoral care. Programs and policies

promoting awareness or mandating background checks do nothing for the hundreds of thousands of suffering victims. The bishops as a group have done nothing for them either because they will not or more probably because they cannot.

There seems to be little sense in continuing to demand that bishops change their attitudes or at least their behavior. We have been beating our heads against the wall for a quarter of a century and the best we can hope for is that the sound will reverberate somewhere out in the Cosmos and eventually cause a stir before the end of time or the Second Coming, whichever comes first.

The institutional Church's abject failure has revealed fundamental deficiencies in essential areas, all of which have been directly instrumental in perpetrating and sustaining the tragic culture of abuse:

1. The erroneous belief that the monarchical governmental structure of the Church was intended by god and justifies the sacrifice of innocent victims “

2. The belief that priests and bishops are superior to lay persons, entitled to power and deference because they are ontologically different and uniquely joined to Christ.

3. A lay spirituality that is dependent on the clergy and gauged by the degree of submission to them and unquestioned obedience to all church laws and authority figures.

4. An obsession with doctrinal orthodoxy and theological formulations that bypasses the realities of human life and replaces mercy and charity as central Catholic values.

5. An understanding of human sexuality that is not grounded in the reality of the human person but in a bizarre theological tradition that originated with the pre-Christian stoics and was originally formulated by celibate males of questionable psychological stability.

6. The clerical subculture that has propagated the virus of clericalism, which has perpetuated a severely distorted value system that has influenced clergy and laity alike.

Has Pope Francis brought a new ray of hope? I believe he is a significantly different kind of pope but he is still a product of the monarchical system and he is still surrounded by a bureaucracy that could hinder or destroy any hopes for the radical change that is needed if the institutional Church is to rise about the sex abuse nightmare and become what it is supposed to be, the People of God. The victims and indeed the entire Church are tired of the endless stream of empty statements and unfulfilled promises. The

time for apologies, expressions of regret and assurances of change is long gone. Action is needed and without it the pope and bishops today will simply be more names in the long line of hierarchs who have failed the victims and failed the church.

I believe there is reason to hope, not because of the engaging personality of Pope Francis. This pope's overtures to victims are grounded on three decades of courageous efforts by survivors. Without these efforts nothing would have changed. Survivors have changed the course of history for the Church and have accelerated the paradigm shift. If the Catholic Church is to be known not as a gilded monarchy of increasing irrelevance but as the People of God, the change in direction hinted at by the new pope's words and actions are crucial and if he does lead the way to a new image of the Body of Christ it will be due in great part because the survivors have led the way for him.