

# AQUINAS WALTER RICHARD SIPE

1932 --- 2018

*Courage!* Richard ended his letters, his emails and his conversations with me and with so many others with that word. I learned from him however that it did not mean the garden variety of courage .... The kind one needs for example to cross a busy street in New York City or drive a car in Rome. He was referring to that special, elevated kind of courage that is grounded in the Serenity Prayer:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change,  
The Courage to change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

I don't think Richard ever fully realized it, but he was the embodiment of the courage to change the things he could. For over a quarter of a century Richard's unprecedented research provided him with the wisdom to realize that the Church he believed in and loved, the real Church, the People of God, was sorely in need of both the exposure and the eradication of the virus of sexual violation by its own clerics and the exposure and eradication of the dishonesty and narcissistic behavior of the hierarchy, behavior that enabled the continued violation and tragically ruined the lives of countless innocent believers.

Richard's research and his findings terrified the status quo and gained him the attacks, the slander and the condemnations of those

whose security was rocked by the reality Richard discovered. His courage prompted him to stand face to face on a level playing field with the immense power and stature of the world's largest corporation and the largest and oldest religious denomination. He may have blinked once but he never backed down and today we know he was dead right in his conclusions and in his predictions.

What is amazing is that this gentle, humble and loving man was filled with this such unprecedented courage. Few knew the price of uncertainty and misplaced guilt that Richard paid as he forged on, not because he was a radicalized reformer, but, as he so often said, it was simply the right thing to do. I know because I was one of them.

Our lives intersected over a quarter century ago. The similarity in our backgrounds, both having been priests in religious orders, and both having been naïve enough to believe the official church would affirm our findings, drew us together. Our relationship grew to a wonderful and deep friendship that supported a bond of mutual and loving trust.

I long ago realized that Richard's true calling, his real ministry and in a sense his priesthood really began when he met and married Marianne. Over the years that the three of us shared a mutual drive to research this terrible phenomenon, seeking to discover the real depth and breadth of its roots, we also shared a journey. Our shared odyssey was a search for a spiritual serenity that we needed to fill the void in our lives, a void created as we watched the church we believed in, hoped in and trusted, disintegrate under the weight of its own false pretensions. We were our own support group through the years because no one had been where we had been.

I recall the countless hours Dick, Marianne and I spent sitting at their kitchen table. It was there that the courage Richard spoke of gave each of us the strength to share our fears, our doubts and to admit even the guilt that occasionally had plagued us, wondering if we were really doing what so many had accused us of doing, destroying the Church. I drew much of my own strength, hope and determination from the fearless commitment of Dick and Marianne. From what Dick often said to me, I know that I gave some of that back to them and in time the three of us emerged from that dark tunnel with fortified hope and courage.

I don't think Richard's momentous research, his radical conclusions and his super-courageous confrontations with the ecclesiastical monarchy could have happened apart from his union with Marianne. I can say this because I was so often an intimate part of this process and the certitude, the wisdom and the strength Marianne infused in Richard always rubbed off on me.

Richard and Marianne changed the course of history for the Catholic Church and for the most vulnerable of its members. It was and will continue to be a change that is not welcomed but resisted but it is a change that is essential if we are to see a transformation from a decaying monarchy to what the Church really is, the Body of Christ.

I would like to finish by sharing two truths about the life of Aquinas Walter Richard Sipe.

The first is a reflection on the years from 1932 to 2018: *Dum vivere, vivat --- While he was alive, he lived!*

And the second, a reflection on a future that will be, because of Richard's life. It is from a poem that continues to inspire me:

**One hundred years from now it will not matter  
What kind of car I drove, the size of the house I lived in,  
How much money was in my bank account nor the  
Style of clothes I wore  
But the world will be a better place  
Because I was important in the life of a child.**

Richard's life has been and will always be important in the lives of countless children, old, young, middle aged and yet to be born, important because he had an abundance of that which he wished for all of us,

## **Courage**

Thomas Patrick Doyle  
September 22, 2018

*I love you, my brother*