

The Church's Passivity

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Voice from the Desert
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One of the most egregious and telling examples of what is described by a recent Washington Post editorial, "The passivity of the Catholic Church," 05/06/2012,

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-passivity-of-the-catholic-church/2012/05/06/gIQAJgAU6T_story.html

is what has been happening in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia since the Boston, Massachusetts Archdiocese imploded in 2002.

In an article, "The crisis of credibility in Philadelphia," published in the National Catholic Reporter on 10/28/2005,

http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005d/102805/102805x.htm

I wrote:

"I remember Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua being quoted on a CNN 'Newsnight' report covering some of the cardinals who returned from Rome and attended the annual Catholic University fundraiser in Philadelphia on April 26, 2002. He answered a reporter's question by saying, 'We all are agreed that no priest guilty of even one act of sexual abuse of a minor will function in any ecclesial ministry or any capacity in our diocese.'"

Events following that April, 2002 statement have shown in excruciating detail that Cardinal Bevilacqua's words did not accurately describe the actions of the Philadelphia hierarchy then or during the ten years that followed.

Events since 2002 include:

1. three grand juries being convened to investigate the Archdiocese of Philadelphia resulting in reports published in 2005 and again in 2011,
2. the release of depositions given by Cardinal Bevilacqua and some of his auxiliary bishops,
3. denials by Cardinal Justin Rigali shortly after the second grand jury was released in February of 2011 that no suspected, credibly accused of known sexual predators were in ministry,
4. and his almost immediate placing of 26 priests on administrative leave following that statement.

On Friday, 05/04/2012, the current Archbishop of Philadelphia, Charles J. Chaput, released the resolutions of eight of the priests put on administrative leave by his predecessor. Charges against five men were substantiated and three were not. A ninth priest is now deceased so that investigation could not be concluded. Archbishop Chaput has promised that the remaining cases will be concluded as soon as possible given the exhaustive nature of the review.

Meanwhile the seventh week of the trial of Msgr. William Lynn, head of priest personnel under Cardinal Bevilacqua has begun in Philadelphia's Criminal Justice Center. The criminal charges against Lynn are child

endangerment and conspiracy. He is the first church official, and so far the highest, to be held accountable for failing to protect children while covering up for known sexual predators.

What does all this tell us?

Like the example given in the Post editorial, that of the Rev. Bradley M. Schaeffer, the former president of the U.S. Jesuit Conference and who led Chicago Jesuits in the 1990s, it illustrates a strikingly similar pattern of not alerting the police and not removing individuals having a documented history of credible accusations based on the facts found in Philadelphia Archdiocesan records and secret files.

Three previous leaders of this archdiocese have been shown to have protected suspected, credibly accused or known sexual predators at the expense of children. In many cases lives have been ended, destroyed or irreparably damaged not only by the actual sexual exploitation of predators but by the collusion of leadership that gave no thought to protecting children.

Catholic leaders may “insist they have turned the tide against clerical sexual abuse,” but that will only be perceived as more empty words, “sounding brass and tinkling cymbals,” (1 Corinthians 13:1) unless two things happen:

- 1. bishops need to admit to and take steps to correct a deeply flawed foundational culture within the Church – Clericalism – that enabled and facilitated the sexual abuse of untold numbers of children**
- 2. and they need to be pro-active in supporting the removal of all criminal and civil statutes of limitation regarding the sexual abuse of children which would also allow for a legislative window of at least two years for bringing forward previously barred cases of childhood sexual abuse by anyone.**

Bishops in the United States have viciously opposed the removal of statutes of limitation covering childhood sexual abuse in every state where such legislation has been proposed including Colorado, Ohio, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania. Unless or until the hundreds of thousands of dollars that are being spent to oppose SOL reform are put into supporting such needed legislation, the moral authority and credibility of the U.S. hierarchy will continue to dissipate.

At the same time there should be no accommodation in law given to any institution that gives more protection to known or credibly accused sexual predators of children than it does to the children Jesus Christ mandated it protect.

Protecting children cannot be just another “top priority” as mentioned by Archbishop Chaput in his 05/04/2011 press release; it must be the top priority and that includes fully supporting the passage of PA House Bills 832 and especially 878 which mandates a two year civil window, much like that included in Delaware’s 2007 Child Victims Law.

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