



The Crisis in the Catholic Church and The Need for Action by the Laity

Editor's Note: The revelations of numerous mostly older cases of pedophilia in the Catholic Church uncovered by a two-year grand jury investigation in Pennsylvania, released in August, became international news. Journalists and leading Catholic scholars, writers and bishops commented on the grand jury report, as well as many other shocking reports, of child abuse by clergy. Less visible have been laity voices in this crisis. We offer our own perspective in this issue, but we do not claim to have all the answers and we invite our readers to respond to this issue in their own communities.

In order to facilitate discussion, this month's Mindszenty Report provides an overview of the scandal, the Catholic reactions to it, and proposals for church reform. We want to make it clear to our readers that we at the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation are not experiencing a "crisis of faith." Our faith is based on the Word of Jesus Christ, which transcends institutional corruption, human fallibility and individual sin.

The Pennsylvania Shocker

On August 14, 2018, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro revealed the comprehensive findings of a statewide investigation by a grand jury uncovering decades of abuse of children by priests and the systematic cover-up of these abuses.¹ The grand jury found child abuse dating back to 1948. The full report, over 800 pages long, identified 301 Catholic priests as predators who sexually abused children while serving in active ministry in the church. More than 1,000 children were victimized by these priests. The report charged that senior church officials, bishops, Monsignors and others routinely covered up these abuses to avoid scandal, criminal charges against priests, and monetary damages to dioceses. Priests charged with these abuses were routinely shuttled to other parishes without stigma, leaving parishioners unaware of past predatory behavior.

The extent of this abuse was disturbing in itself, but the lurid details and the naming of specific priests offered in the report made, quite frankly, for disgusting reading. We will spare our readers the foul details of abuse, but the number of clerical abusers within six dioceses bears repeating: In the Diocese of Erie, 41 predator priests were named; Diocese of Allentown, 37 priests; Diocese of Greensburg, 20 priests; Diocese of Harrisburg, 45 priests; Diocese of Pittsburgh, 99 priests; and Diocese of Scranton, 59 priests. The full grand jury report can be read at <http://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report>.

The report detailed how church officials covered up cases of abuse, which lessened the chance that law enforcement could prosecute predator priests because the statute of limitations would run out. "As a consequence of the cover-up, almost every instance of abuse we found is too old to be prosecuted," the report concluded.² Victims were "brushed aside, in every part of the state, by church leaders who preferred to protect the abusers and their institutions above all else."³ Indeed, the grand jury found many instances where several diocesan administrators, including bishops, prevailed upon victims not to report abuse to police. In other instances, law enforcement personnel were pressured by these church officials to terminate or avoid an investigation.

Retired Erie Bishop Donald Trautman tried to stop publication of the report in its current form, but dropped the challenge after prosecutors agreed to changes not directly accusing the bishop of cover-ups. Afterwards, Trautman, who headed the Erie Diocese from 1990 to 2012, issued a three-page statement expressing his "disgust" with clergy sexual abuse. He told the press that he met or tried to meet every victim of abuse and helped them obtain diocese-paid mental health treatment. He stated that he worked with Erie prosecutors in 2002 to review diocese records of abuse. He added that he regularly worked with the police, and

he had personally removed at least 16 priests from active ministry over allegations of child abuse. Trautman's lawyer asserted, "There is simply no pattern or practice of putting the church's image or a priest's reputation above the protection of children."

Trautman was especially concerned about charges filed last May against an Erie priest, Rev. David Poulson. Court documents alleged that a confidential diocesan memo indicated Trautman knew, from at least 2010, about complaints concerning Poulson's alleged behavior, including charges that he sexually assaulted two boys between 2002 and 2010. One of the boys was molested in various church rectories while he served as an altar boy and was forced to confess to Poulson for absolution.⁴ Trautman denied knowing of sexual abuse by Poulson during his time as bishop of Erie. Whether this was the case or not, there were widespread cover-ups in the six dioceses named in the report.

The Wider Problem

The church in Pennsylvania was, sad to say, typical, not exceptional. Reports of predator priests abusing children and cover-ups had been circulating for decades as victims brought civil suits against diocese officials across the United States—most famously in Boston, where a longstanding pattern of clerical sex abuse of minors and shuffling of priests from parish to parish was revealed by investigative journalists in 2002 and dramatized in the 2015 film *Spotlight*. The Pennsylvania grand jury report merely reopened the floodgates.

Although many dioceses had already improved their procedures for removing abusive priests, bishops across the country began admitting that there had not been enough transparency in their investigations of abuse. Catholic writers and bishops generally did not try to refute the Pennsylvania report. A notable exception was Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, who called into question the report's findings. In a lengthy essay that appeared on the Catholic League website, Donohue sought to "debunk many of the myths, and indeed lies, that mar the report and/or interpretations of it."⁵

Donohue maintained that most of the allegations of 1,000 children abused over a period of 70 years were "never verified by either the grand jury or the dioceses." Furthermore, not all those accused were priests, but "some were brothers, some were deacons, and some were seminarians." Of the 300 accused, he noted that only half that number, 150, were substantiated. Moreover, he found that the accused named in the report were not afforded the right to rebut

the charges, because almost all of the "accused are either dead or have been thrown out of the priesthood." Over the past two years, he claimed, only .005 percent of the Catholic clergy have had a credible accusation made against them. He concluded, "There is no on-going crisis—it's a total myth. In fact, there is no institution, private or public, that has less of a problem with sexual abuse of minors today than the Catholic Church."⁶

The magnitude of the priest sex abuse scandal threatens to financially engulf individual dioceses. Over the last 14 years, 19 Catholic dioceses and religious orders in the United States have filed for bankruptcy protection because of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, according to the watchdog group Bishopsaccountability.org. More than \$3 billion has been paid in judgments and settlements in the U.S. A recent example is the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings in Montana, which announced in August that it was awaiting a result of a vote by plaintiffs on whether to accept a \$20 million settlement offered to 86 people who alleged they were sexually abused by 27 priests in the diocese.⁷ Litigation began six years ago, leading the diocese to file in 2017 for bankruptcy protection as it began negotiating the settlement. The proposed settlement also prohibits the diocese from opposing legislative measures that would change Montana's criminal or civil statutes of limitations for sexual abuse against children.

Chile and the Pope

The allegations in Pennsylvania and Montana constituted only a fraction of the clerical sex abuse cases given notoriety around the world this year. Reports of homosexual and child abuse by priests in other countries gained new attention. Chile is an instructive case. After long defending a Chilean bishop accused of covering up for abusive priests, Pope Francis accepted the resignations of five Chilean bishops in June over their poor response to sex abuse allegations. Chilean prosecutors are reportedly investigating 158 people, including bishops, priests and laypeople, in connection with the scandals.

In early August Pope Francis commended the Chilean bishops' conference for their newly adopted plan to prevent future instances of sex abuse.⁸ After a week-long meeting, the Chilean bishops announced that they would cooperate with a criminal investigation being conducted into alleged sexual abuse by priests. They appointed attorney Ana Celis as president of the National Council for the Prevention of Abuse and the Accompaniment of Victims, a position that had previously been held by a bishop. The bishops also released a list of names of priests sentenced civilly and canonically for abusing minors.

Wuerl's Call for a National Panel

This call for cooperation with criminal and civil investigators in Chile was echoed by Washington, DC Cardinal Donald Wuerl's proposal that the U.S. Catholic bishops create a new high-level panel to receive and evaluate any allegations or rumors of sexual misconduct by one of its member bishops.⁹ Cardinal Wuerl's proposal was a direct response to revelations of sexual abuse by his predecessor, now former cardinal, Theodore McCarrick. McCarrick was accused of sexual misconduct as a priest and bishop. The allegations led McCarrick to renounce his place in the College of Cardinals.

Before becoming a cardinal, McCarrick had served as a priest in New York and led Catholic communities in Metuchen and Newark, NJ. He served as archbishop of Washington, DC from 2000 to 2006, when he was replaced by Wuerl. As details mounted of his abuse of young men over decades, including two seminarians in Metuchen who received financial settlements, and nearly 20 years of abuse of a boy that started when the child was 11 years old, McCarrick was forced to relinquish his red hat. McCarrick's case highlights the newer face of the clergy sex scandals: as society has cracked down on sex with minors, sexual harassment of adults has remained a less-policed problem in seminaries and among priests looking to ascend the ladder of the church hierarchy.

Wuerl's call for a new national panel met with derision from many who highlighted the failure of an earlier panel created by the bishops after the 2002 Boston clergy abuse scandal.¹⁰ Furthermore, Wuerl came under criticism for allegations that he covered up for his predecessor McCarrick and had looked the other way in sexual misconduct cases when he had served as bishop of Pittsburgh.¹¹ He has asked Pope Francis to accept his resignation.

Sensational Charges Against Francis

The McCarrick scandal reached up to the Vatican itself. In 2006, McCarrick stepped down as Archbishop of Washington. He retired to the Redemptoris Mater seminary, then was sent to the Institute of the Incarnate Word. Sometime around 2009, Pope Benedict XVI placed McCarrick under some sort of sanction, not unlike house arrest. This sanction was reportedly rescinded by Pope Francis, who made McCarrick his "trusted counselor" and allowed McCarrick to recommend the elevation of Blase Cupich and Joseph William Tobin to positions of power in the American church.

This elevation of McCarrick came even though Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò claimed in an open letter published on August 25 that he made several attempts to make the

Vatican aware of McCarrick's abuses over the years; that he personally discussed with Wuerl these allegations well prior to the public revelations of McCarrick's misconduct; and that Pope Francis was aware of these allegations when he elevated McCarrick as his personal counselor.¹² Viganò openly called for Francis to resign. If true, as Jonathan Last pointed out in the *Weekly Standard*, the scandal goes beyond McCarrick himself. Indeed, as Last states, "The institutional damage is done not by abusers but by the structures that cover for them, excuse them, and advance them. Viewed in that way, the damage done to the Catholic church by Cardinal Wuerl—and every other bishop who knew about McCarrick and stayed silent—is several orders of magnitude greater than that done by McCarrick himself."

Last argues that the pontificate of Francis can, perhaps, best be understood as a political project. His election as pope in 2013, Last believes, was planned in advance by four radical cardinals, Cardinals Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Walter Kasper, Godfried Danneels and Karl Lehmann. This explains Francis' efforts to dismantle the restrictions on communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, which could open the door to changes to doctrines on marriage, sexuality and the family aimed at allowing pre- and extra-marital sex, homosexuality and same-sex marriages to be sanctioned by the church.

A Homosexual Network

Swirling around the child abuse scandal are broader charges of a homosexual network within the priesthood and a refusal of even traditionalist bishops to confront this issue.¹³ Rod Dreher reporting in *The American Conservative* maintains that gay culture permeates seminaries, dioceses and the Vatican itself. Gay priests, he contends, are promoted within the ranks, even though they are known for breaking their vows of celibacy. He pointed to the arrest in September of a Chicago priest in Miami having oral sex with another priest. The arrested Chicago priest was appointed to Cardinal Cupich's youth education program, Casa Jesus.

Dreher thinks such stories are only the tip of the iceberg. Within the Vatican itself, Pope Francis appointed former papal nuncio Monsignor Battista Ricca as his representative to the scandal-ridden Vatican bank, even though Ricca lived openly with his male lover, was caught in an elevator having sex with a male prostitute, and was beaten up in a gay bar. Dreher's point is not that homosexuality leads to child abuse. Instead, he argues that a culture has developed within the church that tolerates the breaking of celibacy vows, by both homosexual and heterosexual oriented priests, to cover up abuses because of fears by higher-ranking prelates that their own sins will be made public. Dreher cites studies, although

disputed, concluding that only 45 percent of priests, homosexual and heterosexual, are celibate.¹⁴

What Is To Be Done?

After consultation of many authorities about what needs to be done to cleanse the church of corruption and cover-ups, two conclusions are apparent: First, allowing priests to marry women is unlikely to eliminate sex abuse within the church, although it could mitigate the extent. Protestant denominations that allow married clergy experience many of the same problems seen in the Catholic Church today, as well as the problem of adulterous clergy. Hard data on sexual abuse of minors in Protestant churches is scarce, but insurance companies of Protestant evangelical churches report they receive an average of 260 claims of minor abuse each year.¹⁵ These figures do not include claims of sexual misconduct with adults. Second, there is widespread agreement that the clergy cannot police themselves. What is called for is activism by the laity.

To encourage the laity (and reform-minded clergy) to express themselves, the *Mindszenty Report* asks the following questions:

Should a national laity commission be appointed by the U.S. bishops with the charge to investigate any diocese, parish or seminary charged with misconduct and make its findings public?

Should the church adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward non-celibate priests, as the eminent lay Catholic public intellectual Robert P. George has argued?

Should laity have the authority within a parish to appoint, with a bishop's consent, their priest?

Should the present extremely narrow circumstances allowing for married priests be broadened?

How is our faith in the higher message of Jesus Christ to be maintained during this time of institutional reformation?

Mindszenty Report Reprints

SHOULD COLLEGE BE FREE? No, but colleges should be held accountable for the ever-increasing cost of a college education and the untenable burdens of debt they place on students. Ask for 9/18

NICARAGUA: A MARXIST LESSON REPEATED. Bloody crackdowns by dictator Daniel Ortega in the U.S.'s backyard illustrate the ruthlessness of socialist regimes. Ask for 8/18

We welcome our readers' suggestions for how to save the church from its current existential threat.

1 "Attorney General Shapiro Details Findings of 2-Year Grand Jury Investigation into Child Sex Abuse by Catholic Priests in Six Pennsylvania Dioceses," August 14, 2018, <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/taking-action/press-releases/attorney-general-shapiro-details-findings-of-2-year-grand-jury-investigation-into-child-sex-abuse-by-catholic-priests-in-six-pennsylvania-dioceses>.

2 Ibid.

3 Mark Scoloro, "Report: Church Leaders Pressured Victims, Cops over Abuse," *Religion News Service*, August 4, 2018.

4 Ibid.

5 Bill Donohue, "Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report Debunked," August 16, 2018, www.catholicleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/PA-GRAND-JURY-REPORT-DEBUNKED.

6 "Bishop Says No Cover-Up in Priest's Case but Admits Lack of Transparency," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 6, 2018.

7 "Montana Plaintiffs Vote on \$20m Sexual Abuse Settlement," *Catholic News Agency*, August 3, 2018.

8 "Chilean Bishops' Effort to Prevent Sex Abuse Affirmed by Pope Francis," *Catholic News Agency*, August 6, 2018.

9 Joshua McElwee, "Exclusive: Cardinal Wuerl Proposes National Panel to Investigate Allegations against Bishops," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 6, 2018. Also, Ed Condon, "Marie Collins Reacts to Cardinal Wuerl's Proposals Following the McCarrick Scandal," *Catholic News Agency*, August 6, 2018.

10 For a discussion of the failure of the first panel, see Michael R. Strain, "No More Bishops Investigating Bishops: Appoint Frank Keating to Do That," *National Review*, August 14, 2018; and Rod Dreher, "Frank Keating on the Catholic Bishops Today," *The American Conservative*, August 10, 2018.

11 A detailed and important review of allegations of Bishop Wuerl is found in Jonathan V. Last, "The Catholic Church in Crisis," *Weekly Standard*, September 14, 2018.

12 Ibid.

13 Rod Dreher, "Taking the Gay Priest Issue Seriously," *The American Conservative*, September 4, 2018; and Dreher, "Inside the Seminary Closet," *The American Conservative*, August 22, 2018.

14 Rod Dreher, "The Elephant Remains in the Sacristy," *The American Conservative*, July 24, 2018. See also Anne Hendershott, "In the Church Scandals, All Roads Lead to Rome, and Many Run through D.C.," nationalreview.com, September 18, 2018.

15 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/31/feature/the-epidemic-of-denial-about-sexual-abuse-in-the-evangelical-church/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2683cb538634.

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by

Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

7800 Bonhomme Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone 314-727-6279 Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$25 per year

Outside the U.S.A. \$35

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and subscribers are invited to have it printed in their local newspapers.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

web site: www.mindszenty.org
 orders: inquiries@mindszenty.org