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Priests, Celibacy, and Sexuality

In Depth

The Cardinal McCarrick Syndrome

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THE CARDINAL and CELIBACY



Pope Benedict XVI said, "The greatest persecution of the church doesn't come from enemies on the outside but is born from the sins within the church." May 11, 2010

A number of new first person reports of the sexual activity of Theodore Mc Carrick have recently come into the public domain. Some new reports are from mature priests who were victims/partners of *Uncle Ted* early in their ministry and now have age appropriate sexual partners; others have gotten into trouble for their pattern of sexual involvement with young men.

None of these priests want to identify themselves on record at this time. Silence feeds the system of abuse that prevails in the church from the top down.

The systemic nature of sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy is becoming ever more apparent as the worldwide exposure of abuse of minors is exposed in Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Brazil.

The pattern and practice of bishops, including Pope Benedict when he headed a German diocese, is clear: send reported abusers for mental health counseling; reassign them to pastoral work regardless of what a professional recommends (i.e. restriction of access to minors); allow them to work again unsupervised; wait for another report of offence; repeat the cycle; cover it all up.

There is no doubt that abuse of minors is a societal problem. Church authorities, including the Pope, continue to use this fact to try and justify the problem in the ranks of the clergy.

But the church and clergy are not the general public. The moral standard they represent and teach is not the same as even the best of secular society.

To criticize the Roman Catholic Church for the sexual activity of its bishops and priests is not a *slur* or an *attack* on religion, or on the church, or on the clergy, or on the pope. It is a service.

To pretend that abuse of minors (and sexual activity of men who present themselves to the public as celibate) is just "a few bad apples" is not accurate. [Cf. Statistics]

To persist in saying that the selection of candidates for the ministry should be the main focus for a solution to more responsible clergy is misleading. Certainly, candidates of good intellectual, psychological, and moral fiber are desirable in any professional training program. But if the system into which they are recruited and incorporated is corrupt they are in peril.

The facts are clear, simple, and typical of the heritage of tolerance of abuse and cover-up inculcated by Theodore E. McCarrick, archbishop of Newark (1986-2000) and perpetuated by his successors. There is

documentation that records McCarrick's sexual activity and sleeping arrangements with seminarians and young priests even when he served as the first bishop of Metuchen after serving as an auxiliary bishop in New York.

On file are the unsealed "*MEDIATION DOCUMENTATION FOR FR. G.*" that involved McCarrick, the dioceses of Metuchen and Newark, NJ. (2006) A financial settlement was reached. The case was sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, but it has not yet responded. Documents include the history of McCarrick's initial sexual gesture and approach to the victim then a seminarian, in the bishop's Metuchen residence in 1986. Documentation includes hand written correspondence (letters and cards) from McCarrick postmarked between 1987 and 2005. Many of the letters are signed "Uncle Ted." The names of other priests who were either seen having sex with McCarrick or witnessed McCarrick having sex with another priest are also included in the file. One of the priests is still in active ministry another left the ministry and was assisted by the church and McCarrick to re-educate for another profession. The names of other sexually active priests are also in the reports. Records of McCarrick's activities with these priests are also included in medical evaluations and records all reviewed by Bishop Hughes of Metuchen already in 1995.

Excerpts from the legal Settlement Documents include firsthand accounts that are also in the Newark Archdiocese records of an incident on a trip with McCarrick, then Archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, with a seminarian and two young priests when they shared a room with two double beds, it reads:

McCarrick, wearing just underwear, got into bed with one of the priests: "Bishop McCarrick was sitting on the crotch of Fr. RC As I was watching TV with Fr BL [full names appear in the documents], bishop McCarrick was smiling and laughing and moving his hands all over Fr. RC's body. Bishop McCarrick was touching Fr. C's body, rubbing his hands from head to toe and having a good time, occasionally placing his hands underneath Fr. C's underwear. [I was] feeling very uncomfortable while trying to focus on television, and Fr. B.L., started smiling. As I looked at the bed next to me, Bishop McCarrick was excitedly caressing the full body of Fr. R.C. At that moment, I made eye contact [with] Bishop McCarrick. He smiled at me saying, "Don't worry, you're next." At that moment, I felt the hand of Fr. B.L. rubbing my back and shoulders. I felt sick to my stomach and went under the covers and pretended to sleep."

McCarrick continued to pursue the young man, sent him notes and telephoned him. Notes reveal that it was the custom the Archbishop McCarrick to call his protégés "nephew" and encouraged his entourage to call each other "cousin" and for them to call him "uncle Ted."

On another occasion McCarrick summoned the young man to drive him from the Newark Cathedral to New York City. He took him to dinner; and after, rather than returning to Newark as anticipated McCarrick went to a one-room apartment that housed one bed and a recliner chair. McCarrick said that he would take the chair, but after showering he turned off the lights and clad in his underwear he climbed into bed with his guest. Here is the account from the documents:

"He put his arms around me and wrapped his legs around mine. Then He started to tell me what a nice young man I was and what a good priest I would make someday. He also told me about the hard work and stress he was facing in his new role as Archbishop of Newark. He told me how everyone knows him and how powerful he was. The Archbishop kept saying, "Pray for your poor uncle." All of a sudden, I felt paralyzed. I didn't have my own car and there was nowhere to go. The Archbishop started to kiss me and move his hands and legs around me. I remained frozen, curled up like a ball. I felt his penis inside his underwear leaning against my buttocks as he was rubbing my legs up and down. His hands were moving up and down my chest and back, while tightening his legs around mine. I tried

to scream but could not...I was paralyzed with fear. As he continued touching me, I felt more afraid. He even tried several times to force his hands under my shorts. He tried to roll me over so that he could get on top of me, but I resisted, I felt sick and disgusted and finally was able to jump out of bed. I went into the bathroom where I vomited several times and started to cry. After twenty minutes in the bathroom, the Archbishop told me to come back to bed. Instead I went to the recliner and pretended to fall asleep."

In a letter dated four days after this incident McCarrick wrote a note signed "Uncle Ted" that said in part: ***"I just wanted to say thanks for coming on Friday evening. I really enjoyed our visit. You're a great kid and I know the Lord will continue to bless you...Your uncle has great spots to take you to!!!"***

There are additional documents that substantiate this particular relationship. One can safely say that now-retired Cardinal McCarrick was same-sex active and can be presumed to have a homosexual orientation. Neither fact has interfered with his career as a cleric in the Roman Catholic Church.

The power position of a cardinal places him above suspicion and makes him immune from criticism; this in defiance of the solid historical record of periodic moral violations of some clerics (and politicians) in high places.

The facts are clear, simple, and typical of the heritage of tolerance of abuse and cover-up inculcated by Theodore E. McCarrick, archbishop of Newark (1986-2000). There is documentation that records McCarrick's sexual activity and sleeping arrangements with seminarians and young priests even when he served as the first bishop of Metuchen after serving as an auxiliary bishop in New York.⁶

In 1990 when I published my book *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy* a good part of the clerical world rejected the claim that a large proportion of the clerical community was not practicing celibacy and that 6 percent of priests had sexual contact with minors. Some bishops wrote to tell me that my conclusions were similar to their experience "but I should not have said it." I was criticized as being disloyal; my research method also came under criticism.

But in spite of it all, the conclusions have been tested and found reliable. It is now an accepted fact that many priests in the United States at any one time are not practicing celibacy. This was Step One to the beginning of understanding the problem of clerical celibacy in general and the crisis of sexual abuse specifically. (Cf. *Squabbling About Numbers*) Specifically it was the beginning of spelling out the systemic construct of the celibate/sexual dynamic in the Catholic Church.

Step Two: With the hospitalization of priests in the proliferation of mental hospitals established since 1946 for sexual acting out clergy another insight became obvious: bishops and superiors knew what was going on. In fact, as the crisis of abuse took shape it became increasingly apparent that bishops not only knew what priests were doing to minors, but they were covering up what they knew and participating in the abuse by transferring the abusers from one parish or locale to another without informing or warning anyone of the previous assaults. They blamed psychiatrists and lawyers for giving them bad advice. (Pope Benedict XVI recently still used this excuse.) But no bishop needed to be told that the behavior under question was not celibate. And oversight of priests' celibacy is the job of the bishop. This basic neglect and undervaluation of celibacy is a major factor in allowing the abuse of minors. Bishops dismissed the criminal behavior as being within their province because it is a "sin."

Step Three: As the documentation from civil and criminal cases erupted from every corner of the States a further element in the dynamic of celibate violation and sexual abuse revealed itself. That is: The pattern and practice of superiors, confessors, spiritual directors, novice masters, and faculty members having sexual exchanges and friendships with seminarians and young priests. Its prevalence in the United States is unquestionable. The legal cases that have been filed against priests who have abused minors are but one source of reliable documentation. Mental health records are another. Most of all the testimony of the

abused is substantial, painful, pitiful, and disheartening.

A great deal about this element in the system is well known and also undeniable. The trouble is that it is sealed within the system. Few of the seminarian/priest victims will talk on record. They have everything to lose. Sexually active priests who have no intention of being celibate do everything to cover their tracks.

But the reality goes to the top. And the pattern is not exclusively homosexual. Bishops and even cardinals who have more or less long term relationships with women are known about and there is as-of-yet unpublished documentation. (This practice used to be called concubinage, was most common and quasi tolerated. Most the time now these relationships are carried on under some more dignified word.)

More ominous are the relationships of sexual sponsorship in which an older priest or superior takes an attractive and responsive younger priest into his affectionate embrace. Yes, some of these associations do become sexual. As the senior man rises in stature, position, and power he brings his protégé along with him up the scale of the organization. Sometimes the younger man eventually equals his mentor's stature; he too can repeat the pattern so well learned and practiced. This pattern is well exercised in Rome.

There are scores of reliable documents that demonstrate this practice and people involved.

The main point is that the dynamic is in operation and affects even good, observant clergy who cannot speak openly because the secret system will not tolerate them. Where are they to go? The press will not touch malfeasance on this level of the power system without impossible vetting that will expose the whistler blower to potential or certain destruction. Who of the many-in-the-know within the secret clerical system have that kind of courage?

What I have written to Pope Benedict (Cf. home page) is but a simple example of the systemic dynamic of celibate violation within the priesthood and some of the dire consequences for the church, the clergy, and our youth.

I have expressed my awareness of how difficult it is even for him to address this dimension of the problem that I have named the Cardinal McCarrick Syndrome. Great Saints like Pope Gregory I, Peter Damian, the patron of church reform, and the other saints illustrated in C. Colt Anderson's *Great Catholic Reformers* have tried, some with more success than others. (Cf. Books of Note) There is a need for such saints today. The problem is present, operative, and of major magnitude.

AW Richard Sipe

Now Read "[Statement for Pope Benedict XVI](#)"

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