

**GEORGETOWN U. April 13, 2016**

Aiden Johnson, a freshman at Georgetown University organized a panel for the *Lecture Fund* of the university. Nearly 400 students filled the Lohrfink Auditorium for the event entitled ***A Spotlight on the Church: What This Means for the Ordinary Catholic.***

These were my thoughts for Aiden as I approached the panel:

It is for me the honor of a lifetime to join your fellow students and your other guests to discuss what *Spotlight* means to us all. Bob Bennett and Marty Baron are men long held high in my esteem; Tom Doyle and Mike Rezendes are brothers, comrades in arms and friends beyond measure.

First, I want to give credit to the Jesuit influence on my work and life. Fr. John L. Thomas, S.J., sociologist and sexologist was a mentor in the early 1960s.

Fr. Christopher Mooney, S.J. in the 1990s was crucial to my understanding of Natural Law and how the Church has misapplied that concept to its teachings on human sexuality.

My time teaching Jesuit theologians at Woodstock in Maryland (1967-70) before its move to New York and Yale added immensely to my knowledge of the depths to which priests are challenged by the vow of perfect and perpetual celibacy.

Fr. Frank O'Connor, S.J. and my years teaching undergraduates at Loyola University in Baltimore gifted me with the experience of young men and women struggling to incorporate their human sexuality into identities, relationships, and life-goals.

When I was in Rome in 1993 I met with a group of Jesuit scholars living at Bellarmine College. It was the frankest and most open discussion on human sexuality I have ever had with priests. None are free to speak openly, but they validated every conclusion I have on the subject—those I have written about in a statement entitled (boldly-brazenly) *Sexual Heresies of the Catholic Church.*

That is my background.

Second, you have cast the discussion brilliantly in terms *What This (Spotlight) Means for the Ordinary Catholic*.

The clergy have sacrificed a large part of their credibility in matters of sexuality in the last decades. This loss has been profoundly publicized by the spotlight the Boston Globe focused on the scandal of clergy sexual abuse and the cover up by bishops.

The rejection of *Humanae Vitae* (1968) [family planning-birth control] by the majority of Catholics is one historical marker of this shift in respect for doctrinal pronouncements about sex by ordinary Catholics.

What this means is that the ordinary Catholic must take more personal responsibility for his or her understanding, development and exercise of their sexuality. They, not clergy, have the moral obligation to make thoughtful choices about the use of their sexual attitudes and powers. The development of their sexual (and all) relationships is in their control. Reason, responsibility, relationships, not sin, forms the basis of behavior.

Third, we ordinary Catholics must be prepared to sustain our spirituality in the face of the inevitable conclusion of this scandal of clergy sexual abuse.

In October 1993 I said in Chicago before a group of 300 survivors of abuse that “the problem we are looking at today (clergy abuse of minors) is the tip of the iceberg and if we follow it to its foundations it will lead to the highest corridors of the Vatican.”

Now there is little or no resistance to the statement that a certain proportion of Catholic priests sexually violate minors. (10% in Boston; 11½ % in Los Angeles)

The questions that now face once the subject of clerical sexual activity has been exposed are formidable: How can this group of child abusers be selected, fostered, tolerated, concealed, and defended in a culture that advertises itself as celibate—sexually safe?

When the celibate/sexual culture of the priesthood is examined certainly we will find a cohort of sexually active bishops, rectors and staff members of seminaries, confessors, novice masters and religious superiors who have had or are having sexual relationships or have had active sexual lives. Most are not active with minors, but with (more or less) consenting adults, or perhaps age appropriate partners.

A great deal of this activity is conducted within the clerical institutional culture. The activity is passed on within the clerical community—priest and student, priest and confrere, or with women in one way or another dedicated to the church.

The system hides this activity—sometimes in the quasi open—known, but not spoken of outside the inner circle. Activities are communicated sometimes in confession, other times in reports that are squelched or disregarded. The more important the actor the more protected by the power system.

This power block in the system cannot afford to be too active in ferreting out clergy who abuse minors lest they themselves or the system that protects them all be exposed.

I have reported a U.S. cardinal who has been cited (and documented) for abuse by seminarians and by priests (5) in his diocese. [One, a priest who incardinated from another country was told when he was taken to bed, by this cleric, “This is the way we do in the United States”.]

The Vatican cannot handle the problem because this clerical behavior is too common.

When I attended the Vatican International Conference on Celibacy in May 1993, Cardinal Jose Sanchez, then head of the Vatican Dicastery on Clergy was asked by a BBC television reporter what he thought of the studies by Fr. Victor Kortze of South Africa and Richard Sipe of the U.S. that reported that at any one time no more than 45 or 50 percent of priests were practicing celibacy. He said, on camera, viewed by 90 million people, “I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of those figures”.

The press is generally reluctant to touch this thorny area. The movie *Spotlight* demonstrates the difficulties the press faces from ecclesial and secular forces and inherent in researching a very private realm of behavior.

When no civil laws are broken the avenue of tort compensation is not open for redress so even questionable and abusive behavior escapes the attention of the law and press—and victims suffer in silence.

Sexuality is not an easy topic to expose or talk about in the public forum.

But you can be sure that this part of the sexually active celibate system will receive a spotlight just as far reaching and bright as the one lighted by Marty Baron, Mike Rezendes and the Boston Globe has about clergy sex with minors. The truth will out.

Who or when this part of the scandal will be addressed no can say. But like the Parousia: the reality is certain, its immanence is unpredictable.

The Catholic Church in the midst of a Reform as great as the Protestant Reformation—and at its core is human sexuality.