

Catholic Church Still Squandering Its Moral Authority

**By Maureen Paul Turlish
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Can the Vatican's latest order for seminaries to do a more thorough job preventing homosexuals from entering the priesthood be seen as anything other than more smoke and mirrors?

Again the Holy See appears intent on a search and destroy mission to weed out candidates for the priesthood when what it should be doing is weeding out the sexually abusive and perverted clergymen who violate the innocence of thousands of children, not to mention young women, men and vulnerable adults.

Skim some of the pages of the few grand jury reports and the other investigations made public on these horrific crimes.

If the Holy See wanted to prevent many of these incidents it could have done so simply by following its own canon law and the criminal and civil laws of most countries. It could have prevented such tragedies by following the mandates of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child to which it has not submitted even one of the periodic compliance reports as required since becoming a signatory to that declaration.

What the Vatican needs to do is stop kicking members of the hierarchy who aided and abetted predator priests upstairs as was the case with Boston's Bernard Law, who now holds a plum position as the archpriest of the Patriarchal Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. What the Vatican needs to do is to defrock, laicize or excommunicate some of the living and credibly accused sexual predators among the 19 of their fellow bishops in the United States alone.

This would give some substance to Pope Benedict XVI's words, "to do everything possible so that this does not happen again."

Yes, the institutional Roman Catholic Church has made mistakes in accepting deviant and sexually maladjusted individuals, no matter their orientation. But to scapegoat homosexuals is blatantly homophobic and unconscionable and only serves to further undermine the institutional church's credibility.

Read some of the current stories from newspapers across the country and around the world, including the most recent one close to home.

The Rev. Fernando Cristancho, who formerly served in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, is being tried in Maryland for abusing two of his triplets. He had been removed from ministry, but not according to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, for having a woman bear his children through in vitro fertilization in his native Colombia. Even earlier, Cristancho was credibly accused of the sexual abuse of another woman leading to his initial removal from ministry in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

But for the current lawsuit and news stories on Cristancho, all this would probably have been written off as totally bizarre and highly improbable. The continuing sexual abuse problems plaguing the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, however, made that impossible.

This is not a chapter gleaned from some 21st century edition of the TV miniseries, "The Thorn Birds," or even episodes from Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales."

Quite to the contrary, cases like Cristancho's are tragic and outrageous examples of maladjusted individuals who believed their positions as spiritual leaders somehow gave them license to indulge their perversions.

They are examples of a church hierarchy's failure to adequately screen potential seminarians, both heterosexual and homosexual, using thorough psychological and spiritual evaluative criteria in seminaries around the world.

One wonders if the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has any processes in place to vet priests coming to the United States to serve.

Since the bishops have announced that their discussion on abortion has been removed from their November meetings' agenda, perhaps it would it be possible to discuss vetting guidelines for such priests instead?

One could also say that such examples are telling of women's place in the patriarchal scheme of things, not to mention the revelatory reports on the sexual abuse of nuns by clergy around the world made public in the 1990s.

Lay experts contradict what church spokesmen Monsignor Jean-Louis Brugues said publicly about sexual offenders. With the data to support their conclusions, experts like Richard Sipe, himself a former Benedictine monk, conclude that while homosexuals are no more likely than heterosexuals to molest children, the molestation and rape of post-pubescent girls and vulnerable adult women is not committed by homosexual men.

To once again attempt to scapegoat those with a homosexual orientation when the abuse, molestation, rape or sodomy of a child, young girl or boy, vulnerable woman or man is a crime of power, position and control, is unworthy of any religious institution or denomination.

As Daniel Maguire, professor of theology at Marquette University said in a 1994 Cairo speech, "I believe that the Vatican has squandered its moral authority on issues about which it has no privileged expertise."

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