

The Scandal of Pedophilia in the Church

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By Annie Laurie Gaylor © 1992

A version of this article appeared as a chapter in the anthology *The Book Your Church Doesn't Want You to Read*, edited by Tim C. Leedom (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company 1993).

The general consensus in the United States is that if it is religious, it must be good. Criticism of religion is discouraged and stifled. It remains socially unacceptable to point out the main objections which skeptics and freethinkers have to religion: that it is both untrue, and harmful. Ironically, while criticism of religion rarely makes the mainstream, the slandering and scapegoating of atheists is so acceptable that polls have shown that most Americans would not consider voting for an atheist for President. The public harbors illusions straight out of the stuff that made William Jennings Bryan such a successful religious demagogue. One of his typical statements was, "Outside of the church are to be found the worthless; the criminal, and the degenerate, those who are a burden to society rather than an aid."

Christian religious indoctrination has taught believers that what makes you a good person is what you believe, not what you do. "Get right with God" and everything else falls into place, is the fundamentalist view. In this black-and-white world, the good are the Christians who go to heaven; the bad are the hell-bound unbelievers. While the more liberal branches of Christianity usually reject this simplistic bifurcation of the world and this narrow understanding of morality, they too believe that being a Christian is what makes one "good." Their benevolent view of Jesus and the parts of the bible they deign to acknowledge as relevant to today's world, does not permit exploration of the darker side of Christianity. History is replete with the recorded abuses and savageries of organized religion when it comes to power. Human sacrifices to appease the gods. The Crusades. The Inquisition. The execution of millions of women under the direction of the bible. Pogroms against Jews. The Holocaust. Jonestown, Guyana.

Believers in our society are indoctrinated to ignore the bloody history of religion, and to pay effusive lip service to belief in God, Jesus, the bible, and God's holy representatives on earth. Ordained ministers and priests are "men of God," "God's holy instruments," a race apart, anointed. It is then no wonder that clergymen who wish to misuse power and betray trust are in a unique position to do so. Newspapers are full of reports of financial exploitation, sexual transgressions during pastoral counseling, and what has surfaced since the mid-1980's as one of the most persistent public relations problems facing both Catholic and Protestant churches today: the criminal sexual abuse of children and teenagers by ordained clergymen.

As British philosopher Bertrand Russell analyzed in 1916: ". . . [Regarding] the convention that clergymen are more virtuous than other men. Any average selection of mankind, set apart and told that it excels the rest in virtue, must tend to sink below the average" ("Religion and the Churches").

Philosopher/theologian Martin Buber, in *Good and Evil*, made this insight:

"Since the primary motive of the evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one's evil from oneself, as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some other highly visible form of Christian within our culture? . . . I do not mean to imply that the evil are anything other than a small minority among the religious or that the religious motives of most people are in any way spurious. I mean only that evil people tend to gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment it can offer them."

Child molesters appear to gravitate toward careers which will shield and camouflage them, while at the same time providing access to victims. Robin Levett and Bob Crane write in *It's O.K. To Say No!*: "Because the abuse of children is a sexual preference formed relatively early in life, some offenders consciously or unconsciously choose career paths that will bring them regularly in contact with children. Others may volunteer to supervise children's sports or club activities. Many are highly respected members of the community. Some are in positions of authority over children--teachers, doctors, police officers, clergymen, coaches."

Professionals agree that pedophiles, sexual abusers of children, often seek out professions or activities which bring them into contact with children. Largely unexplored is the role Christianity may play in possibly molding criminal abusers. Researchers know that a typical child molester is a "good Christian" and often a church-goer active in church activities. Why should this be so? Havelock Ellis wrote, "In all countries religion, or superstition, is closely related with crime." It should not be surprising that crime is connected to the religious mentality and its ideology: such beliefs as original sin, the sacredness of gruesome bible teachings and inflexibility of moral codes, the absolution of sin through confession, a lack of personal responsibility for one's actions, and terrifying spectres of a jealous god and evil devils.

Religious doctrine encourages power inequities toward women and children, and such inequities invariably lead to abuse. Christian doctrine emphasizes submission and teaches the exemplary Christian to follow like sheep, and "become as little children" (Matthew 18:3). The classic Christian concept that human nature is innately "depraved" and sinful may also be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Does the Christian ministry attract sexual deviants, or mold them? It may be an unanswerable riddle. When one looks at fallen televangelist Jimmy Swaggart, one may surmise that the more he ranted against the temptations of pornography and illicit sexual relations, the more he was trying to overcome his own impulses, and fighting his own nature. Or one may speculate that the deep sexual repressions of the fundamentalist religion, coupled with the unhealthy adulation he received as one of God's chosen, corrupted what was once an innocent nature.

In either case, the mixture of ministerial power with religion's social inequities and repressive doctrines is demonstrably explosive.

One study released by Rev. Ronald Barton and Rev. Karen Lebacqz (March, 1990) for the Center for Ethics and Social Policy of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, found that a quarter of all clergy have engaged in sexual misconduct.

Extent of the Problem

Studies about pedophiles (adults who prey sexually on children) have not investigated the extent of this crime within the ministry, or whether the ratio of pedophiles in the ministry is higher than that of comparable high-risk professions. Experts agree that the molesting minister is a subset of the dangerous class of "respected members of the community" who betray their position of authority and trust by sexually assaulting children. Many warn that molesters are often "good Christians."

The social myth persists that a child molester is most apt to be of a low-class breed lurking in dark hallways, interested in abduction of children he does not know. In fact, most sexual abusers of children are respectable, otherwise law-abiding people who cultivate friendly relationships with their chosen prey, and may escape detection for precisely those reasons. Research agrees that the typical child molester is able to harm large numbers of children without being caught, in part, because he has already established a trusting relationship, playing on children's sense of loyalty, vulnerability, shame, and naivete, and fortifying his power to silence them through bribery, coercion and violent threats. In the case of a molesting man of the cloth, add to these threats the supernatural ones of God's wrath or hellfire.

The largest study of pedophiles was directed by researcher, physician and psychiatrist Gene G. Abel, M.D., of Emory University School of Medicine, for the Antisocial and Violent Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health. The landmark eight-year study revealed that, "Molesters often become youth ministers, day-care workers, Boy Scout leaders, teachers, Big Brothers and pediatricians" (Dr. Abel and Nora Harlow, "The Child Abuser," Redbook Magazine, August 1987). They add, "He is often an active Christian who is involved in his church."

Abel's study discovered that 403 pedophiles had molested more than 67,000 children! Pedophiles who targeted male victims averaged 282 victims, while pedophiles who targeted girls averaged 23 victims. Other studies have uncovered more traditional findings of higher incidences of abuse of girls.

Some figures are available about ministers who are child abusers. The Church Mutual Insurance Company, of Merrill, Wisconsin, which insures 46,000 churches, has seen about 200 claims against ministers for sexual abuse of children in the late eighties. The company estimated that in 1990 there were as many as 2,000 cases of sexual abuse by clergy in the courts.

Jeffrey Anderson, a Minnesota attorney who specializes in sexual abuse civil suits, was aware of more than 300 civil claims against Catholic priests in 43 states through 1991, and has handled 80 cases himself. Catholic reporter Jason Berry has tracked at least 100 civil settlements by the Catholic Church in the years 1984-1990, totaling \$100 million to \$300 million. Of course, many such civil cases are settled secretly.

Roman Catholic canon attorney Father Thomas Doyle has estimated that about 3,000 Roman Catholic priests are pedophilic abusers of children (an average of 16 priestly sex abusers per diocese).

Baltimore psychotherapist and former priest A.W. Richard Sipe, author of *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, 1990, made a comprehensive study of the sexual conduct of priests. As a result of his study, Harper's Index 1990 published this statistic: "Estimated chances that a Catholic priest in the United States is sexually active: 1 in 2." Sipe studied 1,000 priests and 500 of their "lovers" or victims. He offered this breakdown: 20% of priests are involved in sexual relationships with women; 8-10% in "heterosexual exploration," 20% are homosexual with half of them active, 6% are pedophiles, almost 4% of them targeting boys. However, Sipes observed "the homosexual contacts are four times more likely to come to the attention of parents or authorities, especially if the sexual involvement stops short of intercourse in heterosexual cases."

The offices of the national monthly *Freethought Today* out of Madison, Wisconsin, receive three to four newspaper clippings per week from readers detailing a new criminal or civil court accusation against a priest or Protestant minister. It has surveyed reported cases in North America during the years of 1988 and 1989 and found 250 reported cases of criminal charges involving child-molesting priests, ministers or ministerial staff in the United States and Canada. Of the accused clergy, 75 were Catholic priests (39.5%), and 111 were Protestant ministers (58%). Also charged were one Mormon clergyman, one occult minister and two cult ministers. Protestant cases involved equal numbers of mainstream and fundamentalist/evangelical denominations. That study revealed no rabbis charged with child molestation.

Although priests make up only about 10% of North American clergy, they were 40% of the accused, leaving the Catholic Church, which complains that the media are "priest-bashing," with no grounds for criticism. With outcome unknown in about a fifth of the cases, the study found that 88% of all charged clergy were convicted, with slightly lower conviction rate for priests--81%.

A majority of cases did not go to trial, with 61% of accused reverends pleading guilty (53%) or no contest (8%). Three-quarters of all clergy who pleaded innocent were found guilty. About half of the Catholic priests pleading innocent were convicted.

The study revealed that Catholic priests were acquitted or dismissed of child molestation charges at a higher rate than Protestant ministers. Similarly, Catholic priests received a higher rate of suspended sentences when convicted, and when sentenced, spent considerably less time in jail or prison. Seventy-eight percent of convicted ministers were incarcerated with sentences as brief as 30 days in jail to as long as three lifeterms. About 10% received probation only.

However, priests were incarcerated at a lower rate, with only 68.5% of convicted priests spending time in jail or prison. The average Protestant clergyman sent to prison received 11.5 years, while the average Roman Catholic priest received only 3.6 years. Of the 21 priests sent to prison, none received a sentence higher than nine years. By contrast, of 58 sentenced Protestant clergy, 45% received ten or more years, including three life sentences.

Almost twice as many priests received suspended sentences. Additionally, one priest was given treatment only as a sentence and another was channeled into pretrial intervention with charges dropped upon successful completion.

Overall, 7.4% of the cases against Protestant ministers were dismissed and 4.7% were acquitted. Cases against priests were dropped at a higher rate of 12.5% dismissal, and 6.3% acquittal.

The very high conviction rate would indicate that prosecutors tend to charge clergymen only when they feel very confident of the outcome.

In these cases, involving 190 ordained clergy and 60 nonordained clergy staff, such as Sunday school teachers, crimes mainly occurred at church locations. One convicted priest molested victims just before giving Mass. Sexual abuse occurred at the sacristy, in the rectory or church van. About half of the clergymen were officially involved in youth functions. About a third were accused of molesting youths during camping trips, youth group activities, retreats and crusades. About 20% were accused of molesting children at religious schools, 21% at church homes for children or through foster care. Eleven percent were accused of abusing children during counseling sessions exclusively, although other cases involved a counseling relationship.

Most ministers were charged with molesting at least four or five victims but were believed to have assaulted many others. The sexual assault charges ranged from indecent touching to rape, sodomy, and child pornography. Much of the abuse was long-term, with some children assaulted as many as 1,000 times. Included in the study were prominent clergy and evangelists who had made names for themselves through special ministries or "good works."

Charges for all 190 cases involved a total of 847 identified victims. Conservatively, according to speculations made by investigators, the 190 clergy had at least 4,000 other victims, for a low estimate of an average of 21 victims each. These victims often were not included in charges for pragmatic legal reasons, because they had been molested in other jurisdictions or times, or because the statute of limitations had been exceeded.

The profile of the typical clergyman charged with molesting children: a 45 year old man (ages ranged from 24 to 80 at the time of arrest), with four to five named victims, most often boys in their early teens. Of all the accused, 37% involved crimes against girl victims, 58% male victims, 3.2% children of both sexes, 1% sex not specified.

Freethought Today's follow-up study of 1990 cases found one clergyman or church leader busted every three days for child sexual abuse. Two-thirds of these 106 perpetrators were priests or Protestant ministers. This study was concluded at a point where slightly more than a third of the cases were closed. Of those with final dispositions, almost all--98%--of the accused had been convicted. Only one of the closed cases had ended in a not-guilty verdict. The briefer study confirmed the earlier findings of a Catholic versus Protestant double standard, with priests receiving lighter sentences than Protestant ministers, and nonordained clerical staff receiving by far the heaviest sentences. Catholic priests accused in 1990 were prosecuted mainly for molesting boys, while about half of the Protestant clergy were charged for crimes involving female victims. Cover-ups were specifically noted in newspaper reports in 38% of the cases, including many Protestant cases. Shockingly, 11 out of the 46 Protestant ministers charged in 1990 with criminal sexual abuse had prior convictions--nearly a quarter of the cases, all dating since 1985. Most of the men had received light sentences enabling them to return to the pulpit, and resume sexual abuse of children, quickly. Churches are not only failing to check ministers' records, but in some instances are knowingly hiring convicted child molesters.

The most blatant cover-up that year involved a Salvation Army minister who was permitted to keep his job and was given continuing access to children after back-to-back arrests for sexually abusing children during bible classes.

Defendants often unabashedly used their piety and positions to ask for (and sometimes receive) court leniency.

Scene of the Crimes

Many parents assume their children could not be safer than when in the care of a church institution or clergyman. Confessionals, youth groups, Sunday School outings, Christian Scouting, day camps, summer camps, church schools and athletics, church nurseries and day care all grant clergy special access to children and young teenagers--often otherwise unchaperoned. Chaplains have access to church facilities as well as public ones. Molesting priests have often invited a young boy for weekend trips, "sleep-overs" at the rectory and similar outings, which might otherwise be forbidden or would normally raise parental suspicions. Parents may be flattered when a "man of God" spends a great deal of time alone with their child.

The first nationally breaking news story about church coverups of sex crimes broke in 1984, when well-known attorney Gloria Allred of Los Angeles brought the country's first "clergy malpractice" lawsuit that year on behalf of Rita Milla, a devout Catholic teenager. One day Father Santiago Tamayo reached through the broken screen in the confessional to fondle her breasts. By January 1980, he was engaging in sexual intercourse with her. He introduced her to Father Cruces, who also used her sexually. In all, five other priests encouraged her compliance, flaunting their religious authority over the sheltered teenager. Rita later told news media that the priests had told her sex was natural, and that "priests get lonely, too." She was aiding them in their religious work.

When she became pregnant in January 1982, she was packed off to the Philippines. She told her family she would be "studying medicine." The priests intended for her to have her baby in secrecy and leave it there, giving her only \$450 to last seven months. She lived with cockroaches and ate only one meal a day, nearly dying during childbirth of eclampsia. Her family rescued her, and Rita and her baby daughter returned to the states, after Bishop Abaya of the Philippines promised to help her. When that aid failed to materialize, Rita went to Bishop Ward of Los Angeles for help. He said there was nothing he could do. After that final betrayal of trust, Rita and her mother filed the landmark clergy malpractice suit, seeking to establish paternity, set up child support, and sue the priests and the church for civil conspiracy for breach of fiduciary duty, fraud, deceit and clergy malpractice--and "to protect other young women from the pain and suffering caused by priests who abuse their position of trust," said Attorney Allred. The courts dismissed the case, citing a one-year time limit.

When Allred called the press conference to expose the scandal and announce the suit, all seven priests mysteriously vanished without trace, according to the archdiocese of Los Angeles. In 1991, Tamayo finally resurfaced, documenting to media that the diocese had warned him and his cohorts to flee the country. Tamayo offered proof that the church had known his whereabouts for years, including during the time when Allred tried unsuccessfully to serve him and the other priests with legal papers. The archdiocese had sent him monthly payments for years while he hid out in the Philippines.

In 1988, the church had finally set up a \$20,000 trust fund for Milla's daughter, after she agreed to drop a slander suit against a bishop. The church lawyer maintained it was not an admission of liability, but an act of benevolence for the child. A paternity suit is unresolved.

A second nationally renowned case was filed in 1985, focusing more public attention on Catholic cover-ups. Father Gilbert Gauthé, of Louisiana, admitted to molesting 37 boys and one girl. He pleaded guilty on various charges in October 1985 and was given a 20-year prison sentence which can not be paroled. The families of many of his victims went to court when they learned that a bishop and monsignor were aware of child molestation reports against Gauthé for more than ten years before his abuse was halted.

Small-town Catholics turned against the families as trouble-makers. All but one family agreed to settle their civil lawsuits out of court. But Faye and Glenn Gastal had their day in court. After their son, eleven, testified in court, he received a one million dollar award for damages from the Catholic Church on February 7, 1986. His parents received \$250,000 as compensation for their pain, ostracism and harassment.

Gauthé had molested some of the children as many as 200 times, including anal and oral rape, during church outings, when alone with children, in the rectory, sacristy,

confessional and the priest's camper.

The Gastal boy testified that he was led to believe that being molested by priests was part of his job as altar boy. He thought his parents knew what was happening: "I thought he was doing the right thing because he was a priest." Later, the priest guaranteed his silence by threatening that "he would hurt my daddy, he'd kill him."

In what is the classic Catholic "musical chairs" mode of dealing with accusations against priests, it was revealed that the church had simply transferred Gauthé to new, unsuspecting communities. Parents had confronted the priest as early as 1972. In 1974, Gauthé admitted to a bishop that he had made "imprudent touches" in "one isolated case." The following year, the bishop appointed him chaplain of the diocesan Boy Scouts. In 1977, more parents complained. Gauthé was directed to seek psychiatric treatment by church officials, but in 1978 was transferred to another family parish. The sworn statement of one church official was, "I am trained as a priest to forget sins." The enormity of the scandal prompted even the National Catholic Reporter to condemn the cover-ups.

The church has paid at least \$14 million to the victims of Gauthé alone.

The case of Father Carmelo "Mel" Baltazar exemplifies the predatory nature of the crimes. At a church position at Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa, California, he molested a boy on a dialysis machine. Despite this, the Catholic Church in Boise was willing to hire him as chaplain of St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center. They took no action after an Episcopalian minister reported to Bishop Sylvester Treinen that Baltazar had fondled a boy in double-leg traction. Bishop Treinen compared Baltazar's behavior to that of a car that, "no matter how well you take care of [it]" occasionally has a flat tire. He was finally prosecuted for luring two teenaged boys to his church home in the Boise diocese. Following his arrest, it was learned that the U.S. Navy had kicked him out of a chaplaincy position, and that he had been transferred from three dioceses for abusive behavior. In 1987, he was sentenced to seven years for sexual acts with a teenaged boy he met in the psychiatric ward. Judge Alan Schwartz said at the sentencing: "I think the Catholic Church has its atonement to make as well. They helped create you."

The willingness of congregants to circle the wagons and support an accused clergyman has numerous illustrations. One 1986 criminal case revealed the extent to which fundamentalist backers of a convicted molesting preacher would go. Christian supporters from three states filled the courtroom during hearings against Rev. James Britton Myers, of Kenosha, Wisconsin. Although he was convicted of the heinous crime of raping a little girl at his Christian school over a five-year period, starting when she was five, one member of his congregation called the crime "one drop of ink in crystal clear water."

A judge in California was inundated with letters of support asking him to pardon Father Andrew Christian Andersen, who was found guilty in 1986 of 26 counts of child molestation. Following the guilty verdict, Andersen was hugged by a church pastor and dozens of supporters. The judge sentenced him only to five years' probation, with the condition that he serve it at a church-owned treatment facility in New Mexico. Although the Diocese of Orange had received a report by a mother that her son had been abused by him, Andersen had been permitted to continue regular contact with altar boys for the following three years. The church never reported anything. He had been sent for some counseling, but quickly resumed molesting, and was not removed from positions involving the supervision of boys. He was finally reported to authorities by a psychiatrist counseling a 13 year old altar boy. The postscript of this coverup is that Andersen's parole was revoked in 1990 and he was sentenced to six years in state prison, following his arrest in New Mexico for forcing a teenaged boy into a car, assaulting him and trying to sodomize him.

The Salvation Army would not remove its minister, Gary Hallock of Pennsylvania, from his duties teaching children bible stories, even after he had been arrested for sexually abusing children at his church! The "captain," an equivalent of minister, had victimized seven children, ages four to 15, and even a profoundly retarded 15 year old boy. He was sentenced in 1990 to up to 72 years in prison. Meanwhile, a civil suit was launched against the Salvation Army for their negligence by parents of victims.

The extent to which a minister-molester is held above suspicion, despite blatant criminal acts, is exemplified by a 1987 criminal suit in Nashville. The arrest of Rev. Jack Law, a Baptist minister, was heralded by a headline, "Girl, 5, Raped Under Pew." He was accused not only of that, but of molesting and raping her two sisters. These crimes took place at the family home as well as during an outing arranged by him so the girls could help him distribute religious tracts. The girls had tried to tell their parents, but were not believed. "Being a preacher," the father said of him to local media, "we thought he was a good man." Law killed himself that year rather than face trial.

The devout often find it unthinkable that a respected member of the clergy could molest children, especially boys, who are often considered invulnerable to exploitation. A case in point occurred in Tampa, Florida, when a mother walked in on Rev. Fonville Gandy when he was placing his hands on her son's genitals. He told her he was giving her son an "anatomy lesson," and she believed him! Obviously she could not permit herself to believe the evidence before her very eyes that a minister could betray her trust, sexually abuse her child, then lie and cover-up. The mother realized the truth when Rev. Gandy was later arrested for other molestations, and she testified against him during his trial. Gandy was sentenced in 1986 to five years in prison.

Why are churches often a safe harbor for criminal child molesters? There are many answers to that question. It is, in part, because children are taught to give "men of God" special deference and obedience. Sheryll Kerns Kraizer, author of *Safe Child Book* and a pioneer in developing sexual abuse prevention, writes: "Many children tell me that their body belongs to God." A young child who assumes his or her body is not their own, but is "owned by God," will be vulnerable to abuse by an esteemed "man of God."

Clergy, whose role includes "pastoral counseling," are trusted and sought after for confidences and guidance. Yet being a pastor is no guarantee of having had professional training, not even necessarily a degree, much less professional counseling licenses, academic credits or the necessary trained and disinterested professional attitude. Clergy are often in contact with depressed or hurting parishioners, who are expected to confess and confide deeply personal feelings. The Catholic Church's traditional ritualistic confession of "sins" sets up an opportunity for children to be inappropriately questioned by priests on intimate or embarrassing topics. Pastoral counselors join secular professionals in a field in which at least 10% of counselors admit to sexually abusing a client, while half of all counselors report treating clients who have been sexually abused by others in their profession. The power inequities during a counseling situation have led to sexually exploitative relationships that have been compared to incestuous betrayal.

The denial that may be natural when it is learned that a respected member of the community has been accused of a shameful act seems to be magnified in church circles. Congregations may form a wagon circle around the accused assailant, ostracizing victims and their families. Church hierarchy may actively cover up, bribe, fail to act or knowingly pass on a child molester to another parish or congregation. Church teachings of "forgiveness" of sins may be promoted at the expense of the victims.

Finally, churches are used to operating as though they were above the law. Unlike other nonprofit groups, churches are not required to even file information on financial arrangements, and are used to special favors and community approval. While many do not come to the rescue of the battered principle of state/church separation when it is under assault, they wave the First Amendment banner vigorously when it comes to investigations by public authorities of wrong-doing within church doors. They treat these cases as a crisis of faith, rather than as criminal actions.

Churches are not policing themselves, and are often unpoliced by the state. Even under fire, churches are dragging their feet to institute reforms. Since 1986, the Church Mutual Insurance Company has formally advised church clients to fingerprint all applicants for church positions, to carefully check out resumes and gaps in resumes, to call

references and demand them for work with children, to institute careful monitoring of church day cares, to make sure two adults act as chaperones on field trips, to take, in short, the kinds of precautions that public schools and better child care facilities have been taking for years.

Are the churches doing it? No. Several denominations have passed position papers or policies for dealing with internal investigations once a complaint has been lodged privately. None has announced steps in keeping with all the recommendations of the Church Mutual Insurance Company. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church insists that each diocese must make its own policies and determinations. In 1990, Auxiliary Bishop A. James Quinn of Cleveland told a conference of canon attorneys to consider hiding the crimes, by sending files on priests accused of child molestation to the Vatican Embassy in the District of Columbia, which he maintains is outside the reach of the U.S. Courts. "If there's something there you really don't want people to see, you might send it off to the Apostolic Delegate," said Quinn.

In addition, church officials are either exempt by law from the mandatory child abuse reporting laws, or prosecutors are interpreting those laws as if they were exempt. Any action taken by churches largely has been in reaction to civil suits against them, when their pocketbooks are threatened, and, to a lesser extent, due to unfavorable publicity.

The Catholic hierarchy in particular has been outspoken in trying to minimize or defend abusers within its ranks. Typical of public statements was the opinion of Archbishop James Hayes, quoted in the Toronto Star (July 2, 1989): "The church exists to pardon and heal . . . There may be cases where the child was chasing after the man, looking for affection and whatever happened, happened only once." Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland editorialized in the May 1988 Catholic Herald: "We must not imply that the abuser is not guilty of serious crime, but we could easily give a false impression that any adolescent who becomes sexually involved with an older person does so without any degree of personal responsibility. Sometimes not all adolescent victims are so innocent; some can be sexually very active and aggressive and often quite streetwise."

With such attitudes, was it surprising that Cardinal John O'Connor of New York City wanted to offer Father Bruce Ritter a job, even after a probe of his charitable Covenant House network for runaways found him guilty of sexual and financial misconduct in 1990? Ritter was never prosecuted for a 20-year pattern of sexual misconduct.

One Catholic leader was felled by charges of cover-up. In 1990 Archbishop Alphonsus Penney of Newfoundland resigned, after a judicial inquiry proved he had evidence of abuse of boys at Mount Cashel orphanage as early as 1979. Twenty priests, former priests or Catholic lay workers were facing charges or had already been convicted of molesting boys, orphans and wards of the state. Boys as young as six were sexually abused, one within hours of being admitted. Penney had chided a mother for "gossip" when she complained she witnessed a priest abusing her three year old son during a "blessing." A judicial inquiry characterized priests as assuming their vocation licensed them to molest, and that they demanded and received special treatment from the attorney general, social workers and police. Police had interviewed 26 boys in 1975, but had dropped the investigation until 1988, when some of the grown victims came forward once more. Penney admitted, "We are a sinful church. We are naked."

The case of Father Baltazar, who had sexually abused a helpless boy attached to a dialysis machine, and another in double leg traction, epitomizes the ruthlessness of child molesters, the heartlessness of the hierarchy, and the vulnerability of their victims. The egomaniacal and rapacious drives of a molester who blots out all sense of right and wrong, brutally disregarding the pain he is causing children, have often found a parallel in churches bent on protecting themselves at the expense of thousands of victims.

If religion or any institution depends on the sexual subordination or exploitation of children or women, then it is better that such institutions should cease to exist. If it is a question of the survival of the churches versus the safety of children, then our allegiance clearly must be with children.

In 1988, I appeared on a "People Are Talking" television show in San Francisco, to speak about my book, Betrayal of Trust: Clergy Abuse of Children, along with a Catholic mother whose son had been molested by a priest, and opposite a local priest and fundamentalist minister in San Francisco. The audience remained stoic as the Catholic mother and I regaled them with horror stories of betrayal and sexual abuse of children by clergymen. But when one of the clergymen on the show "exposed" the fact that I am an atheist, a loud collective gasp was sounded from the good Christians in the audience.

It was a telling demonstration of that narrow bigotry, inculcated in so many Christians, that goodness has far more to do with one's professions of faith than with conduct and actions.

This corrupted idea of morality not only produces an audience that is more shocked at atheism than it is concerned about victims of abusive ministers, but has produced a malignancy of collusion and cover-up in the churches. The religious scandal of clergy abusing children should rightfully close many church doors.

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Excerpt, with permission, from "The Book Your Church Doesn't Want You To Read," editor Tim C. Leedom. Published by Truth Seeker Co., Inc., 1993. P.O. Box 28550, San Diego, CA 92198.

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