

James Carroll writes for the Boston Globe.

Rescue Catholicism from Vatican

POPE BENEDICT XVI has denounced the predator priests with due severity, but he cannot credibly chastise their enabler bishops because he has been one of them. The whole Catholic Church seems to be in crisis, but what is really at stake here is the collapse not of Catholicism, but of Catholic fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is the raising of religious barricades against tides of change. Protestant fundamentalists use the Bible (quoting verses of scripture) as both sword and shield.

Catholic fundamentalists use the papacy that way (quoting encyclicals). Today's Vatican presides as center of a command society with global reach, attempting to exert absolute control over all aspects of Catholic life, from the major (doctrine) to the minor (altar boys). Despite the impression that even many Catholics have, such papal dominance is a modern phenomenon. The Vatican was not always a corporate headquarters, with the world's bishops as menial regional office managers, priests as messengers, the laity as mere customers.

... Surprisingly, **no one saw this distortion more clearly than a pope — John XXIII**, who called, yes, a council to correct it. His Vatican II (1962-65) aimed to restore the "collegiality" of bishops (the pope only as "first among equals"); to reinvigorate local expressions of belief (hence worship in the vernacular); and to retrieve the "priesthood of all believers" as a check on clericalism. Vatican II was a step toward the democratizing of the Catholic Church, which is why Catholic fundamentalists have been seeking to undo it ever since. Fundamentalist-in-chief has been Joseph Ratzinger.

... An example of what must happen now came from the American nuns who recently defied the Rome-obsessed bishops to support President Obama's health reform bill. The nuns acted as if the reforms of Vatican II are real. Now priests and lay people must do the same, rescuing the Catholic Church from its fundamentalists, including the present pope.

The following article, by Pat Wingert, appeared on the Newsweek Web site. Although the author's observations do not mitigate the sinfulness and illegality of the present situation, they do provide context.

Mean Men

The priesthood is being cast as the refuge of pederasts. In fact, priests seem to abuse children at the same rate as everyone else.

The Catholic sex-abuse stories emerging every day suggest that Catholics have a much bigger problem with child molestation than other denominations and the general population. Many point to peculiarities of the Catholic Church (its celibacy rules for priests, its insular hierarchy, its exclusion of women) to infer that there's something particularly pernicious about Catholic clerics that predisposes them to these horrific acts. It's no wonder that, back in 2002, when the last Catholic sex-abuse scandal was making headlines, a Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll found that 64 percent of those queried thought Catholic priests "frequently" abused children.

Yet experts say there's simply no data to support the claim at all. No formal comparative study has ever broken down child sexual abuse by denomination, and only the Catholic Church has released detailed data about its own. But based on the surveys and studies conducted by different denominations over the past 30 years, experts who study child abuse say they see little reason to conclude that sexual abuse is mostly a Catholic issue. "We don't see the Catholic Church as a hotbed of this or a place that has a bigger problem than anyone else," said Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "I can tell you without hesitation that we have seen cases in many religious settings, from traveling evangelists to mainstream ministers to rabbis and others."

Since the mid-1980s, insurance companies have offered sexual misconduct coverage as a rider on liability insurance, and their own studies indicate that Catholic churches are not higher risk than other congregations...

This entire article can be found at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/236096>

**Excerpts from *Does celibacy contribute to abuse?* by the BBC's Paul Henley.
Answers to a question addressed to Catholics in Cologne.**

"If you are already struggling with a conflicted sexuality, including paedophile tendencies, then it is attractive to become part of an institution that obliges you to be celibate," he said. "I have seen many of these cases... and it is something the Catholic Church should be made aware of."

Manfred Luetz, Psychiatrist, was quoted as saying that the "celibate lifestyle can attract people who have an abnormal sexuality and cannot integrate sexuality into their lives." Dr Luetz dismisses any suggestion of a scientific correlation between celibacy and abuse. "The father of a family", he says, "is 36 times more likely to abuse than a celibate priest. So it is not good to discuss celibacy in this context. " "Instead, we have to discuss how to prevent other abuses, we have to speak about the victims and we have to speak about the way we approach these topics with transparency."

One woman in her 20s suggested marriage for priests would be a healthy step forward for the institution. "If it would be allowed I think there wouldn't be so many problems and so many secrets that they have to keep," she said.

Another church-goer said she thought more worldly experience had to be a good thing among priests. "The family and children - they should experience what they are talking about," she said.

A man visiting the cathedral with his wife and daughters agreed. "It should be possible for priests to marry," he said. "It would be a good face for the church, so people can see they make a first step to be more modern and to be actual."

**The full article can be found at:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/8604800.stm>**

The following article, by Owen Bowcott appeared in the *Guardian*.

Vatican was told 50 years ago to act against paedophile priests

A former pope was warned that paedophile priests should be removed from active ministry and repeat offenders expelled from the church, according to a clerical communique that has emerged following a US lawsuit.

The letter, written in August 1963 by the head of an order that specialised in the treatment of priests accused of abusing children, suggests that the Vatican and Pope Paul VI should have known about failings in procedures for dealing with such cases, according to the lawyer who produced it.

A senior church official swiftly dismissed the claim, suggesting it was unlikely the document would have been seen by the then pope nearly 50 years ago.

... **[Rev. Gerald MC Fitzgerald's]** submission appears to have been drafted at the request of the pope. Fitzgerald opens the five-page letter by thanking the pope for an audience the day before and says he is summarising his thoughts at the pope's request on the "problem of the problem priest" after 20 years working to treat them.

He tells Paul VI that treatment for priests who have succumbed to "abnormal, homosexual tendencies" should include psychiatric, as well as spiritual, counselling but goes on to warn about the dangers of leaving those individuals in ministry.

"Personally, I am not sanguine of the return of priests to active duty who have been addicted to abnormal practices, especially sins with the young," Fitzgerald wrote. "Where there is indication of incorrigibility, because of the tremendous scandal given, I would most earnestly recommend total laicisation [defrocking]," he wrote. "I say 'total' ... because when these men are taken before civil authority, the non-Catholic world definitely blames the discipline of celibacy for the perversion of these men."

... Fitzgerald's views about how to treat abusing priests have been highlighted before. At one stage he proposed buying an island where priests attracted to men and boys could be segregated. He even made a \$5,000 down payment on a Caribbean island. In 1960, he sent two priests from the Paracletes to the island of Tortola to investigate the location but his dream ended when the new archbishop of Santa Fe overruled him.

Andrew Sullivan, from the Daily Dish, addresses the money that the Legionaries spread around to protect their founder's reputation.

<http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the-daily-dish/2010/04/the-vaticans-watergate-follow-the-money.html>

"Foreign Priests: Stop-Gap or Solution?" was posted by the editor of *new catholic times: sensus fidelium* on March 15.

Perhaps it is time for the C.C.C.B. to consider a moratorium on the importation of foreign clergy until it has examined the situation more closely. Is the growing shortage and ageing of the clergy a crisis or an opportunity?

No matter where one attends church across this country, it is common to find that the celebrant is not Canadian born. Some of these priests have immigrated to Canada and have become incardinated into a local diocese, or they may be members of religious orders that have a presence in this country. Others come on terms of a temporary contract and are expected to return to their diocese of origin after a determined period of service.

A recent article by John L. Allen, Jr., Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, titled "Foreign priests and the risk of plunder" (NCR Feb 26, 2010), raised a number of issues that comes with a growing dependence in North America and Europe on clergy imported from the Third World where the ratio of priests to people is much more drastic and problematic.

A personal note is obviously needed at this point, as I was once a "foreign priest" who went to the missions with no training in "Missiology" (Mission Sciences) or cultural sensitivity.

... My comments on foreign priests in our country today come with some sympathy towards their situation and an understanding of their difficulties. As was I, they are part of a larger mechanism and are far less individual than even they may understand. Still there are some important differences in this common experience. For many of us, the move into Latin America came with a drop in living styles. We worked among the very poor, and while we were not "poor" (other than by a vow) we did live with some frugality and simplicity. Some did embrace real poverty in their expression of "the preferential option for the poor".

The new foreign import who comes to Canada can expect a sudden loto-like **[lotto?]** change in fortunes. With the job comes automatic immigration status, a salary, a fully furnished house, living expenses and often a parish housekeeper (for these priests would be accustomed to servants). They get a car, a huge status symbol in their own countries, and a trip home most every year. Playing their cards right, they can easily ingratiate themselves among some of the more traditionalist and well to do parishioners by reintroducing pious rituals like Perpetual Adoration services.

... What about the home countries? These clergy are coming not from a situation of clergy surplus, except for perhaps Poland which has priests coming out of every nook and cranny in a society that is becoming more secular and less church dominant. In countries like the Philippines, where there is not a surplus of priests, the clergy have received special permission to celebrate more than four masses on Sundays and three on weekdays. I remember the rare occasion when I would celebrate three masses on a Sunday in three different chapels: I cannot imagine what this does to the clergy if this is all they do every day! The situation I encountered in Peru in the 1970's is today not much better in terms of clergy to population ratios. Many of the young Peruvians who joined the community I worked with decided after ordination to seek their fortunes in the north. ...

Whether we are taking the best or the worst from other countries, we are contributing to the crisis in the local churches of other countries. Sometimes the bishop of the foreign import receives a financial compensation for the loss of his clergy, and this stimulus could make a big difference for some local ordinaries. At the same time the foreign priest in Canada, who is accustomed to living on much less, is in a position to send remittances back home to his family, providing support for parents and siblings, and even offspring, that he could not provide working in his own country. Is this fair compensation to the church of origin and its local clergy who remain to minister to the real multitudes? Or is it just a drain on local resources, after they have trained and ordained these priests?

... Perhaps it is time for the C.C.C.B. to consider a moratorium on the importation of foreign clergy until it has examined the situation more closely. Is the growing shortage and ageing of the clergy a crisis or an opportunity? Can the church find in this situation the impetus for true renovation and the involvement of the people, who are church and who hold within themselves the treasure of the churches [sic] Mysteries. Perhaps a new form of worship and building community could evolve from this opportunity. The bishops need to consider their role in depleting the number of clergy working in truly desperate conditions, such as Latin America. If any country truly has an abundance of clergy, perhaps there are places far needier than Canada.

As for the foreign priests who are already here, they need to be received with charity and kindness as are all immigrants. Their needs are no different than any newcomer and it is the responsibility of the established community to take them in hand and help them adapt to this new land. At the same time, as with all immigrants, it is important that they realize that some of their values, customs, traditions and heritage are simply not welcomed or needed in Canada. Too often groups import the problems they were seeking to escape from. In all things - "caritas" must come first.

In personal terms, Obama honors Christ's sacrifice

WASHINGTON (AP) -- In openly personal terms, President Barack Obama on Tuesday honored the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, saying he draws inspiration from an eternal story of pain, suffering and redemption.

"We are thankful for the sacrifice he gave for the sins of humanity, and we glory in the promise of redemption in the resurrection," Obama told Christian leaders from around the country at an Easter prayer breakfast at the White House.

"Such a promise is one of life's great blessings," the president continued. "As I am continually learning, we are, each of us, imperfect. Each of us errs, by accident or designs. Each of us falls short of how we ought to live. Selfishness and pride are vices that afflict us all."

Obama's comments provided a brief, uncommon opening into how he views his Christian faith. He told the religious leaders that their examples are followed by millions of people. He welcomed them warmly as "my brothers and sisters in Christ" and honored Christ as "our risen savior."

The president spoke in particular of the story of Christ's last words on the cross, quoting this phrase: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

"These words were spoken by our Lord and savior," he said, "but they can just as truly be spoken by every one of us here today. Their meaning can just as truly be lived out by all of God's children. So on this day, let us commit our spirit to the pursuit of a life that is true."

Obama has also held White House events honoring the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

I am grateful for your comments and articles. Please continue to send them to tony@tonyercolano.com