

The following article, *Sister Margaret's Mercy*, by Sophia Deboick, appeared on guardian.co.uk

... Last November, Sister Margaret McBride, a sister of mercy and long-serving administrator at St Joseph's Catholic hospital in Phoenix, admitted a 27 year-old woman who was 11 weeks pregnant and suffering from pulmonary hypertension. This serious condition has a mortality rate of between 30% and 56% in pregnant women, and the patient was already suffering heart failure. Doctors said an abortion was necessary to save her life and Sister Margaret authorised it. This week the Bishop of Phoenix excommunicated Sister Margaret, saying she had removed herself from communion with the church by her "own evil action".

Sister Margaret will now be denied the sacraments of the church she has dedicated her life to and faces possible dismissal from her order. The diocese of Phoenix has had little useful to say about what she should have done in this situation, and while a Catholic bioethicist has said that in such cases we should simply hope both mother and child survive, as a supporter of Sister Margaret stated, "hope is not a strong option in a life-or-death situation".

The diocese has offered no real alternative to Catholic medical professionals facing such a dilemma than to leave the woman to die.

It might be said that the diocese's reaction is unsurprising – indeed it is the fact that their actions are in perfect accordance with church law that is so concerning. Recent church history has seen an increasing emphasis on the absolute prohibition of abortion. In 1886 Leo XIII explicitly prohibited it, even where the life of the woman concerned is threatened, and in 1930 Pius XI stated that "however much we may pity the mother whose health and even life is gravely imperilled in the performance of the duty allotted to her by nature, nevertheless what could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent?"

Yet, while these frightening regulations are uncomplicated in church law, how they play out on the ground is a different matter. Sister Margaret believed she was acting in accordance with Article 47 of the healthcare guidelines issued by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. This permits treatment which will result in abortion if it saves the mother's life. American bishops have recognised the real need for flexibility in the church's prohibitions then, and groups like Catholics for Choice reflect the opinions of many ordinary Catholics who find their allegiance to church doctrine tested to the limit by prohibitions that risk women's lives. However, the teachings handed down from Rome remain unchanged by popular opinion.

The church's commitment to an absolute ban on abortion in all cases was underscored in 2004 with the canonisation of Gianna Beretta Molla. An Italian paediatrician, Gianna was two months pregnant when she discovered she had a uterine tumour. Rejecting a hysterectomy, she continued with the pregnancy, and her daughter was born on Good Friday 1962. Gianna died a week later, aged 39, leaving behind three other young children. Beatified in 1994 – the International Year of the Family – a prayer to Saint Gianna contains the lines "Jesus, I promise you to submit myself to all that you permit to befall me, make me only know your will." While Gianna was clearly an intelligent woman

who made her own decisions, she is now being used to promote the alarming ideal of passivity that fits the extreme anti-choice position of the church.

Sister Margaret's case, and others like it, reveal that the Catholic Church's position on abortion is one of intractable impracticality, by which a hierarchy of male clerics bury their heads in the sand about the obvious moral problem of privileging an insentient foetus, incapable of sustaining life on its own, over the life of an adult woman with a social existence. While the discussion this week has been in the familiar terms of the right to self-determination versus the moral repugnance of "social abortion", it should be remembered that this strain of thought, one that is directly promoted by Rome and that has many devoted proponents all over the world, means that it is not only a woman's right to choose that is being threatened, but a woman's right to live.

For links to articles listed below, you may either click on the link itself, or copy the link into your browser.

Shades of grey in a world of apparent absolutes

Though the case of the Phoenix religious sister who was directly involved in the decision making process to terminate an 11 week pregnancy in order to save the mother's life has been reported in Catholic and secular media as a clear cut case of excommunication, canon lawyer Fr. Thomas Doyle says the case isn't that simple.

Fr. Thomas P.Doyle's article is available in its entirety at:

<http://ncronline.org/news/justice/shades-grey-world-apparent-absolutes>

Tom Doyle is a priest, canon lawyer, addictions therapist and long-time supporter of justice and compassion for clergy sex abuse victims.

Tony Equale offers the following response to Fr. Thomas Doyle's article. Grateful to Sal for passing this along.

Shades of grey in a world of apparent absolutes

1. Thomas Doyle's letter to NCR May 18, 2010 makes it clear that the Bishop of Phoenix followed none of the procedures of Canon Law (CL) in the excommunication of Sister Margaret McBride, an administrator at St Joseph's hospital. I am grateful for that information. Doyle's dry legal analysis may very well have been chosen as a *literary genre* that would underline for the reader the complete lack of concern for (ignorance of?) Church Law displayed by Bishop Thomas Olmsted's egregious over-reaction to the decision to save the life of the mother of a diseased fetus,

with an abortion. It allowed Doyle to criticize the bishop severely without having to “raise his voice” or appear to defend abortion. *Kudos!*

2. There is no extant Canon or accountability mechanism, however, like a regional review board, that could possibly have prevented the bishop from acting in ignorance of CL or without due deliberation, or for any other inappropriate reason however stupid, negligent, lazy or sadistic. There is nothing in CL to prevent it from happening again, there or elsewhere, because Bishops exercise absolute unaccountable power in their dioceses. CL is effectively a suggestion box for the Bishops, not “law.” But Doyle does not point that out. There nothing in Doyle’s remarks that implies criticism of the authoritarian absolutism inherent in the monarchical episcopate that made the Phoenix stupidity possible. The unaccountable episcopate proves CL to be nothing but a toothless fairy of smoke and mirrors, a pseudo-rational veneer on an irrational cult of absolute, hierarchical power ... all in service to the fantasy of a “community of supernatural salvation” not a community of growth in compassion and humanity as Jesus promoted.
3. Except for the rhetorical effect, Thomas Doyle’s excursion into the surreal world of CL is a total waste of time and intellectual energy. Any number of “lay” commentators without the least knowledge of the juridical niceties that Doyle seems to enjoy putting on display, cut straight to the marrow and saw clearly that this was a case of some pathology still waiting to be named. You don’t need CL to tell you how to be a human being, nor how to mourn when you see a punitive policy justly earning opprobrium for the inquisitor and his Church.
4. The rush to condemn and hurl anathemas proves that the personnel that currently run the Church are focused on their own power and their subjects’ full obedience, not on care and concern for their people. Doyle is right to point out and emphasize that the purpose of CL is to “correct” and foster personal growth, not punish. “Excommunication as a last resort” was apparently a lecture that the young Thomas Olmsted never attended. Perhaps he was out sick that day. Perhaps he was also out sick each and every time that John 8 is read as the gospel at mass.
5. Excommunication is a “punishment” of great magnitude only for those who believe that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. To even deal in these categories is a Roman-mediaeval anachronism. For those who believe such archaic inanity, excommunication is tantamount to being condemned to hell. The first item of doctrinal reform ... should it ever occur ... must be the official public repudiation of the arrogant “doctrine” of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ... and the derogation of all laws that are based on it ... including excommunication.
6. The Church should be an organization dedicated to helping us all become better human beings, as Jesus intended. Instead it fancies itself the presence of a law-obsessed “God” on earth and in that capacity is eternally preoccupied with displaying its own moral power and self-

righteous image. It is invested *in finding opportunities* to “show its authority” and to force capitulation to its mandates. It also feels compelled to preserve its “divine image” at all costs, no matter how undeserved and damaging to the defenseless. Its energies are eternally focused on itself. It is a self-idolatrous organization **because it does not define itself as human**. The problem is not the way the current hierarchy happens to exercise its authority ... the problem is the Church’s **self-divinizing self-definition**. The problem in other words, is the very existence of the Roman Catholic Church as it has defined and structured itself. These “lapses,” like the “excommunication” of sister Margaret and the “cover-up” of pedophilia, are not exceptions ... they are the *necessary non-preventable* fall-out of an organization that has imagined itself to be “God’s” voice on earth for moral and dogmatic “truth.” Doyle does not confront this.

7. Jesus’ compassionate response to a convicted adulteress in John 8 did not in any way imply that adultery was OK ... but it *did imply* a scathing criticism of the inhuman application of the law and self-aggrandizing exercise of authority by the male hierarchs who would dare condemn a woman they themselves may have exploited. (Her male accomplice was, conspicuously, absent.) Please notice: Jesus did not justify his “position” by citing other laws or authoritative juridical commentary, nor gender-specific denunciations. *He said nothing!* He wrote in the sand ... we are not told what he wrote ... **because we do not need to be told ...**

John 8: (Douay-Rheims)

... 3. *And the scribes and the Pharisees bring unto him a woman taken in adultery: and they set her in the midst,* 4. *And said to him: Master, this woman was even now taken in adultery.* 5. *Now Moses in the law commanded us to stone such a one. But what sayest thou?* 6. *And this they said tempting him, that they might accuse him. But Jesus bowing himself down, wrote with his finger on the ground.* 7. *When therefore they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said to them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* 8. *And again stooping down, he wrote on the ground.* 9. *But they hearing this, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest. And Jesus alone remained, and the woman standing in the midst.* 10. *Then Jesus lifting up himself, said to her: Woman, where are they that accused thee? Hath no man condemned thee?* 11. *Who said: No man, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither will I condemn thee. Go, and now sin no more.*

Do we have the ears to hear?

How do you atone for something terrible, like the Inquisition? Joseph Ratzinger attempted to do just that for the Roman Catholic Church during a grandiose display of Vatican penance — the Day of Pardon on March 12, 2000, a ritual presided over by Pope John Paul II and meant to purify two millenniums of church history. In the presence of a wooden crucifix that had survived every siege of Rome since the 15th century, high-ranking Cardinals and bishops stood up to confess to sins against indigenous peoples, women, Jews, cultural minorities and other Christians and religions. Ratzinger was the appropriate choice to represent the fearsome Holy Office of the Inquisition: the German Cardinal was, at the time, head of its historical successor, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. When his turn came, Ratzinger, the church's premier theologian, intoned a short prayer that said "that even men of the church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth."

If you detect ambivalence in those words, you are on the road to understanding the difficulty Ratzinger — now Pope Benedict XVI — faces in leading the Catholic Church to properly atone for another stain on its history: the decades of cases of child abuse by priests and cover-ups by their bishops. ...

Find this article at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1992171,00.html>

The following was published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<http://ncronline.org>). James Ewens has worked as a chaplain in hospice care and with the mentally ill during his 30 years as a priest. He is retired and lives in North Lake, Wisconsin.

Surely Rome Can Do Better

By James Ewens.

Let me take you into a situation that illustrates the church institution's instinctive reaction to cover-up scandal. It was a workshop in 2000 for new Jesuit superiors. The presenter, a former provincial, was discussing the circumstances when a superior could break the bond of confidentiality between himself and the men he was in charge of. He said something could be shared with the provincial "If it was a matter of danger for the individual or to others."

I asked, "What do you mean by others?" His response was concise and immediate: "The Jesuit order." (Not, as I expected, "students, parishioners, those we are counseling, etc.")

I was stunned by his answer, and the fact that none of the other 40 participants expressed any disagreement with it. That same evening we heard a talk by a newly installed bishop. He had worked in another diocese prior to his current post and said he often appeared in court to defend priests facing charges.

He described how, as he was walking into court, he would recite to himself, "I'm sorry, Your Honor, but I do not remember." Those attending the dinner laughed loudly. One wonders if either of these revelations would have occurred if "outsiders" (lay people, the parents and victims of sexual abuse by priests) had been present. I strongly doubt it.

I am, however, convinced that the two interlocking issues that contribute to sex crimes against young victims are precisely this misuse of confidentiality and power in the insular clerical culture, and the Vatican's fixation on celibacy.

The church's fixation on celibacy became obvious eight years ago when I decided to implement my decision to leave the priesthood. The process is complex and little known, even by clerics.

To obtain permission to leave the Jesuits I had to write a letter to the general of the order in Rome, stating my reasons. I had to write a similar letter to the pope, asking to become an "inactive priest." (I imagine it as having my hands tied behind my back, with the church saying I still possess the powers of a priest but without authorization to use them "unless there is a state of emergency or someone is in imminent danger of dying.") I was told the process would be completed within 6-8 weeks.

Writing the two letters seemed simple enough. However, there was one hitch: if I also wanted to be released from my vow of celibacy I would have to go through a series of steps, similar to those required for couples who seek an annulment from their marriage. I would need to have individuals who knew me before I was ordained to testify as to my freedom and maturity when I made this choice in 1970. The theory is that evidence will be found indicating I was not truly free and mature to choose celibacy in the first place. If, indeed, this can be found, then I could be released -- just as some married couples qualify to have their marriages annulled due to a lack of mature free choice.

This is how the church works diligently to protect the bond of marriage and the bond of celibacy -- but then I learned there was one additional hurdle: seeking this permission would take a minimum of two years and neither of the other two requests could be granted until -- and if -- it was successfully approved. Wow! Three superiors encouraged me to only apply for the first two permissions, saying that if I did get married "things could be worked out later without much difficulty."

Of course. It is eight years later, I did get married, and now I'm told that my marriage will only be "regularized" by the Vatican if I respond favorably to a five-page questionnaire that focuses primarily on my sexual history over the past 45 years. I have chosen not to complete the document because I am unable to answer the one question in it that I think is valid: "Why is it that you are seeking this special favor?"

In short, after being released from my vows as a Jesuit and being approved, by the Vatican, to become an inactive priest, I feel no need to obtain a further permission to have my marriage "regularized" -- especially since it can only be obtained by completing an onerous questionnaire fixating on my personal sexual history. Surely Rome can do better than that.

It would be interesting to examine the incidence rate of child abuse within the following population. I suspect it would be far below the clerical norm.

Italian priests' secret mistresses ask pope to scrap celibacy rule

By John Hooper in Rome

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/27/italian-priests-mistresses-letter-pope>

Dozens of Italian women who have had relationships with Roman Catholic priests or lay monks have endorsed an open letter to the pope that calls for the abolition of the celibacy rule. The letter, thought by one signatory to be unprecedented, argues that a priest "needs to live with his fellow human beings, experience feelings, love and be loved".

It also pleads for understanding of those who "live out in secrecy those few moments the priest manages to grant [us] and experience on a daily basis the doubts, fears and insecurities of our men".

The issue was put back on the Vatican's agenda in March when one of Pope Benedict's senior advisers, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the archbishop of Vienna, said the abolition of the celibacy rule might curb sex abuse by priests, a suggestion he hastily withdrew after Benedict spoke up for "the principle of holy celibacy".

The authors of the letter said they decided to come into the open after hearing his retort, which they said was an affirmation of "the holiness of something that is not holy" but a man-made rule. There are many instances of married priests in the early centuries of Christianity. Today, priests who follow the eastern Catholic rites can be married, as can those who married before converting to Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism.

One signatory, Stefania Salomone, 42, an office manager, said the message to the pope had been endorsed by nearly 40 women registered with an online forum linked to // *Dialogo* website. But such was the sensitivity of the issue that only three had published their names.

The letter was posted on the internet on 28 March. But it was only reported on Wednesday by the online international news agency, *globalPost*.

Salomone said that because Catholics were taught to look up to priests, women dropped by their priest-lovers "often lose their faith in men altogether". Her own five-year relationship had been platonic, but Antonella Carisio, one of the other signatories, said she had an affair with a Brazilian priest who frequently slept at her house.

When their relationship was discovered by another priest, he was transferred to Rome. "When he left, he even gave me an engagement ring," she said.

But he subsequently returned to Brazil and this week told the *globalPost* news agency: "She was a friend and a confidante, but I was never in love with her."

The person who passed this along concluded with the observation, "So, if he didn't love her, was he just using her?"

Vatican's sex abuse prosecutor says church must amputate to heal

By John L Allen Jr.

The article is available at: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/vaticans-sex-abuse-prosecutor-says-church>

Is It Time for the Pope to Resign?

What follows is the text of a talk given by Richard Sipe to a group of guests invited by www.bishop-accountability.org in the Boston Public Library on May 20, 2010. It is a provocative commentary setting out the case why the gravity of the present crisis facing the Church calls for Benedict XVI to be the 10th Roman Pontiff in history to resign.

http://www.catholica.com.au/gc3/rs/004_rs_290510.php

Please continue to send your articles and comments to tony@tonyercolano.com