

## **A very disturbing story of how zealots are attempting to destroy our Church.**

### **Sister Margaret's Choice**

By Nicholas Kristof

May 26, 2010

We finally have a case where the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy is responding forcefully and speedily to allegations of wrongdoing. But the target isn't a pedophile priest. Rather, it's a nun who helped save a woman's life. Doctors describe her as saintly.

The excommunication of Sister Margaret McBride in Phoenix underscores all that to me feels morally obtuse about the church hierarchy. I hope that a public outcry can rectify this travesty.

Sister Margaret was a senior administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix. A 27-year-old mother of four arrived late last year, in her third month of pregnancy. According to local news reports and accounts from the hospital and some of its staff members, the mother suffered from a serious complication called pulmonary hypertension. That created a high probability that the strain of continuing pregnancy would kill her.

"In this tragic case, the treatment necessary to save the mother's life required the termination of an 11-week pregnancy," the hospital said in a statement. "This decision was made after consultation with the patient, her family, her physicians, and in consultation with the Ethics Committee."

Sister Margaret was a member of that committee. She declined to discuss the episode with me, but the bishop of Phoenix, Thomas Olmstead, ruled that Sister Margaret was "automatically excommunicated" because she assented to an abortion.

"The mother's life cannot be preferred over the child's," the bishop's communication office elaborated in a statement.

Let us just note that the Roman Catholic hierarchy suspended priests who abused children and in some cases defrocked them but did not normally excommunicate them, so they remained able to take the sacrament. Since the excommunication, Sister Margaret has left her post as vice president and is no longer listed as one of the hospital executives on its Web site. The hospital told me that she had resigned "at the bishop's request" but is still working elsewhere at the hospital.

I heard about Sister Margaret from an acquaintance who is a doctor at the hospital. After what happened to Sister Margaret, he doesn't dare be named, but he sent an e-mail to his friends lamenting the excommunication of "a saintly nun":

"She is a kind, soft-spoken, humble, caring, spiritual woman whose spot in Heaven was reserved years ago," he said in the e-mail message. "The idea that

she could be ex-communicated after decades of service to the Church and humanity literally makes me nauseated.”

“True Christians, like Sister Margaret, understand that real life is full of difficult moral decisions and pray that they make the right decision in the context of Christ’s teachings. Only a group of detached, pampered men in gilded robes on a balcony high above the rest of us could deny these dilemmas.”

A statement from the bishop’s office did not dispute that the mother’s life was in danger — although it did note that no doctor’s prediction is 100 percent certain. The implication is that the church would have preferred for the hospital to let nature take its course.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy is entitled to its views. But the episode reinforces perceptions of church leaders as rigid, dogmatic, out of touch — and very suspicious of independent-minded American nuns.

Sister Margaret made a difficult judgment in an emergency, saved a life and then was punished and humiliated by a lightning bolt from a bishop who spent 16 years living in Rome and who has devoted far less time to serving the downtrodden than Sister Margaret. Compare their two biographies, and Sister Margaret’s looks much more like Jesus’s than the bishop’s does.

“Everyone I know considers Sister Margaret to be the moral conscience of the hospital,” Dr. John Garvie, chief of gastroenterology at St. Joseph’s Hospital, wrote in a letter to the editor to The Arizona Republic. “She works tirelessly and selflessly as the living example and champion of compassionate, appropriate care for the sick and dying.”

Dr. Garvie later told me in an e-mail message that “saintly” was the right word for Sister Margaret and added: “Sister was the ‘living embodiment of God’ in our building. She always made sure we understood that we’re here to help the less fortunate. We really have no one to take her place.”

I’ve written several times about the gulf between Roman Catholic leaders at the top and the nuns, priests and laity who often live the Sermon on the Mount at the grass roots. They represent the great soul of the church, which isn’t about vestments but selflessness.

When a hierarchy of mostly aging men pounce on and excommunicate a revered nun who was merely trying to save a mother’s life, the church seems to me almost as out of touch as it was in the cruel and debauched days of the Borgias in the Renaissance.

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**The following article was published on <http://commonwealmagazine.org>. It is written by Fr. Nonomen, who is the pastor of a suburban parish. He has been a priest for more than twenty years.**

## **Bad Timing**

### **THINGS LEFT UNSAID IN THE YEAR OF THE PRIEST**

5/17/2010

No, this “Year of the Priest” has not been the best for priests or for any Catholics. Just when some of us thought we might be turning the corner, moving on, re-establishing some level of trust, it turns out the wounds are far deeper and much more widespread than we thought.

Around these parts, the “Year of the Priest” has been as much of a nonevent as the opening of Al Capone’s vault or spending New Year’s Eve with the Y2K bug. Although Pope Benedict XVI officially began the observance last June, it wasn’t until eight months later that any activity started registering on our local seismograph. That’s when daily *ferverinos* began direct-depositing themselves in my diocesan e-mail inbox—luscious little bits of soul candy from the writings of eighth-century martyrs—courtesy of someone in the clergy personnel office. Then there were the detailed instructions on how to obtain a plenary indulgence during this time, along with the valuable information that I may also apply this indulgence to “deceased brethren in suffrage.” The cherry on the sundae was an actor channeling St. John Vianney who’d been commissioned by a diocesan office to add a few local stops to his tour schedule so we could all catch the show and be inspired. I admit that I opted instead for *Grease* at the local high school, but only because one of the kids in our youth group landed the part of Sandy.

I don’t blame the diocesan brass for this lackluster observance. It was just lousy timing. Who knew back in June that this would also be the year that the winnowing fan would hit the Irish church? That the scandal would reach Munich? That the heartbreaking cries of two hundred deaf boys would sound through the decades and finally reach our ears? No, this “Year of the Priest” has not been the best for priests or for any Catholics. Just when some of us thought we might be turning the corner, moving on, re-establishing some level of trust, it turns out the wounds are far deeper and much more widespread than we thought.

The people in my parish, as in many, seem to be divided into two camps. There are those who are simply tired of it all, tired of hearing about the scandals and the endless debate over who is responsible. They view the new corrective and preventative measures that many dioceses now have in place as important and viable steps to a new beginning. They just want to get on with it and over it. I suspect that many of these people have not been personally affected by clergy abuse. Like a great majority of Catholics, they’ve had either neutral or good relationships with their parish priests.

On the other hand, there are people in the pews who remain angry and appalled at a system and a leadership that would knowingly set down a wolf near their children. Yet they love the church and, from what I can tell, have no intention of leaving it. They remain active members of the parish, and after Mass they even let their kids give me a hug. Their thoughts are set on the future as well, but with a sense that substantial structural change is the only way to assure the safety of generations to come.

Ministering to these two very different groups and preaching to them from the same pulpit has made this “Year of the Priest” quite an exercise in creativity for many of us in

the parish setting. Both have my heart and both have my ear. Learning to be a priest for both of these groups has required me to reassess my role as a servant and as a leader. Fellow priests in my prayer group have been a tremendous source of support in all this; the people in my parish even more so, with their generous words and frequent encouragement. But in this most difficult “Year of the Priest,” from whom have I not heard a word? The boss. The guy in charge.

Maybe that’s how this year might best be celebrated. Let every bishop, archbishop, cardinal write a note to each of his priests. Don’t make it long or we won’t read it. Just be sure to make it personal. Don’t just sign your name to the sentiments printed on the back of a holy card. Refer to a specific homily I preached. Or tell me the great things you heard about our parish food pantry or carnival or speakers program. Or at least let me know that you appreciate how accurately I account for the royal jelly (since, technically, everything belongs to you), or how frequently I show my face at company gigs. Anything that lets me know that you know *something* about what I do as a priest, as a minister of God’s people.

More than an e-mail or an indulgence, this might go a long way in building up a little morale that’s been lost. Like so many Catholics, we priests aren’t going anywhere either. We’re here to help figure things out and, in the meantime, tend to the wounded, and baptize a few babies, and preach a few homilies, and chair a few meetings—all the things we normally do in the year, in the life, of a priest.

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**The following reflection appeared on Eugene Cullen Kennedy’s blog and was published on National Catholic Reporter (<http://72.26.206.155/>)**

### **If the church ordained women, there would be no sex abuse crisis**

Some years ago I asked in a column, "If the church ordained women would there be fewer abortions?" I suggested that recognizing women as fully equal with men would have obviated centuries of the repression, injustice, and pain inflicted on women and cleared the air of the edgy suspicion and anxiety with which many men, including church leaders, have regarded women throughout the centuries.

In the last century, women sought equal rights for themselves as human beings from the men who had grown up believing that they constituted a second and lesser sex whose main role was, in ways too many to number and too scandalous to name, to take care of them. Had the church ordained women it would have automatically changed history, making them equal in all ways, and striking off the emotional chains that had bound them, voiceless, in time's dungeon. Men would have had to relate to them on the same footing and much of the longing for independence that is symbolized in the abortion struggle would have been lessened.

This is beginning to sound as improbable as "Avatar," but duck away from the cascade of unconvincing arguments dumped on women (e.g., "Women don't look like men so they can't represent Jesus,") by the usual suspects of the curial all-star theology team. Imagine instead that the church had affirmed their human equality by welcoming women into the priesthood. What would the results be?

Such action would have killed Clerical Culture: Like a noxious species wiped out by a meteor before it could evolve into a monstrosity, Clerical Culture would never have come into being. Women would not have stood for it. To grow, it needed an all-male environment, an agar plate as smooth as a fairway on which women were forbidden to play.

Some women were granted visiting rights to Clerical Culture -- the mothers of priests who were also necessary for its flourishing. These women had enormous influence on little Johnny's going to and remaining in the seminary, and were happy to spoil him on his vacations and later on his days off. They were, we might say, enablers who were glad to have their priest sons hanging around the exclusive clerical club house. They could be boys forever.

Priests' mothers cannot be faulted for accepting the honored place, right next to the statue of the Blessed Mother, where Clerical Culture placed them. Their revered presence -- symbolized by their hands being bound at death with the same linen cloth that bound their sons' hands at ordination -- meant that other women were not welcome, at least not as close range, another prerequisite for a booming Clerical Culture.

In classic Clerical Culture, women were handmaids of the lords, allowed in by the servants' entrance and regularly reminded by men, from the pope on down, that they were inferior by nature and, much like slaves cruelly counted as half persons, they were expected to know their place and meet male demands without making any of their own. Priests liked to make jokes that you could not have women priests because they couldn't keep the secret of the confessional and Pope John Paul II became so exercised over the issue that he instructed then Cardinal Ratzinger to fashion a prohibition in the form of an infallible declaration. Not surprisingly, led by sensible women, Catholics paid little attention to this.

Would sex abuse have occurred if there were adult women in the priesthood standing up to and confronting the troubled male priests who preyed on the children in their care? Indeed, would Clerical Culture, with its locker room ambience and its odors of cigar smoke, bay rum, and Bushmill's whisky, have survived the clear eyed gaze of women who made clerics put away their toys and grow up?

Clerical Culture was the essential breeding ground of the sex abuse crisis. This crisis was also hidden in the violet trimmed folds of this unique social milieu. It conferred respect, esteem, and the benefit of the doubt on those priests who could not earn it on their own and who carried out furtive erotic raids on the innocent in its maze-like structure. This culture allowed the unhealthy to pass for healthy and lead secret lives whose corrupt form they themselves did not understand.

Women priests would not have allowed this tragic feasting on children to go on for an hour without taking action to end it. Healthy women do not put up with unhealthy men and this crisis would have been averted had the priesthood had enough healthy women in it to make the unhealthy men either grow up or get out.

The church would have been wise to adapt the old advertising slogan, "Do you want him to be more of a man? Try being more of a woman." Did the church want to avoid the sex abuse crisis and guarantee the manliness of its priests? It should have tried letting women do the job.

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**The final Jeopardy answer: They have before. And the question is:**

**Will Sisters Save the Catholic Church?**

**This full article is available at:**

<http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/sexandgender/2634/>

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**The following article is by Associated Press columnist, Rod McGuirk.**

**Australia archbishop: Church culture tied to abuse**

CANBERRA, Australia — The Roman Catholic Church's culture of discretion and focus on "sin and forgiveness rather than crime and punishment" were among ingrained factors that ultimately led to the child sex abuse scandal and cover-up surrounding the church today, a pre-eminent Australian bishop said Monday.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge, whose archdiocese is based in the national capital of Canberra, took the unusual step of writing an open letter attempting to explain the culture that led the church to turn a blind eye to priests accused of molesting children. Factors include a determination to protect the church's reputation, a culture of discretion, "institutionalized immaturity" of priests fostered by seminary training, and an outlook of "sin and forgiveness rather than crime and punishment," Coleridge wrote.

Clerical celibacy was not itself a factor but it "has its perils," he wrote. "The discipline of celibacy may also have been attractive to men in whom there were paedophile tendencies which may not have been explicitly recognised by the men themselves when they entered the seminary."

Coleridge said as a young priest in the 1970s, he regarded pedophilia cases as "tragic and isolated." Coleridge's view shifted when he was called to serve at the Vatican as chaplain to Pope John Paul II during a five-year period that ended in 2002. While there, Coleridge came to regard child abuse in the church as "cultural."

"There is no one factor that makes abuse of the young by Catholic clergy in some sense cultural," Coleridge wrote. "It seems to me a rather complex combination of factors which I do not claim to understand fully."

Coleridge, a priest for 36 years, said no one could now deny the scale of the pedophilia problem in the church.

"All can see that this is a time of crisis for the Catholic Church ... there will be no quick fix to this problem, the roots of which go deep and wide."

Coleridge said Monday that Pope Benedict XVI was the right church leader for the challenge. Before he became pope in 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger held a key Vatican role in dealing with sex abuse.

"As cardinal and as pope, he has acted as vigorously as I think he can without claiming that he's got a magic wand or that the pope can just speak a word from on high and it all happens," Coleridge told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio Monday.

Canberra-based church historian Paul Collins said Coleridge's letter was unprecedented in Australia in that it openly admits the scale of the child abuse problem.

"Certainly Coleridge is the first bishop to have tackled it head on in this way in Australia," said Collins, an author and former priest.

Broken Rites Australia, a support group for victims of clergy sex abuse, said the church's failing as outlined by Coleridge was unforgivable.

"The archbishop's comments show how the Catholic Church hierarchy have covered up sex abuse and dealt very badly with the victims," group president Chris MacIsaac said. "But there is no excuse for not understanding that rape, sodomy and child sex abuse is a crime. To be more concerned for the perpetrator of crime than the victim is unforgivable."

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