

# Church's newest cross

**I**t was old news when "60 Minutes" did its segment on Sunday, but the impact was powerful. Mike Wallace did his usual devastating job, the more effective because of his scrupulous fairness.

When the clerical emissary sent to Santa Fe, N.M., to clean up the clerical boy-brothel started to explain that pedophilia was a terribly difficult disease to cure, Mike Wallace calmly told the reverend father to leave Freud out of this and explain just how it was that a Catholic archbishop with whom complaint after complaint had been filed, moved pedophilic priests to a different set of altar boys, and then went back to tending his own concubines.

What is going on? Well, what is going on is the practice of a despicable sin in a world in which people shudder from the use of the word "sin." I do not know whether the archbishop in question is a student of the Rev. Charles Curran, but it is worth recalling that when Father Curran was told by the Vatican that he could not teach Catholic theology at a Catholic university there was a general outcry, with everybody talking about academic freedom while the poor Vatican was trying to talk about theological sin.

Father Curran, in the course of his imaginative courses in morality, came up with the idea of "proportionate reason." What you are forbidden by the church to do you must not do, but if you do do it, and there is proportionate reason to do it, then that is a mitigating factor. Unless we laymen have missed something, that means that if the girl is devastatingly attractive, it is more understandable if you take her to bed.

Under the doctrine of proportionate reason, we would be enticed to assume that the pedophile priests who traveled unchecked, especially in the archdiocese of Santa Fe, are to be . . . understood . . . because of the irresistible attraction to them of young boys, even as the bishop who was supposed to protect his flock, and his religion, was fornicating away, though perhaps he desisted during Lent.

The Catholic Church has one very

big black eye. There are even actuarial results: Insurance companies will no longer write liability protection to the church, so riddled is it by the current scandals. I suppose it is time to hear from a Catholic legal organization that we should have federal and state laws setting a limit on recovery by parents of boys sodomized by Catholic priests.

Granted, the sordid affair has to be put in context. A statistician reports that there have been 1,000 Catholic bishops in the history of the United States. Exactly two of them have been charged with sexual crimes. That is the good news. The bad news is the crimes themselves, and two questions having to do with the handling of them.

The first question is: Why is it that Catholic officials who knew about the criminal behavior of the priests didn't report it to the local prosecutor? Isn't this what the law calls misprision of felony? That a rapist wears the cloth ought not to shield him from prosecution when his superior ascertains that he has committed statutory rape. We are all owed an explanation, first, of the lack of action by the relevant church authorities in the country; second, by the apparent inaction of prosecutorial agencies defending the laws of the land.

Inevitably, the Catholic American asks himself the critical question: How is it that the Vatican hasn't been heard from? The pope is not so isolated that we do not hear from him to plead against the execution of a random South African killer, or of a Spanish terrorist. Why hasn't the pope thundered against the commission of a crime that disgusts the moral community and profanes his church?

And curiosity takes us still further. The Playboy philosophy tells us that we should take our pleasures as we find them. But what is it that is not being done in the seminaries to guard against the ordination of men who simultaneously prepare to devote their entire lives to the propagation of the faith, but are apparently too weak to withstand the temptation to engage in the corruption of youth — the greatest sin, if sins can be ranked, of those listed in the New Testament?

Pope John Paul is no more a moral weather vane than the Rock of Gibraltar. In 1988, he denounced "proportionatism," and has spoken out continuously against the notion that private judgment authorizes "dissent" from the church's moral teachings.

But the silence of the Vatican on the current scandal cannot be excused on the traditional grounds that to speak out is to "give scandal." If "60 Minutes" can talk about a Catholic scandal in America, so can Vatican Radio and Osservatore Romano.

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