

[Home](#) > [CBN News](#)

CONTROVERSY

## The Dark Night of the Catholic Church

By **Brian Connor**  
*CBN News Reporter*

April 2, 2002



According to a CNN-USA Today-Gallup poll, more than half of Catholics surveyed, 55 percent, say they think sexual abuse is a widespread problem.

[CBN.com](#) - The Catholic Church continues to feel the sting of recent sex abuse scandals. Mounting revelations of priestly indiscretions are casting a dark cloud over the entire church.

In Boston, Father John Geoghan has been accused of sexually abusing more than 130 children over a 30-year period. Surprisingly, the archdiocese of Boston had knowledge of the alleged assaults. But rather than remove him from the ministry, church leaders repeatedly transferred Geoghan to other parishes where the sexual abuse continued.

And in Florida last month, the bishop of Palm Beach, Anthony O'Connell, resigned amid reports he molested a former seminary student in the 1970's. Since then, O'Connell has been named in two federal lawsuits alleging more sexual abuse and that the church conspired to cover it up.

With new allegations surfacing almost daily, Catholics are outraged. According to a CNN-USA Today-Gallup poll, more than half of Catholics surveyed, 55 percent, say they think sexual abuse is a widespread problem.

Seventy-two percent say the church is doing a bad job in dealing with the problem. And another 74 percent believe the church has been more concerned with protecting its own image than with solving the problem.

But many longtime Catholics, like Regent University's Dr. Bob Schihl, are telling the faithful not to lose heart.

"The messenger does not determine the validity of the message," Schihl said. "The message of the church, the message of the Gospel, should not be deterred. They have to see through it. They need to know this is just a man. This is just one person. They are not the church, as Cardinal Law is not the church, as the pedophilic priests are not the church."

Yet, in the wake of the scandal, there are calls for the church to end the celibacy requirement for its clergy. Others are lobbying for the ordination of women as priests. But according to Schihl, a former priest, those are not the answers.

"They're coming out of the woodwork calling for every kind of change. It's important to remember the Church is not a democracy. All the polls will not alter the teachings of the Church. The Church is a monarchy, and Christ is our king," he said.

"The effort to say that the problem at the root of this malady and this grievous sin is celibacy is so misguided," agreed Keith Fournier, an active Catholic deacon and the founder of Common Good, an ecumenical movement dedicated to Christian social action.

"This tragedy has revealed pedophilia, which is horrible. But, I think it strikes at an even deeper root, and that's the homosexualizing of the culture. What we're dealing with is a homosexual problem. And, that needs to be seriously looked at," Fournier said.

A new book due out April 15<sup>th</sup> appears to support Fournier's concerns. *Goodbye! Good Men* claims a "gay subculture" exists at various seminaries across the country. It even suggests "homosexual politics" is deterring heterosexuals from continuing to study and prepare for the priesthood.

With public outrage reaching a frenzied pitch, Pope John Paul II addressed the current sex abuse scandal in his annual message to priests on March 22nd. The leader of more than one billion Catholics worldwide called it a "grave scandal" casting a "dark shadow of suspicion" over all priests.

Critics say the Pope's message was too little, too late.

Others disagree. "I think this Pope has spoken with great courage, with great clarity...for calling this what it is. He said these priests have not only 'fallen,' they've participated in the mystery of iniquity, in Latin...the worst of evil," Fournier said.

But Fournier and others in the church do not want to focus on the scandal. They want to help heal those who have been wounded by sexual abuse and prosecute those responsible.

A survey by *The Post-Dispatch* of St. Louis may indicate most dioceses in the U.S. have already been adequately addressing the problem for years. While much of the public may think Catholic leadership sweeps sexual abuse claims under the rug, the survey says otherwise.

Eighty percent of the 178 U.S. dioceses questioned do not rely on church hierarchy alone to assess sex abuse claims. More than half of the dioceses say they alert state authorities of sex abuses charges "immediately."

At this time, the way the Church continues to handle the scandal and address parishioners' concerns is critical.

"The Church will survive. Perception of the Church, I think, ultimately can improve if the Church deals with this appropriately. And finally, I think it can be a season of purification so that the Church on the other end of it all can come through this 'dark night,'" Fournier said.

Schihl is also hopeful, recognizing that God can convert this time of scandal into a time of

restoration. "The great scandals of history were always followed by great spiritual revival movements. And if this isn't a call to revival and renewal, I don't know what is," he said.

The Christian Broadcasting Network, Inc. © 2004