

# Unsettling Facts Underlie The Statistics

By PAUL LIKOUDIS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Behind the statistics on the extent of clerical sex abuse in the Catholic Church in the United States over the past 50 years — gathered by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and interpreted by the U.S. bishops' National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People — are a number of unsettling facts that raise more questions than the NRB report answered.

Item: Of the 4,392 priests accused of sexually abusing or molesting 10,667 minors, 149 priests abused a staggering 3,000 victims.

Item: 81% of the victims were minor males; 19% were female.

Item: 78% of the abused victims were between the ages of 11 and 17 when the abuse began; 16% were between the ages of eight and ten, and slightly less than 6% were younger than 8 — that is, approximately 2,000 young children were victimized by "pedophile" priests; the remaining 6,600 were victims of homosexual predators.

Item: Over the decades between 1950 and 2002, the number of female victims dropped steadily, while the number of male victims rose dramatically, peaking between 1970 and 1979 at 2,563, while the number of female victims peaked in the decade between 1960 and 1969, at 1,636, dropping to 145 in the decade 1990-2002.

Item: The largest class of abusers were those 1,049 priests born between 1930 and 1939, while the second largest class, 1,003 priests, were born between 1940 and 1949. Nearly three-fourths of the 4,392 priests identified as sex abusers — 3,321 — were born between 1910 and 1949.

Item: Almost half of all priests accused of sexual abuse — 44.8% — were ordained between 1950 and 1960, and almost 72% of abusive priests were between the ages of 25 and 29 when they were ordained.

Item: Of the 274 abusive priests reported to have been abused themselves, 17% were abused by a priest, 25% by their own father, 9.4% by their own mother, 11% by a peer, and 5.2% by a sibling.

Item: 86% of the alleged incidents of abuse were never reported to police or resulted in no police report, and 94% of abusive priests were never charged.

Item: 78% of abuse victims lived with both parents, while 11% lived with their mother only, and a mere 1.1% lived with their father only.

Item: Of the victims, 26% claimed only one act of abuse, while 46.9% claimed "numerous times."

Item: Of the enticements offered by priests to victims, pornography rated low at 8%, while alcohol/drugs was the most common, at 38.6%, second was an overnight stay with a priest, at 30.5%, and sports or recreation was third at 23.3%.

Item: Almost 41% of abuse took place in the priest's residence or rectory, and 16.3% of abuse occurred in the church.

The NRB report makes it clear that the sexual revolution affected the Catholic Church in a peculiar way because so many homosexual priests, who "grew up" and were ordained in the pre-Vatican II Church, used the Church as an opportunity to act out. And they were then protected from the consequences of their homosexual predations on teenage boys to whom they had access through their parishes and schools and youth programs.

The report does not explain why allegations of abuse, which peaked in the 1970s, did not become publicly known until the last few years — literally until the 21st century — when a synergism between journalists and tort lawyers, assisted by judges and legislators, brought the scandal to the attention of the public.

Blame for scandal is put squarely on the bishops.

"Too many bishops in the United States," declares the report, "failed to respond to this problem forthrightly and firmly. Their responses were characterized by moral laxity, excessive leniency, insensitivity, secrecy, and neglect. Aspects of the failure to respond properly to sexual abuse of minors by priests included: 1) inadequately dealing with the victims of clergy sexual abuse, both pastorally and legally; 2) allowing offending priests to remain in positions of risk; 3) transferring offending priests to new parishes or other dioceses without informing others of their histories; 4) failing to report

See

"national review report" p. 10

"TO RE-ESTABLISH ALL THINGS IN CHRIST" (Ephesians 1:10)

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instances of criminal conduct by priests to secular law enforcement authorities, whether such a report was required or not; and 5) declining to take steps to laicize priests who clearly had violated canon law."

The report claims that only four bishops, without naming them, sexually abused minors. That number would not include recent allegations against Bishop Thomas Dupre of Springfield, who is accused of abusing two young boys, one a pre-teenager; credible claims against former Bishop Daniel Ryan in Springfield, Ill.; nor does the number likely include the former general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and former bishop of Phoenix, James Rausch, former Honolulu Bishop Joseph Ferrario, and certain other bishops against whom accusations have been made. (Bishops Rausch and Ferrario are both deceased.)

The four bishops it acknowledges as abusers of minor males are, most likely: Bishop Kendrick Williams of Lexington, Ky., Bishop Anthony O'Connell of Palm Beach, Fla., Bishop J. Keith Symons of Palm Beach, Fla., and Archbishop Robert Sanchez of Santa Fe (accused of molesting young women).

In a practical sense, the data-gatherers may have missed some episcopal misconduct because dioceses were the custodians of the records and submitted information voluntarily.

## Missed Issue

Just as the bishops remain largely exempt from financial accountability for their own conduct — for spending more than half a billion dollars to keep the scandal hidden, most in "hush money" payments — so they remain largely exempt from disclosing any records concerning bishops' sexual misconduct, or their own misconduct in recruiting troubled men to the priesthood.

For example, there is no acknowledgment of instances like that of disgraced former Bishop G. Patrick Zimann of Santa Rosa, Calif. He met a young man who lacked complete seminary training, and ordained him a little more than a year after their first meeting (see *The Wanderer*, October 14, 1999, p. 1). The young man, Jorge Hume Salas, had earlier been expelled from a number of seminaries. He later accused the bishop of homosexual abuse. The NRB report also makes no acknowledgment of documented instances where bishops accepted men, expelled from other seminaries for pederasty or homosexual activity, into the priesthood for their own dioceses, such as former Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen accepting Fr. Paul Conn. (See *The Wanderer*, May 2, 1996, "For Seat-

le Archdiocese, It's Hard to Confess Wrongdoing," by Paul Likoudis.)

Instead, the NRB says: "Many Church leaders appeared to have avoided dealing with problems of sexual abuse, perhaps because of a discomfort about addressing sexual issues and a reluctance to exercise authority over priests, often leaving to others with less authority the management of critical issues they should have addressed themselves."

Such an assertion ignores the reality that the U.S. bishops as a conference, and individually — in most cases — have not shown any discomfort in promoting sex education for Catholic school children, AIDS awareness, and pro-homosexual "safe school" curricula and programs in numerous dioceses. Some bishops exercised their authority over any Catholics who opposed such agendas by ignoring, marginalizing, or ridiculing them.

Nor have certain bishops avoided using authoritarian measures to discipline or punish priests who balked at their dictates on such issues as removing Communion rails, installing altar girls, allowing women to preach, and so on.

The NRB report also offers this explanation on why bishops did not punish abusing priests:

"Many in the Church failed to realize or appreciate that sexual conduct by an adult with an older minor is a criminal act. As a result of this failure to appreciate the legal (as well as moral) dimension of this conduct, clergy abuse of minors was very rarely reported to the civil authorities. One priest stated, 'I just don't think it ever occurred to them that there was a law out there; that the ethos of the society was . . . you go to prison for this.' To the extent that bishops and provincials really did not comprehend that sexual conduct between an adult and an adolescent was a crime, the fault must lay somewhat with their legal counsel."

## What It Does Say

The NRB team led by noted Washington attorney Robert Bennett emphasizes that "this report is not intended to address Church doctrine or to serve as a sounding board for those within the Church and outside the Church who wish to use this scandal to accomplish objectives unrelated to or tangential to the goal [of restoring the bonds of trust]. The problem facing the Church was not caused by Church doctrine, and the solution does not lie in questioning doctrine."

It also states that the "nature of the current crisis is twofold: It consists both of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the failure of many Church leaders to respond appropriately to that abuse. But the crisis also has a spiritual dimension, for, as is the case with all sinful conduct, it represents a failure to comport with divine law and the teachings of the Church. Unless all aspects of the crisis are addressed forthrightly, any steps to remedy it will bear only the patina of reform and renewal."

And the report does make a very strong case for maintaining the discipline of clerical celibacy by citing some of the most moving defenses of the tradition written by Pope John Paul II and Pope Paul VI, who warned bishops and educators in his 1967 encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caeli-*

*batus* that unfit candidates for the priesthood must be removed from the seminary.

"The life of the celibate priest," wrote Paul VI, in a passage cited by the NRB, "which engages the whole man so totally and so delicately, excludes in fact those of insufficient physical, psychic, and moral qualification. Nor should anyone pretend that grace supplies for the defects of nature in such a man."

The report identifies two major reasons for clerical sex abuse: inadequate seminary screening, which allowed too many "sexually dysfunctional and immature men" into the seminary, and inadequate formation, which left too many seminarians unprepared "for the challenges of the priesthood, particularly the challenge of living a chaste, celibate life."

While the report does say that the scandal should not be a reason for banning homosexuals from the priesthood, stating, "there are, no doubt, many outstanding priests of a homosexual orientation who live chaste, celibate lives," it also states that "more than 80% of the abuse at issue was of a homosexual nature."

Nor does the report ignore the fact that in the 1970s and 1980s a "gay subculture" arose in many seminaries, "and at these seminaries, according to several witnesses, homosexual liaisons occurred among students or between students and teachers. Such subcultures existed or exist in certain dioceses or orders as well. The board believes that the failure to take disciplinary action against such conduct contributed to an atmosphere in which sexual abuse of adolescent boys by priests was more likely. In light of this background, it is vital that bishops, provincials, and seminary rectors ensure that seminaries create a climate and a culture conducive to chastity."

The NRB report also acknowledges that "numerous witnesses" testified that a contributing factor to the permissive attitude of both priests and bishops to clerical pederasty is the tolerance of sexual relations between priests and adult women and/or men.

Such cases are not only "gravely immoral," but "statements to the effect that it is 'nobody's business' if a priest engages in sexual conduct with an adult are fundamentally wrong. Whether a priest keeps his vows and lives in accordance with the moral precepts of the Church is the business of his bishop, his fellow priests, and his parishioners."

The report also takes notice of two questions that are on the minds of many American Catholics: Why has Rome done so little to remove bad bishops, and should bishops who allowed known predators to remain priests be forced to step down?

In the section which explores the role of canon law in the Church, the authors write:

"Many attribute the Vatican's inaction in the current crisis to a general reluctance to interfere with bishops. Others attribute it to a view in Rome that the sexual abuse of minors by members of the Catholic clergy was uniquely an American problem. Whatever the cause of its earlier inaction, the Vatican did respond with strong statements once the depth of the scandal and full weight of its implications became apparent."

But a footnote adds: "In fact, some witnesses stated that the Vati-

can had not sufficiently criticized or pressured recalcitrant bishops in the United States. The Church is understandably sensitive to preserving its independence from secular authorities, which in many areas of the world still attempt to influence the selection of bishops. Nevertheless, allowing a bishop to remain in office after he, due to his own actions or omissions, has lost support from Catholics in the diocese, priests in the diocese, and other bishops erodes the authority of all bishops."

The depth of the crisis in the American hierarchy can be gauged by the fact that Bishop Anthony O'Connell allowed himself to be advanced from the Diocese of Knoxville, Tenn., to Palm Beach, knowing he had paid a hush-money settlement to a young boy he molested, that Bishop Robert Lynch of Tampa-St. Petersburg remained in office after disclosures he paid \$100,000 to a former aide he had "sexually harassed," and, most recently, there are the allegations of sexual abuse against Bishop Howard Hubbard in Albany — which are currently under investigation.

Unlike Archbishop George Pell, who stepped aside as archbishop of Melbourne when molestation allegations were brought against him until his name was cleared, Hubbard has not stepped aside.

And that brings up the \$500,000,000 question: If the bishops, as the NRB report makes clear, are unwilling to make "fraternal corrections" and overcome the indictment in Bennett's report — that they are guilty of "moral laxity, excessive leniency, insensitivity, secrecy, and neglect" — what are the chances the bishops can succeed in putting the sex abuse scandal behind them?