

"The John Jay Report"  
 Week of June 20, 2011  
 ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY  
 By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

The Tony Auth cartoon that appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and was reproduced in *The New York Times* on Sunday, May 22, four days after the release of the John Jay College's five-year, \$1.8 million study of the sexual-abuse crisis in the Catholic priesthood, said it all.

The cartoon showed a pie-eyed bishop, lying on the ground smoking a water pipe, labeled "Rationalization," and blaming everything on the '60s culture of permissiveness.

Unfortunately, the study pretty much lets the U.S. bishops escape responsibility for the crisis, although the 300-page document, "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010," does urge the bishops to adopt uniform, secure policies characterized by genuine transparency and true accountability.

The advice apparently has fallen on deaf ears in some major and not-so-major dioceses around the United States.

Now that the study has been out for a while, the critics are beginning to sharpen their knives.

I am relying here in large part upon Tom Roberts' story in the *National Catholic Reporter*, "Critics point to John Jay study's limitations" (5/23/11).

"Questions persist," Roberts writes, "about the reliability of the basic data that underpins both the most recent study, as well as one on the nature and scope of the scandal that was released in 2004, because the researchers relied principally on reporting by bishops."

Bishops appointed by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, one might add, still have a vested interest in making the Church and its priesthood look as good as possible and, in the process, making their own stewardship of the crisis seem unassailable. This is directly challenged by a recent grand jury report in Philadelphia.

Second, the "conclusion that priests' behavior was influenced by and reflected turmoil in American culture during the 1960s and 1970s" fails to take into account that the scandals have spread to other, non-American locations, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and several European countries, including Poland.

Third, the study failed to go into any depth regarding "institutional dynamics, particularly clerical/hierarchical culture," which many think is integral to understanding why the scandal was covered up and tolerated for so many years.

Fourth, the study concentrates on the behavior of priests, but questions persist about the role that bishops have played in protecting perpetrators and in moving predatory priests from place to place, thereby exposing innocent children to further abuse and often without even informing the pastor of the abuser's new assignment.

Margaret Leland Smith, data analyst for the study, was asked during a two-day program on sexual abuse at Marquette University Law School in early April whether the public could assume that the study did take into account all the relevant data submitted by the bishops.

Her answer was a bit circuitous, but here it is: "Whether or not the count includes all, the fact that all of the allegations, almost all we had, were supported by evidence and substantiated means that one can make an inference that there may have been other allegations that the dioceses did not submit because they did not find them substantiated. I have no evidence one way or the other on that."

After her reply, she joked, "I'm going to get in trouble for that."

Richard Sipe, a married priest who has written widely on the sexual-abuse crisis, cites as one of the study's weaknesses its failure to account for clerical culture except in a "very small, non-essential way." He also points to various institutional elements that are peculiar to Catholicism (but not to the United States) and that the study ignored: secrecy, clericalism, and authoritarianism.

These have surfaced, Sipe notes, as the sexual-abuse scandal in the priesthood spread to other countries.

Father Thomas Doyle, a Dominican and former Air Force chaplain, is the leading advocate for victims of sexual abuse by priests and often serves as a consultant and witness for aggrieved parties.

He points out that, while the John Jay study is limited to the United States and to the years 1950 to 2010, there are signs in other countries that sexual abuse by priests and other ecclesiastical persons had occurred widely well before the period under study.

"These are incidents," Father Doyle insists, "that happened that had nothing to do with sociocultural changes in the '60s and '70s."

He also points out that the study is concerned with the behavior of priests, but not with that of bishops. He asks: "When the abuse and abuser became known to church authorities, why were [the abusers] allowed to continue doing what they did?"

Good question.

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"Blessed John Paul II"  
Week of June 27, 2011  
ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY  
By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

The late Pope John Paul II was beatified on May 1<sup>st</sup> and is now well on the way to canonization. Some people have complained about the speed of the process, but as the pope's biographer George Weigel has correctly pointed out, there were no complaints about the speed with which Mother Teresa's cause was advanced.

The speed of the process, however, is not the issue, nor is there any doubt in the minds of most critics that John Paul II is in heaven.

What *is* at issue is the record of his long pontificate. Canonization is a public declaration not only that the new saint is in heaven, but that his life or hers is worthy of emulation (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 50).

While it is certainly the case that John Paul II's pontificate included many achievements (his three social encyclicals, the renegotiation of the Lateran Pacts, his outreach to Jews, his interfaith gathering and prayer for peace at Assisi), its two major deficiencies were his grave mishandling of the sexual-abuse crisis in the priesthood and his appointment and promotion of exceedingly conservative bishops to, and within, the hierarchy.

Both deficiencies continue to define the Catholic Church in our time, and account for the severe demoralization that afflicts so many in the Church today.

They also explain why so many thousands of Catholics have left the Church in recent years, so many in fact that in the United States ex-Catholics would constitute the country's second largest denomination if they constituted a church unto themselves.

Therefore, it is the case that, on Blessed John Paul II's watch, the greatest crisis to hit the Catholic Church since the Reformation was allowed to grow and to fester, and the bishops appointed during his long reign were unable to offer the kind of pastorally effective leadership that the crisis required.

Indeed, these bishops were not selected in the first place for their pastoral qualities, but for their unquestioning loyalty to the Holy See on such issues as contraception, abortion, priestly celibacy, and the ordination of women.

Bishop William Morris was recently sacked from his diocese of Toowoomba, Queensland, in Australia because he had urged in a pastoral letter that the ordination of women to the priesthood and the end of obligatory celibacy for priests at least be considered by the Vatican.

Pope Benedict XVI gave as his principal reason for dismissing Bishop Morris from his diocese that the bishop had effectively denied that the matter of women's ordination had already been permanently settled by an infallible teaching of Pope John Paul II.

Many Catholics are demoralized today because of the continued stench from the sexual-abuse scandal in the priesthood and because of the repressive, pastorally insensitive behavior of some of the bishops appointed by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

They may have an additional reason for demoralization on the First Sunday of Advent later this year when the "reform of the reform" goes into effect. Some will resent the millions of dollars spent on new missals and song books, and will be confused and disoriented by the loss of familiar wordings.

Those who are more ecumenically-minded will lament the fact that, for the first time since Vatican II's reform of the liturgy, the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations will not be celebrating the Eucharist with the same words.

Close observers of this column and of my many contemporary lectures, writings, and television appearances know that, at the beginning of the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, I expressed not only the hope but also the expectation that both pontificates would be highly successful, notwithstanding the doubts that many other commentators were expressing.

In the former case, I welcomed the election of the first non-Italian pope in over 400 years. In the latter case, I was encouraged by the new pope's selection of the name Benedict. Benedict XV (1914-1922), as I had pointed out in my *Lives of the Popes*, "may well have been one of the finest popes in history, but surely one of the least appreciated" (p. 355).

I judged Benedict XV to be one of the twelve "good" popes in papal history, calling him "Perhaps the most underrated of the modern popes" (p. 436).

For those who wonder why the Catholic Church seems to be passing through one of the worst patches in its history, more benign explanations are, first, the premature death of Pope John Paul I after only 33 days in the papacy and, second, the refusal of Cardinal Carlo Colombo of Milan to accept election to the papacy in the second conclave of 1978.

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