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by NCR Staff

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November 6, 2020

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In Thomas P. Doyle's [review of a new book that examines clergy sexual abuse](#), the longtime expert for lawyers representing victims of clergy sex abuse says that Dyan Elliott's research is "nothing short of remarkable, stunning and most importantly, authentic." Below are letters to the editor responding to the review. They have been edited for length and clarity. If you would like to join the conversation, follow the guidelines below.

Thomas P. Doyle has done pioneering work on this subject ever since his 1985 report for the bishops. Dyan Elliott's book is due for release in November.

The title of her book states the scope: *The Corrupter of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy*. This also states its limitation: the focus on clergy.



This is important, because we cannot have a full true picture unless we carry out a similar examination of the incidence of sexual abuse of children and how authorities dealt with it in society and in other organizations over a similar period of time. It would be like a detailed study of slavery in what are now the United States of America, without similar study of slavery in other parts of the world.

It would be difficult to find another institution comparable to the Catholic Church, but a similar study of such abuse and how it was dealt with not just in other churches, but in secular institutions like schools, military, sporting organizations, etc. Without that, we may be tempted to conclude that the disastrous abuse and failings in the Catholic Church are peculiar to the church.

Historian Philip Jenkins in his 1996 book *Pedophiles and Priests* offers a wider study within which Elliott's valuable study can be assessed.

PÁDRAIG McCARTHY

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Much thanks go to Thomas P. Doyle for his thoughtful and informed review of *The Corruptor of Boys*, Dyan Elliott's scholarly probe into the historical origins of clerical sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. Doyle concedes that his groundbreaking efforts — as well as the work of other pioneers in the subject such as Richard Sipe and Jason Berry — while insightful and provoking, "exposed only a tiny tip of a massive iceberg."

Elliott's work, as Doyle's review reveals, dives beneath the surface and gives measurement to the previously ignored dimension of the scandal, with its ugly tentacles reaching back 1,700 years. The "crisis" is not a crisis, Doyle tells us, it is an existential phenomenon which has hung like an anvil around the neck of the institutional church for centuries.

We, in the company of other lay men and women in my parish, have studied the primal birth pains of Christianity — guided by the works of Henry Chadwick and others — and are impressed with the zeal and fervor of the early apostolic church. Our small Christian community study group was dismayed by what we learned: that the seemingly good news of Constantine's "legalization" of the previously underground church came with the unintended consequence of that "humble" church's adoption of the imperial culture of the Roman Empire, complete with the baggage of a hierarchical system of governance adorned with its fanciful pretenses and flourishes.

Now, Doyle tells us in his review, Dyan Elliott lifts the cover of the cesspool that incubated and nourished a sordid church subculture of the corruption of boys giving way to — as the book's subtitle loudly trumpets — sodomy, scandal and the medieval clergy. The mutation of an innocent apostolic church is the womb from which clericalism was born. This pervasive sin also inculcated a code of secrecy which the management ladder — popes, cardinals, bishops, heads of religious orders, etc. — convinced itself was for the greater good of protecting the institution.

We will read and study Elliott's monumental work and will likely — as will so many others — be heartbroken by yet another encounter with this tragic history. However, we are buoyed by our faith that the veil of darkness will be rent by the light of the Holy Spirit inspiring a pope to lead us back to a purified, simple and humble apostolic church, cleansed of not only sexual abuse but permeating clericalism as well. The laity has grown weary of a church corrupted by this deep-rooted clericalism which perpetuates the denial of women's rightful equality in matters church and

continues to profess a distorted view of human sexuality.

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Thomas P. Doyle writes with authority and experience. He has travelled this road of research and revelation about clergy abuse for decades. That he manages to continue to write on this subject amazes me. May he continue to find the grace and serenity he must need to even sleep at night and not succumb to spontaneous combustion as a result of the anger and pain he has uncovered and witnessed.

I have known and respected Tom for years and obviously he thinks very highly of this book. I haven't read it myself but both the title and Tom's review suggest that the molestation and rape of female children did not find a place in this history. I am a female victim and have met many others.

I understand the impossible task of telling the whole Catholic abuse history, however I am saddened by the apparent lack of any acknowledgement that the Catholic Church, the *Corruptor of Boys*, was also the coercer and abuser of little girls, and teenage and adult women.

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