

No Longer Just an American Problem

Suzanne Morse | Apr. 1, 2010 NCR Today

On Hardball last night, [Chris Matthews said](#) [1], "what floors me, I thought that this was just a problem of a particular couple of generations perhaps, of priests that had this problem, and they were getting away with covering it up in the United States and Ireland. And it turns out that it is a world-wide problem, and it is getting everywhere and it is not going away."

Eight years ago, the word was that this was all a Boston problem. Who can forget then Senator Rick Santorum blaming the clergy sexual abuse crisis on "the basic liberal attitude ... in that area," according to [this article in NCR](#) [2].

Matthews is certainly not alone in feeling that this was largely an "American problem." For years, it was clear that many Catholics in the U.S. believed this in no small part because that was the message coming from the Vatican. But this latest eruption of the crisis shows both the success that the institutional Church had in promoting that idea for so long? and the danger inherent in pushing this message for as long as it did. Because it is now clear that the Vatican knew that it wasn't just an American problem. And so did most close observers. Back in 2006, for instance, the [Dallas Morning News](#) [3] did a whole series on the crisis in the Church in Latin America.

I think that many American Catholics, while disillusioned with the institutional Church here, received some sort of solace "and emotional protection" - by believing that this was a problem inherent to a permissive American culture. Such an attitude allowed them to feel outraged but, I think, also gave them a way to avoid dealing with something that makes many Catholics extremely uncomfortable even today "assigning responsibility to the Vatican. However, faced with the evidence that, in fact, the Vatican was well aware of the scope of this crisis, they feel betrayed all over again. Last night, Chris Matthews articulated that renewed sense of betrayal that so many Catholics are feeling this Holy Week.

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[1] <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3036697/#36123718>

[2] <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/washington/wnb071505.htm>

[3]

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/longterm/stories/Runaway_priests_hiding_in_plain_sight.5ee1e9b