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It's too easy to say that it's sin

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | May. 13, 2010 Bulletins from the Human Side

The beleaguered Pope Benedict XVI has dealt with the sex abuse crisis like a shy bachelor who holds back from stepping onto the dance floor at the parish social. A lifetime of dealing abstractly with men and women from the safe perch of a classroom podium did not exactly prepare him for the immersion in the human rhythms of intimacy that define the dance even on church property.

He has shifted from one foot to the other, letting others call the tune while he hung back, turning ashen and turning away when he learned, as Paul did of his Corinthian community, that what he remembered as a fox trot had been taken over by a wolf pack. Yes, he promised, I?ll get involved in this soon and then woe betide the wolf pack.

So far, his idea of correcting the disorder is to let some of the band leaders quit and to vow that changes will be made in the future, just you wait, and you people who have been trampled on, come over by the bandstand, I?ve got a little time at the break to hear your troubles.

One must feel sympathy for this earnest and good man who looks as if he wishes he had stayed home and played his piano instead of going to the dance in the first place.

Now, according to *The New York Times*, he has given a new explanation of the sex abuse crisis to journalists on his Portugal-bound plane. The problem, he says, is ?truly terrifying? and is ?the sin inside the church.?

This is purely descriptive and, while it at least shifts from blaming sex abuse on the media or the Sexual Revolution, it is hard to believe that this is news to the pope, who may be said to be in the Sin business, or that it is enough to add to the recent admission that it sex abuse is illegal the insight that it is also sinful.

The history of sex abuse in the church resembles an interminable dance that has lasted into the smoky past-midnight hours; everyone is unhappy but the band leader keeps saying ?Take five? instead of calling for the windup waltz.

Sex abuse may be sinful but it is far more complex than that and cannot be understood or dealt with by the church unless it commits itself to exploring and, like Noah herding passengers onto the ark, naming all of them correctly and doing something about them.

Forty years ago, the American bishops commissioned several studies of American priests. The psychological study revealed to the bishops that a large segment of American priests were psychosexually underdeveloped, that is, that their internal development did not match their chronological age. From this very cohort arose many of the priests who became abusers in the decades that followed.

How could the church have ordained these troubled persons and why were they attracted to the priesthood in the first place? These are only a few of the questions raised at the time. Officials chose to receive the reports but not to look further into the complex issues to which it pointed. Sociological and psychological factors played critical

roles in mixing the cultural soil in which the flowers of evil of the sex abuse crisis took root.

Sex abuse is sinful but that is too easy and too narrow a category with which to classify this problem.

Not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing: that is the idea when you describe sex abuse as a sin on one day while, on another, you insist that celibacy is the ?glory of the priesthood? and is so sacred that you can neither investigate or discuss it.

We may well sympathize with Benedict who, having been responsible for sex abuse cases when he headed the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, knows better. Like the bachelor who can?t let himself go in dancing, good Pope Benedict can?t let himself go in exploring the complex reasons for a problem that has brought so much suffering to so many good people in the church.

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