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John Jay sex abuse report cites wrong culture as culprit

Arthur Jones | May. 18, 2011

The U.S. bishops plus Catholic organizations-financed study of the causes behind the pedophilia crisis correctly blamed the problem on the culture. The only error is that the John Jay report focused on the wrong culture and began with the wrong age cohort.

The culture at fault, is not the culture of ?modernism? (to borrow from Pius X), but the ?trickle-down? corporate culture of the autocrat, beginning with the autocratic papacy. Not for nothing were Irish and other pastors of yore known as parish popes.

Secrecy, non-accountability, and the arrogance of exclusivity have long been the hallmarks of the Church-in-Rome (the papacy, the College of Cardinals, the Curia, and by extension the world?s 5000-plus bishops). But it trickled down to the parish level, too. (And here it is the Church?s corporate culture that is being addressed, not every single ordained man across time almost immemorial.)

Move down a notch from the papacy to the cardinals and bishops.

Does it seem that everyone in the Church-in-Rome plays the silent autocrat's game? Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating, head of the U.S. bishop-appointed National Review Board on clerical sexual abuse, would later tell the Los Angeles Times, that some bishops? determination to keep the child sexual-abuse scandal secret was Mafia-like: "To act like La Cosa Nostra and hide and suppress, I think, is very unhealthy." Keating resigned, and refused to apologize: "My remarks, which some bishops found offensive, were deadly accurate. I make no apology,? he said.

Listen to the aggrieved Irish bishops arguing the papacy told them not to report anything. And they obeyed. Just as parish priests obeyed the bishops, and the people obeyed the parish priests.

Where should the research for this project have begun? By interviewing all the Catholics over 80. What were the whispers in the 1930s? Which priests did boys stay away from then?

What changed in the American Catholic Church, belatedly, was not that the American cultural metamorphosis suddenly allowed pedophiles to flourish; they were always in the Church, proportionate or disproportionate to their percentage in the society. What changed was the emerging laity?s willingness, as parents, to sue for redress of grievance, grievances against the fact their children had been abused by priests.

The 80-and 90-year-olds -- the abused children's grandparents and great-grandparents -- would have told the researchers that priests and pastors (and to only a slightly lesser extent, nuns) were once unapproachable gods. Abused boys and girls, abused women and men, did not dare raise a complaint. For corroboration, look at the years of the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. Talk to the survivors of Catholic orphanages, men and women over 80 -- pick your Western city.

Look at the rest of the West and ask its 80-year-olds in Britain and Germany most particularly. Pedophilia in a

Church where medieval cardinals had catamites is not a late happening. The researchers might have asked permission to spend some of the past five or so years in the Vatican library.

Ask 80-year-old and older Anglican men who were young around Anglican curates in the 1930s; same system of god-like presences on altar, in pulpit, mediating -- in eras of spiritual mind-control -- like their Roman Catholic colleagues as to whether the supplicant or sinner went to Heaven or Hell.

No, Pope Benedict; no, Archbishop Dolan. You cannot finesse this one with a John Jay report. The new Church culture of ?spin? will not get the Church-in-Rome out of this one.

[Jones is *NCR* Book Editor. He is a former *NCR* editor and publisher and Washington bureau chief in the mid-1980s when *NCR* first began reporting the clergy sex abuse story.]

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