

## Child Abuse as A Sign of the Times

Ken Briggs | May. 18, 2011 NCR Today

The Sixties did it.

The John Jay College report on child sexual abuse by priests nails it. Don't put the chief blame on the church -- nothing wrong with its teachings on sexuality or celibacy.

It's the demon Sixties with its ravenous demand for freedom. Blacks, women, college students, war protesters cut loose against the old restraints. Vatican II chimed in, wittingly or not, or borrowed from it, espousing such things as letting fresh breezes blow through the church and encouraging a participatory, more democratic Catholicism.

To many church authorities, the "revolution" that mattered most was about sex. Cramped minds imagined orgies and impulsive free love that assaulted church teachings.

"Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests 1950-2010" plies the looking glass at the huge scandal that has erupted and identified that old conservative whipping boy as a major culprit.

As the report would have it, priests who were steeped in pre-Vatican II classical morality fell apart when exposed to Woodstock. So shaky was their devotion to the eternal doctrine of the church that they let their libidos loose in the most perverse ways. But don't fault the church: they'd been told what to do, they were seduced by the siren call of a sex mania that was much more powerful than their training could handle.

Seduced by the Sixties. The problem is that most of the accused weren't seduced enough to leave the priesthood. They apparently felt comfortable wreaking havoc on youngsters within the framework of the rectory, not in the fleshpots of hippie communes.

The Catholic church accommodated much of the civil rights part of the Sixties, and many of its activists railed against Vietnam, but stoutly resisted the insights that might have resulted in a more adequate sexual morality. Women's voices of protest were muted and refuted. Discussion of divorce was ruled out; instead, annulments were expanded and re-defined to become divorce by another name.

From the report, the picture is demeaning to priests. It asks us to suppose that they were naive enough to fall into the liberation traps set by the diabolical secularist schemers. It also conveniently gets the church off the hook.