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Sex and money? It's about power

Phyllis Zagano | May. 25, 2011 Just Catholic

Lots of news about sex and money lately. First an international financier is alleged to have raped a hotel maid. Then the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops blames societal changes for sixty years of creeps run rampant. Same story, different emphasis.

As most of the world knows, International Monetary Fund head Dominique Strauss-Kahn was hauled out of a first-class Air France seat by NY-NJ Port Authority police shortly after a hotel maid said he?d assaulted her. The *New York Post* now reports friends of ?DSK?, as he?s known in moneyland, have offered ?seven figures? to the maid?s impoverished family in Guinea if she drops charges. Other news outlets assert he made crude remarks to a stewardess moments before he was arrested.

Then the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released their seven-figure take on sixty years of sex abuse by priests, claiming the collision of unprepared clerics with an anything goes culture.

The bishops? self-study of bishops? self-reporting analyzes statistics since 1950, as if the problem began only then, and implies it?s all over now. Numbers and charts affirm that abusive priests are on the wane, but they do not focus on an aging priesthood. The report wants antidotes to priestly ?stress? and ?loneliness,? but does not recommend increasing the number of married Roman Catholic priests.

As I said, same story, different emphasis. In both cases, the antidote is money.

The DSK crew has apparently flown to West Africa with bags of cash, while DSK luxuriates in a fancy apartment near the courthouse from which he hopes to skip free.

The USCCB has spent the coin of its realm -- donations from its own coffers, the Knights of Columbus, religious institutes of women, and the Catholic Mutual Group (the self-insurance fund of the Catholic Church in the U.S.), to prove the bishops are on top of things so now let?s all be friends.

Great tactic. If you throw enough money at something, it will go away.

May I suggest we not let it go away? Women and children are the most vulnerable humans on the planet. The statistics are sickening. For example: the American Journal of Public Health reports 400,000 women were raped from 2006 to 2007 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where sexual violence is the worst in the world. According to published UN statistics, things are also pretty bad in Belgium, Iceland, and Zimbwabwe, and just awful in Lesotho. Statistics for the U.S., UK and Ireland are frightening as well: around 25 reported rapes per 100,000 persons.

If my math is correct, there are millions of rapists wandering around. Statistically, at least, some of them are in first-class sections of airplanes. Others of them are clerics.

Following them are people with money offering excuses.

As stories of Mr. DSK-the-great-seducer pile up and the USCCB is spinning numbers, who is speaking out? The perspective of both DSK and the USCCB is clear: ?Oh, this can all be explained. See, we have this checkbook here, and then there are all these other ?facts.??

Well, I?m here to tell you it cannot be explained away. The epidemic of men who cannot keep their pants zipped is a disgusting commentary on our culture, but to say the one caused the other is to avoid a very simple principal of human behavior. We are each responsible for our own choices.

And rape -- whether of women or of children -- is the final step on the continuum of disrespect for the powerless. I once had an appointment with a priest I do not know, who brought me into his office and left me standing for several minutes while he sat at his desk and fiddled with his computer.

When I handed him something to look at, he shoved it in a book without looking at it. That is a violence. It is minimal passive-aggressive violence, but it is indicative of an ingrained misogynist attitude. Women are to be merely tolerated, and then only when they are useful.

But most women (and, by extension, children) are not ?useful? to too many of the rich and powerful men who control money and who control sacraments. Most women and children are like the young immigrant hotel maid who met DSK, and like the thousands of young people whose life tragedies are reduced to numbers and graphs by the USCCB report.

The wake-up call needs to be trumpeted now, not later. That wake-up call must come from every single one of us because otherwise you know for sure something will ?happen? to the DSK evidence, and you know as well the next layer of bishops will forget past.

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