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Hierarchical power and clerical sex abuse

Mary Ann McGivern | Feb. 10, 2014 NCR Today

Back in the 1980s, a priest from Portland, Ore., Ray Carey, already had a reputation for assisting seminaries in identifying applicants who were pedophiles. I was on our Loretto membership team and participated in three of his workshops. I learned interviewing skills that stand me in good stead today, centering on how to frame questions to sample interviewee behavior. I also learned more than my mother would have ever wanted me to know about child sexual abuse by the clergy. (That joke is his, too, and I've borrowed it for weapons trade and prisons as well as pedophilia.)

I Googled Father Carey and learned that he gives frequent talks in Portland on spiritual growth and development. He gave a talk on the gifts of sexuality last month that drew high praise in the parish bulletin. I don't know if he still advises seminaries or speaks on abuse issues, but I wish the U.S. bishops conference would consult with him. The sex abuse scandal continues, and I fear that in the search for vocations, some seminaries still don't screen applicants adequately. Past and potential abuse continues to be buttressed by a parallel abuse of hierarchical power.

For example, according *The New York Times* [1], the United Nations is calling on Pope Francis and the Vatican to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among the failures and shortcomings listed by the U.N. are obstruction to extending statutes of limitations; settlements that require victims signing confidentiality agreements; failure to assist birth parents seeking children adopted out of Catholic institutions without parental consent; and failure to identify and support children fathered by Catholic priests.

The Holy See is a member of the United Nations and signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But somebody at the Vatican is arguing that the document only applies within the geographical Vatican, not to the church. Now there's a mind-blowing distinction.

Wikipedia estimates there are well more than 10,000 victims since 1950 in the United States alone, and the Vatican denies that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is applicable. What's new? But reading about the U.N. call for Vatican compliance, I remember with sorrow Father Carey's passion, diligence, knowledge and skill 25 years ago. But it is never too late to repent and reform.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/06/world/europe/un-panel-assails-vatican-over-sex-abuse-by-priests.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20140206