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Church leaders are spinning their wheels

Maureen Paul Turlish | May. 4, 2010 Examining the Crisis

The institutional Roman Catholic church can attack every newspaper in every country in the world but that will not change the fact that as an institution it has participated in an extremely well documented, egregious pattern of enabling and covering up for the sexual abuse of thousands of innocent children the world over during almost an entire century.

Today, members of the hierarchy are railing against *The New York Times*. Eight years ago the *Boston Globe* was the recipient of Archbishop Bernard Cardinal Law's calling down of the wrath of God.

It has been eight years since the U.S. Catholic church was rocked to its foundations by revelations of clergy sex abuse in the Boston archdiocese and five years since a Philadelphia grand jury released a report documenting in explicit detail decades of abuse by clergy and cover up by the Philadelphia archdiocese, where I was born and baptized, and still church leaders are spinning their wheels trying to place blame on the messengers rather than on themselves and on a system that has become so corrupted that it put the protection of individual sexual predators along with an institution's reputation before the protection of the most vulnerable of its members, the children.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke, who served on the U.S. bishops' National Review Board for child protection from 2002 through 2005, suggested recently [1] that it might ?still be good for a few more bishops to step down." Such action does have merit given the documented collusion of those in authority in protecting and covering up for sexually abusive clerics.

Yet, while some are touting the directions and procedures that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops put in place in 2002 as some kind of gold standard for the rest of the world to follow, bishops in Connecticut, Florida, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania have done everything possible to keep more adequate child abuse legislation from being passed. They have adamantly opposed [2] any legislation that would change statutes of limitations that prevent alleged victims from seeking redress after a certain age.

If church leaders want to attack untrue, unsubstantiated and specious statements, let them start with what Archbishop Henry J. Mansell stated in his letter of April 8 [3] in regard to Connecticut's proposed House Bill 5473,

Mansell said that passage of the bill would have a "devastating financial effect" on the "Catholic dioceses of Connecticut, including parish assets and those of other Catholic service organizations.? Though unsubstantiated, his messaged had the desired effect. The bill was officially withdrawn as the legislative session ended April 30, but legislators promised "they will try again in the future."

Brooklyn's Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio reportedly threatened to close parishes [4] in the districts of New York legislators who dared to vote for the Markey-Duane bill. Such threats go well beyond all bounds of civility, but they had the desired effect.

And finally with the predictions of economic doom [5] and gloom made by Archbishop Edwin O'Brien in opposition to Maryland's most recent child abuse bill sponsored by Delores Kelley, one can understand why so many good Catholics bought into the bill of goods being hawked by church leaders.

"Do as I say not as I do," is the message still coming across to the people of God who are waiting for the accountability and transparency promised in 2002 but doled out grudgingly by too many bishops.

While what the pope may or may not have known or done may be unclear at present, one can be sure that the truth will eventually be known. One hopes and prays that Pope Benedict is not directly involved in harboring individuals who should have been reported to authorities but no amount of prayer will change the truth.

The more important questions that should be asked, answered and then acted upon are these:

What are the systemic and endemic flaws in church structure and governance that gave rise to the continuing crisis of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic church?

What was it that gave bishops and their subordinates the idea that they had license to act with such utter abandon and disregard for the safety and protection of children; their bodies as well as their souls?

And is it really necessary for bishops to call down God's wrath on another newspaper when what they should be doing is "besieging" their fellow hierarchs to initiate the reform and renewal that is so necessary?

Have they learned so little in eight years?

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