

SEXUALLY ACTIVE CATHOLIC CLERGY: SQUABBLING ABOUT NUMBERS



The 2005 Vatican publication *Annuario Pontificium* records the following worldwide numbers for Roman Catholic clergy:

- 405,058 priests
- 4,695 bishops
- 745 archbishops
- 190 cardinals
- 7 patriarchs

Rome's conclusion is that 410,695 men are publicly committed to celibacy. There is no reason to squabble about those statistics. The practice of celibacy among this group is quite another question. In a 1971 Rome conference of bishops discussing celibacy and a

married priesthood Cardinal Franjo Seper of Zagreb said, "I am not at all optimistic that celibacy is in fact being observed."

The 2008 *Official Catholic Directory* for the United States records the following figures:

- 14 cardinals
- 55 archbishops
- 391 bishops
- 115 abbots
- 41,406 priests

That book also claims a Catholic population of 67,117,016 out of a total U.S. population of 305,248,229.

The actual number of practicing Catholics is one area to squabble about: *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* published their extensive survey on the religion in the U.S. in 2008. They concluded that 31% of men and women raised Catholic no longer identify themselves as Catholic.¹

The number of clergy who practice celibacy is another question. In 1994 Cardinal Jose Sanchez, then head of the Vatican Congregation for the clergy said "I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of those figures" when he was asked his opinion on studies that claimed that at any one time between 45% and 50% of priests were not practicing celibacy.²

¹ Pew Forum "While nearly one-in-three Americans (31%) were raised in the Catholic faith, today fewer than one-in-four (24%) describe themselves as Catholic. These losses would have been even more pronounced were it not for the offsetting impact of immigration. The Landscape Survey finds that among the foreign-born adult population, Catholics outnumber Protestants by nearly a two-to-one margin (46% Catholic vs. 24% Protestant); among native-born Americans, on the other hand, the statistics show that Protestants outnumber Catholics by an even larger margin (55% Protestant vs. 21% Catholic)."

² Fr. Victor T. Kotze, *Stress Among Roman Catholic Clergy in South Africa*. 1991. A.W.R.Sipe *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, 1990.

In 2002 when the Roman Catholic clergy sexual abuse crisis that exploded into public awareness in the United States it raised serious questions about the number of priests who had abused minors and added to the discussion about the number that actually practice celibacy. Under pressure and public outrage resulting from revelations of widespread violations of children by Catholic clergy the American bishops commissioned the John Jay School of Criminal Justice to determine the number of sexual abuse complaints contained in diocesan records from 1950 to 2002. On February 27, 2004 they presented their report: it stated that 4,311 allegations were leveled against clergy during that period.³ The report says, “the percentage of of incardinated priests and deacons accused of child sexual abuse is consistently between 3% and 6% and the overall average is 5%.”⁴

The figure of 6½ % reported priest abusers results if one isolates priests ordained between 1960 and 1984.⁵ I was particularly interested in this result because my ethnographic study that was conducted during that same period resulted in a conclusion that 6% of Roman Catholic priests abuse minors.⁶ The Georgetown University Research group claims that 71% of sexual abuse by clergy in the United States occurred or began between 1960 and 1984.

The John Jay Report is not the last word on the percent of priests who abuse minors. CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University) keeps ongoing figures on Catholic issues; in 2007 it published additional figures on allegations of priest sexual abusers after the John Jay Report:

- 1,092 new allegations (756 offenders) in 2004
- 783 new allegations (532 offenders) in 2005
- 714 new allegations (448 offenders) in 2006

Their study results are roughly the same as the J-J Report, namely that 80 percent of the abuse victims were boys. This gives additional urgency to understanding the question of homosexual behavior and orientation among Roman Catholic clergy.

Accurate Numbers of Abusers and the Homosexual Question

First, one thing must be kept clear. Gay priests and bishops do not abuse minors because they are homosexual. Pedophilia/ephebophilia are diagnostic categories of sexual deviation and preference. Homosexuality and abuse of minors must be examined as separate questions simply because they are distinct, if sometimes related entities. But it is certainly true that a greater proportion of gay men inhabit the ranks of the RC clergy than exist in the general population (between 30% and 50% in the priesthood according to the best estimates). My experience is that the homosexually oriented clergy keep their celibacy in roughly the same

³ P. 53.

⁴ P. 31.

⁵ Pp. 30 ff. One of the reasons that number is higher is because the number of deacons does not dilute the result.

⁶ I reported this figure to Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk in 1986 when he was president of the USCCB. The number of bishops who have abused is still indeterminate, but a number have been reported. Cf. *Are American Bishops Gay?*

proportion as heterosexual priests and bishops. (Neither group has much to brag about when it comes to practicing celibacy.)

The clerical culture of the RC priesthood is unique: it is *homosocial* as no other organization of comparable size in the world. All of its educational/formation structures, promotions, power positions and control are male. It does produce “situational homosexuality.” The Vatican in a 2005 invented the term “Transitional Homosexuality.” This certainly comes from its vast experience with both the internal forum (confession, spiritual direction, and canonical procedures) and histories of complaints about clergy demonstrate that some do indulge in homosexual behaviors for periods of time.

Consideration of numbers of priests who abuse of minors is distinct from general questions about celibacy.⁷ “We will never know the exact numbers” (of sex abusing priests). Those were the words in May 2007 of Paul McHugh, then a member of the United States Catholic Bishops' National Review Board for Child protection. There is reason to believe that the bishops do not want to know the numbers of priests who abuse children or for that matter the number of bishops and priests who do not practice celibacy.

There are several reasons why McHugh is correct. First and foremost only a fraction of clergy abuse is reported. Experts estimate that only ten (10) percent of sexual abuse victims report their violation. If they are correct there have been at least one-hundred-and-twenty-thousand men and women in the United States who have been abused by Catholic bishops and priests in the years from 1950 to 2002. Counting abuse violations may be compared with speeding tickets—only a fraction of violating drivers get caught. In 1983 11½ of all the clergy active in the Los Angeles Archdiocese were subsequently reported for abuse of minors.⁸

Another reason correct numbers are evasive is because bishops and superiors do not tell the truth about the numbers. For instance, originally the Diocese of Providence Rhode Island reported that 56 priests were alleged abusers.⁹ In October 2007 the diocese admitted that 125 priests had been accused of abuse. This kind of discrepancy between the reported figures and the real numbers is common.

Sexual activity with a minor is *criminal behavior*. This recognition is not new.¹⁰ The abuser

⁷ Also pedophilia among Catholic clergy cannot be equated with similar behavior in the general population where accurate number are still lacking. The clerical culture is one determinant of situational sexual behavior both homosexual and sex with minors. Cf. Charles L. Scott “Sex Offenders” Audio-Digest Psychiatry Volume 36, Issue 16, August 21, 2007.

⁸ This review was conducted by Jean Guccione for the L A Times.

⁹ Louis E. Gelineau bishop of Providence from 1972 to 1997 had a long-standing reputation as an abuser of minors. One report is found in depositions of St. Mary’s orphanage in

¹⁰ In 1568 Pope Pius V issued a public decree called *Horrendum illud scelus* Literally translated means “This horrendous crime” that required that clergy abusers of boys should be degraded, stripped of their source of income and then turned over to the secular arm of government for punishment. The penalty could include decapitation.

wants to hide his behavior because it is a crime. The church conspires to conceal the behavior often to protect its image rather than to protect minors. Victims are subject to guilt shame, intimidation, and confusion that should by rights be borne by the abuser.

A Case History: A notorious example of the pattern and practice of the church in its cover up of even criminal sexual behavior is the case of Fr. Daniel McCormack a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago who is currently imprisoned on charges of sexual abuse of minors. The police picked him up in August 2005. Cardinal Francis George against the advice of his review board and his earlier protestations of protecting children allowed McCormack to continue pastoral work and with the approval the Vicar General George Rassas he received a pastoral promotion where he abused more children. McCormack was arrested again in 2006. Rassas was soon made an auxiliary bishop.

But these behaviors are only the end-games of a priest abuser. The rector of the seminary Gerald Kicanas knew of complaints of “sexual improprieties” registered against McCormack when he was still in studies but nonetheless supported his ordination. He justified himself to the Chicago Sun Times thus “It would have been grossly unfair not to have ordained him. There was a sense that his activity was part of the developmental process and that he had learned from the experience. I was more concerned about his drinking. We sent him to counseling for that.” McCormack was ordained in 1994. The following year, Kicanas became a Chicago auxiliary bishop and in 2001, a bishop of Tucson. This is also an example of the church’s thinking about *Transitional Homosexuality*.

The behavior that Kicanas knew about in 1992 and passed over were accusations of sexual activity with two adult males and one minor boy. “The incidents began in 1988 when McCormack was at a seminary school known as Niles College where Fr. John Canary worked. Canary said the allegations were noted in seminary records, but later ‘disappeared.’ Canary later became seminary rector. In 2006, he was appointed vicar general, a position that became open when Rassas was elevated to auxiliary bishop.” The archdiocese’s chancellor, Jimmy Lago who heads the offices that process sexual abuse complaints was also ambiguously implicated in the fiasco.

This case is a paradigm of the operation of the clerical sexual/celibate system and culture. The superiors, bishops, rectors, etc. know about the sexual activity of seminarians and priests—and bishops. It is secluded and dismissed into the secret recesses of the power system where the men in charge are promoted and can be trusted because they are the keepers of scandals and secrets. The real corruption in the RC Church percolates at the top of the power structure fueled and bound by what I have called the Scarlet Bond of secrecy.

Research: The area of sexual behavior generally is notoriously difficult to research. *Sexual behavior* of all strips is predominantly conducted in private. Self-reporting is undependable. Even Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey’s history making reports on *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *in the Human Female* (1953)—the most authoritative grand scale studies to date of human sexual behavior—has come into sharp criticism in some quarters. Nonetheless, Kinsey the Indiana University professor opened the door for innumerable and diverse studies of behavior including my own studies. Kinsey made the topic of sex discussible and debatable.

William H. Masters, M.D. and Virginia E. Johnson conducted twenty years of direct observation of *sexual response* in a medical setting under laboratory conditions before they published their findings that were ground breaking and unique. The publication of *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970) opened the door for more direct discussion of all sexual behaviors since it touched the universal experience of biological reaction. I served on an American Medical Association committee with Dr. Masters in 1969 and I found his practical and forthright approach to talking about sex inspiring for my own explorations of sexual behaviors and sexual responses in men who professed celibacy. He told me of a research project conducted in St. Louis. Two hundred vowed Catholic religious were asked about their masturbation over the previous two-year period. One-hundred-and-ninety-eight admitted that they had masturbated during that time.¹¹ He said to me, "I don't think the other two understood the question." I was destined to carry on my work in clinical observation and the classroom from the 1960s through the 1990s with a dedication to observation that he inspired in me.

The area I have chosen to study and understand, *clerical celibacy*, by definition excludes any and all sexual behavior and limited response other than spontaneous reactions and releases. In addition the subject in the Roman Catholic priesthood is supported by the astounding official denial that any sexual behavior in fact does take place in that population. Many clergy feel that any exploration of the subject is a hostile invasion of a sacred preserve. Anyone who seriously explores sexual behavior within this population can expect only automatic criticism, rejection, and disdain if he is lucky. But "Facts" as Aldous Huxley said, "do not cease to exist because they are ignored." (*Proper Studies*, 1927)

It is a fact that many priests and bishops do have sexual relations; some on a more or less regular basis; some in measurable numbers with minors. It is important for the protection of children that we know everything we can about the sexual behavior and proclivities of clergy and their sponsoring organizations. I can think of no other facts that can be more useful to the progress and integrity of religion.

¹¹ For authoritative consideration of masturbatory activity Cf. Dr. Michael Patton. "Masturbation from Judaism to Victorianism." This important historical overview was published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1985.