

SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH: FOUR YEARS LATER

In June 2002, U.S. bishops assembled in Dallas for their biannual meeting. It was not a happy time: the sexual abuse scandal dominated the news about the Catholic Church. Next week, the bishops will meet in Los Angeles, only this time few in the media are focusing on the scandal. That's too bad because this time the news is quite different.

In March, the third annual report on priestly sexual abuse of minors was released; a supplementary report was also issued by John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Here's what was found:

- The vast majority of sexual abuse cases occurred between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s
- In 2005, 783 credible accusations against 532 priests were made, 87 percent of which involved abuse that occurred before the 1990s
- 81 percent of the victims were male, and most were not little kids—they were postpubescent (the identical figure was reported in cases found between 1950 and 2002)
- There were 21 allegations made for acts that took place in 2005: five were found to be credible; two were still under investigation; and insufficient information was found in two instances
- Adding the above figures yields a total of nine. Nine out of a total of 42,000 priests means that .02 percent of priests had a credible accusation made against him last year

It is highly unlikely that there are many institutions or demographic groups with a better record than this (e.g., it is estimated that the rate of sexual abuse of public school students is more than 100 times the abuse by priests). Obviously, one victim is too many. But when 99.98 percent of priests today are not under suspicion—and indeed most are good men—it is outrageous that they continue to be subjected to vile depictions in the media, sneering remarks by educators and inequitable treatment by lawmakers.

Stereotypes do not die easily, but it is high time our cultural elite began to treat priests with the degree of respect they've earned. Sweeping condemnations of any group is rightly regarded as bigotry. Including Catholic priests.

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