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'Epistles on Clergy Abuse'

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Vincent J. Nauheimer, whose son was molested by a priest of the New York archdiocese, has published a book titled Epistles on Clergy Abuse. The following is the preface of Nauheimer's book.

Preface

Michael, tell me about Moral Relativism?

No!

Why?

Because, you will only figure out how to use what I say in your efforts to destroy my church!

Michael, I am not trying to destroy your church. The Catholic Church is doing an excellent job of destroying itself. I am only providing a running commentary.

And after a long thoughtful pause Michael said: "I guess you're right. What is it you want to know?"

This was an actual conversation that I had with an ex-seminarian friend who is still a very devout Catholic. He is also one of the brightest, most intellectual, and philosophically astute people I know. It is a fitting opening because it defines the spirit in which my letters and this book were written. This work is a chronological history, through letters, of what has become known as the Infamous Clergy Abuse Scandal. Its purpose is to provide a running record of the destruction caused by an arrogant hierarchy who with unparalleled hypocrisy covered up their own evil with the excuse: "We are protecting the church."

This book will give the reader a first hand opportunity to experience the process of battling with the institution known as the Roman Catholic Church over the issue of sexual abuse of minors through letters. It was compiled because I realized a long time ago that there are those out there who don't have voices. My example has helped many find their voices and in doing so, they have learned to speak out. After reading this book, hopefully, many more will find their voice and use it to put an end to this tragedy.

This all started in a sleepy little village of about twenty-five-hundred households. My wife was a Eucharistic minister and taught CCD for ten years. Both my sons were altar boys and one of them was the sacristan. The pastor was a family friend who had been over to dinner on many occasions; we even vacationed together.

After Mass on Sundays people would talk in small groups, catching up on the week's events. It was the kind of place where you spent more time shaking hands and kissing people than a politician running for office, but this was genuine. The people of this parish were what community was all about. It was the kind of place where things like child abuse didn't happen! And if they did, it didn't happen in church, and most assuredly, these acts were not committed by men such as priests or

pastors. The incident destroyed the fabric of the community by polarizing it.

In April of 1994, my wife was shocked to see our 12 year-old son, Brian, come up the stairs crying. He had been downstairs in the family room watching a movie with the pastor of our church and family friend, Fr. Jerry Gentile. He wanted to know why the priest was touching him that way and he said he didn't want to be his friend anymore.

My wife and I met with the priest a couple of days later and told him that he had violated our trust, but more importantly, that of our son. We told him he was not to be alone with any of our children again and our friendship was over. That was all we did until three years later, when Brian came home from a Catholic retreat for Catholic teenagers. There he met a boy who had recently been released from an institution for self mutilation. The boy proceeded to tell my son about a priest whose violation of him had been determined as the root cause of his behavior. It was the same priest!

When Brian came home, he was outraged and at the same time vindicated. His new- found knowledge confirmed the events of that evening in our home. He asked us to stop this priest. What ensued was a life-altering decision in more than one way. Many thoughts went through my mind at the time. What examples were we going to set for our children regarding right and wrong? If our son wasn't worth fighting for, who or what was? How would we ever look any of our children in the eye again if we swept this under the rug and more importantly, how could they ever look us in the eye knowing that we had stood idly by and done nothing? If we couldn't stand up against the sexual abuse of minors, what could we be counted on to stand up for? The answer was painfully obvious, nothing! The only thing that could be done was to take action. It was by no means either an easy or popular decision. It split our little village and the parish right down the middle. Deep rifts were created in the process between neighbors and friends. Eight years after the fact, as I write this there are still hard feelings on both sides. I will never forget an elderly woman coming up to me and telling me that I had made her pastor's life miserable.

I can look my children in the eye today. They have seen and paid the price of admission for standing up on the side of righteousness. It was a long hard fight fraught with pain, suffering, fear, angst and an ocean of tears. However, in the end, we can all look at each other and in the mirror without wincing. Sadly, there are families who can't. There are some whose children will always wonder what their parents stand for and why their parents put silence before the truth; why they chose the church and pedophile priests over them. Like mine, each decision was deeply personal.

Predator priests know the power of the church and depend upon it. They know the church will go to the wall for them in order to prevent a scandal. They counted on parents not wanting to go public. They also counted on the parental desire to protect their children. These stories are more common than not. The saddest of these stories was hearing about a victim whose father had threatened to kick him out of the house if he said anything to anybody about his relationship with a pedophile priest. Such is the pain and heartache that is contained within the web of abuse. Such is the depth of torment for some when it comes to choosing between their church and their children.

When we initiated our complaint to the archdiocese, we wanted nothing more than to have this priest removed and to see him get the help we thought he needed. If the hierarchy of the Catholic Church had the slightest capability to listen, many of these cases that have rocked the nation would have never seen a docket number. What we got from the NY Archdiocese was the runaround, more abuse, insults and defamation. Most of it, as I recall, was done by a pink-cheeked little man with rodent like eyes and a dead-fish handshake named Msgr. Edward O'Donnell.

O'Donnell was the Vicar of Priest Personnel for the NY Archdiocese at the time. After our first meeting, I recall telling my wife that he reminded me of a rat. Little did I know how prophetic those words were going to be. There was something about the way he positioned his Breviary on the conference room table caught my attention that night, but more importantly, there was no reason for him to take it with him each time he left the room. I wondered then and still do now whether the book contained a hidden tape recorder.

At this point, I feel it necessary to explain that I am not going to go into the life and times of Fr. Gennaro Gentile. For those interested, the New York Daily News did a fine job of detailing Gentile's long history in a two part, eight page expose that ran on consecutive days starting with the March 27, 2002 issue. The story ends with a quote from a priest who worked with Gentile in 1971. Fr. O'Gorman said this about Gentile: "Someone should have kicked him in the ass long before..." Enough said about Gentile, because this book is not about him. The sole purpose of mentioning him is to provide the reader with the background of how I came to be set on this path.

The N.Y. Daily News also did a story on Msgr. O'Donnell on June 16 of the same year. The story quotes a parishioner saying "He used our altar to lie to us, to say that the charges against Father Gentile were untrue when he knew otherwise." A report issued on April 29 of 2002 by a Westchester Grand Jury investigating clergy sexual abuse agreed with the parishioner's assessment of O'Donnell. This is an excerpt from the Grand Jury's findings:

"The Grand Jury also heard testimony and viewed evidence of a concerted effort on the part of the religious institution to mislead the community, defending the abuser while simultaneously attempting to humiliate victims and their families — even in the face of mounting credible evidence against a particular abuser. Congregants, where the abuser was employed, were lied to during religious services in their house of worship. Articles in newspapers sponsored by the religious institution questioned the victim and his family's motives; further, the religious institution used the media to lie about the past record of certain clergy members, thereby willfully misleading the public. In one case in particular, the religious institution sent a high level official to the congregation to vouch publicly for an abuser against whom multiple claims had been lodged by separate victims."

I was sitting in church with my family on the Sunday in question when that despicable little man stood on the pulpit issuing his twisted lies not fifteen feet from the Eucharist. Msgr. O'Donnell abused every member of my family on that day. How do you explain to your children, who have been raised in the church since the cradle, why a priest lies about you and your family from the pulpit? Why did that monster of a monsignor say things about our family that he knew were not true? This was the hierarchy of the NY Archdiocese spewing lies to our neighbors and friends to protect one of their own. If this was the character of the church, we were in trouble and at the time we had no idea of how much, because this was only the first salvo. The week after O'Donnell's speech, the Catholic New York (the archdiocesan newspaper) would publish the fact that "I was a recovering alcoholic" and by purposefully using the past tense create a doubt as to whether I was still in recovery. (I was then and still am now) They also mentioned that I had closed a business earlier that year.

The N.Y. Daily News also told us that O'Donnell was a man of such sterling qualities that he approved of allowing the notorious Fr. Paul Shanley, of Boston ill repute, to work in the Leo House, which was a hostel for youth in New York City in 1995. This happened even after O'Donnell was told that there had been allegations of sexual misconduct made against Shanley. Msgr. O'Donnell, according to the News, in his infinite wisdom wrote back to the Boston hierarchy, "I would find it close to inconceivable that there would be any unwholesome activities occurring there." O'Donnell epitomizes the arrogance and utter disdain the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church had and still has for the children and/or anyone who dares question their authority. O'Donnell was Cardinal O'Connor's hatchet man.

This book is not about the sexual predators dressed in collars. They are evil men no better than animals; slaves to their desires. A pack of wild dogs will feed on the young, infirmed and aged. Sexual predators feed on the most vulnerable group in our society, the children. However, think about this: which is the greater evil? Is a perverted priest, who is a prisoner of his base desire to satisfy his lust for sex and power with children, more evil than the one who allows these collared dogs to prey unfettered upon our children? No less a personage than Cardinal Edward Egan has said that the sexual abuse of children is an abomination. However, the esteemed cardinal has never answered my question as to what word he would use to describe those who allow these abominations to continue. He couldn't, because any name he used would be an indictment of his own actions. Abominable might be a good start.

I blame the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church from the United States to Rome for the Clergy

Abuse Scandal because they are the ones who allowed the collared wolves to prey upon society's most vulnerable members, the children. Secret societies are by nature oppressive societies. Secret societies live and die by their ability to conceal their secrets. Secret societies by their nature must protect the most heinous acts of their members lest their secrets become known. So it is with the Roman Catholic Church. They live in secret, in fear of scandal and have exhibited beyond a shadow of a doubt their willingness to do whatever it takes to avoid scandal.

The darkened wasteland of secrecy is the perfect breeding ground for all sorts of nefarious and malignant growths. It is a cesspool fertilizing the dregs of humanity and creating offspring that are as rotten as the offal from which they spring. Such was the abundance of slime generated by Roman Catholic Church's cesspool that one day it spilled over its banks and ran into the light where it was laid bare to the world. Even now it has not stopped oozing, because despite the best efforts of all the pope's cardinals and all the pope's bishops and all the pope's priests, they haven't been able to contain it again!

In 2002, the Dallas Morning News published a survey that showed that two thirds of the bishops in the United States had allowed sexually abusive priests to continue working. In my opinion, they are guilty of aiding and abetting priests who have committed felonies because in most states, the rape, sodomization and molestation of children are felony offenses.

However, because of the Statute of Limitations, very few priests have ever been convicted and to my knowledge, no bishops have ever been charged. The remaining third are condemned for their silence. Upon discovering the diabolical deeds of their brethren, they should have been publicly screaming at the top of their lungs to have the offending bishops removed, but that was not to be. They should have at least clamored for the removal of the vilest offenders such as Law, but they did not. They should have marched on the Vatican calling for the immediate laicization of those bishops who were themselves guilty of sexually abusing children, but they didn't do that either. Their silence was, and still is deafening! In lockstep, the tyrannical hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States closed ranks and chose to hide and protect their brethren over the children entrusted to their care. Thus they all share the guilt and responsibility for what has become known as the Infamous Clergy Abuse Scandal.

These are not my words, but the words of Jesus Christ:

Matt 7: 15-20

[15] "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

What fruit has the brotherhood of Catholic Bishops produced? They have produced the Clergy Abuse Scandal and thus we know them by their fruits. Is there anyone out there who will not call those that rape, sodomize and molest children evil? The too sad answer to that is yes! It begins with the brotherhood of the red hat.

I was recently heartened to see Pope Benedict give the bishops and cardinals of the United States a rather large slap in the face when he announced to the world that the church in the United States is dying. He knows who is to blame. When as a sales manager, I told a salesman that his territory was dying he knew exactly what I meant; he wasn't doing his job. The cardinals and bishops of the United States know full well what the pope meant. If anyone thinks otherwise, this is a quote from Zenit July 29, 2005 with more remarks: "And if the apparent inefficacy of our preaching is not a suffering for us, it would be a sign of a lack of faith, of a lack of genuine commitment, stated the Bishop of Rome." He too recognizes the evil fruit he helped cultivate. What really surprised me is that the media chose not to explore it.

The current Roman Catholic hierarchy as a group is responsible for an enormous amount of pain and suffering. Only a people with blackened souls would or could put an innocent child in the flower of youth in such harm's way as rape and sodomization. The callous disregard exhibited by the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church for children is monumental. It has only been exceeded by their collective failure to take responsibility for their horrific commissions and omissions once being caught.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has redefined terminology to ease their guilt. They have painted the ugliness with pretty words. The rape of children has become "abuse" a much kinder gentler word. Therefore, priests don't rape children, they abuse them! The priests are not evil, they are sick; they are sinners in need of forgiveness. They don't need to be removed, they need prayers. In the meantime, the rape, sodomization and molestation continued unabated.

This book is a record of the guilt that cloaks all those who have either by their omissions, commissions or both contributed to the evil known as the Clergy Abuse Scandal.

Part One

This contains the letters that I have sent to bishops, monsignors and cardinals. I chose to try and reason with them. They are the decision makers and hold the tethers of animals that abuse and have abused children. I tried to show them through the Churches own teachings the error of their ways. These letters started in 1997 and still continue to this day. I had a brief correspondence with O'Donnell late in 1997 which is included here. After that I never received another piece of correspondence from a member of the Roman Catholic Clergy until 2005. From 1998 right through the spring of 2005, not one of my letters ever elicited a response from the recipient, which was usually of the rank of bishop or higher. That seven-year record was broken in the spring of 2005 by a Bishop Doran. Judging him by his two brief responses, I take him for an arrogant man incapable of defending himself, his actions, his fellow bishops or his church. However, even if they were only an arrogant gesture, his letters were appreciated.

Part Two

This section consists of the letters that I have written to the editors of various newspapers. A lot more were printed than I ever expected; though a number of them were edited. My brand of honesty has too much truth in it to make editors comfortable printing them. Although the respect for the members of the Catholic hierarchy has diminished greatly in the eyes of the public, in the eyes of most editors, the public is not ready to have their bishops and cardinals called criminals, felons and child abusers. However, in my mind at least, any one who gives a pedophile another opportunity to rape a child is certainly a criminal. The great thing about God is that there is no Statute of Limitations on sin. This may not have been a wise thing to mention because once the hierarchy learns of this they are sure to, in their own infallible way, rectify this situation.

Part Three

When I first considered this book, it was with the sole intention of chronicling the many letters that I had sent to various members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Their shameless behavior was a precursor to what I knew would follow: The excuse that they had no idea or did not fully understand the effect their decisions were having on people. That hogwash is thoroughly documented in hundreds of newspapers. This book serves three purposes. It is a record of the hierarchy's hypocrisy, it documents when they were told they were hypocrites and why, it makes public the Catechism, the Canons and the Scriptures that say they should be fired, and lastly and most importantly, it is to serve as an example for others so that they might use their voices and pens to express their anger. It is extremely difficult to tell any member of the hierarchy what you think when your roots lie in generations of cradle-to-grave Catholics. Most Catholics have lived in fear and awe of bishops and cardinals all their lives. What we have witnessed in the past few years is that they are nothing more than men and some of them very evil ones at that. We have all seen this scenario before. Toto has pulled back the curtain only to find a white-haired blubbering old fraud. Such is the fate of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

It did not occur to me to include my letters to survivors when the idea for this book was first conceived. It was done to balance this book. It is very easy to tear down, but quite another matter to help rebuild. In addition to bringing balance to the book, these letters give the reader an insider's view of what it was like being part of the survivor movement. It sheds knowledge on the incredible pain and suffering that survivors go through. It is a record of that pain. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, survivors are some of the finest people that I have ever communicated with and sadly, never met. Without these letters it would be too easy to dismiss me as a myopic individual who can't see beyond his anger at the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. These letters remove that option. They detail the human suffering, pain, frustration, ignorance and betrayal brought about the clergy abuse scandal. More importantly, it is a wonderful view of the way survivors came together to help each other and hold the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church responsible for allowing the evil in their midst to flourish.

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