

Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church

RECLAIMING THE
SPIRIT OF JESUS

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson

Foreword by Donald Cozzens



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Contents

Foreword 1

Introduction 7

The More Immediate Causes of Abuse 9

The Wider Focus of this Book 19

A Personal History 20

1 Healthy People in a Healthy Relationship with a Healthy God 25

A Healthy God 26

Healthy People 30

A Healthy Relationship 40

Meditation 45

2 The Two Books of God 49

The Bible 50

The World Around and Within Us 57

Meditation 61

3 Spiritual Discernment 65

Tradition 65

The Tool of Discernment 73

Meditation 75

4 An Eternal Plan, a Sharing of Life and the Reign of God 77

God's Eternal Plan 77

A Sharing of Life 78

The Reign of God 79

The Church 80

Meditation 84

5 'Like His Brothers and Sisters in Every Respect' 87

The Knowledge of Jesus 88

'Notification on the Works of Fr. Jon Sobrino S.J.' 93

Meditation 96

6 In Service of God's People 99

The Bible 99

What Has Been Handed On to Us 105

The Present Situation 116

Learning From the World Around Us 129

Meditation 132

7 The Authority of 'the Church' 137

A Peter-Figure 139

The Middle Level 144

The Faith of the Whole Church 145

Meditation 149

8 Free and Responsible 153

The Bible 153

Religious Liberty 158

Conscience 158

Assisting Conscience 164

Meditation 172

9 A Turbulence and a Whirlpool 175

The Bible 177

What Has Been Handed on to Us 193

Meditation 195

10 The Return to an Original Sexual Ethic 201

Origins of Current Catholic Teaching 201

An Ethic Based on Persons 204

The Major Questions 210

Meditation 214

11 A Dark Grace, a Severe Mercy 217

Spiritual Harm and Spiritual Healing 217

Forgiveness 220

A New Assignment to Ministry? 225

Meditation 231

12 The Prison of the Past 235

The Freedom to be Wrong 235

Truths Essential to Identity 237

One Authority Changing Another 241

Particular Issues 250

The Certainty of Faith 258

Meditation 260

13 A Government in which All Participate 265

Three Levels of Government 265

The First Level: The Peter-Figure 268
The Second Level: The Bishops 271
The Third Level: The Mind of the Whole Church 282
Meditation 287

14 A Change of Heart and Mind 289

Accountability and Professionalism 290
The Laity: Citizens or Civilians? 293
Renewing the Theological Conversation 296
Putting Our Own House in Order 297
A Church in the World 300
Conclusion 302
Meditation 304

Foreword

On the one hand ...

Catholics today really don't want very much. They understand that the reign of God is within and, at least from time to time, their understanding is confirmed by the experience of God in their very lives. These minor epiphanies may not move them to tears but, often enough, to a profound conviction that love's mercy heals our wounds and the divine presence dwells silently in our midst. In these moments they no longer believe—they *know*. They have been touched by the mystery and healing inherent in the sacraments, in the ecstasy and routine of everyday living, and even in the conflicted values and rank injustices of their troubled world. For this they give thanks, over and over again.

The Catholicism they love is the story of love and healing made flesh in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the story of a God who stoops low to embrace both beggars and bishops, both sinners and saints. Most Catholics not only attest to their faith in God but they modestly whisper that they have felt this embrace—especially in the assembly of the faithful gathered for Eucharist.

This is why Catholics remain Catholic and why countless seekers still try to finagle an invitation to the Catholic party. “We are so blessed,” as the saying goes. Catholics know, most of the time, they are so very blessed.

No, we don’t want very much. But what we Catholics do want is nevertheless important. We want honest dialogue about our wounded church. We want a more open and accountable church, with far less secrecy. We want a serious review of the systems and structures that no longer serve the pastoral needs and mission of the church. We want real collaboration between clergy and laity, a collaboration that respects the Spirit-given talents of the people of God.

Most Catholics, I suspect, know it is not easy being a bishop—perhaps especially in a post-conciliar period like our own. Holding the church in a state of “holy communion” grounded in the Holy Spirit is an awesome responsibility. Many of us can’t imagine the heavy burdens of the episcopacy. My guess is that Catholics believe their bishops and church leaders love the church and want what is best for the church.

Still, we sorely want our church leaders to be honest, courageous, inspiring, and humble. There are many bishops who reflect these virtues and characteristics, but recent experience tells us there are some who appear not to do so.

We want leaders who will treat us as thinking adults. We want leaders who understand they are meant to tell us the story of freedom in Christ Jesus. We want leaders who so live the Gospel that the very witness of their lives is the ground of their authority. Bishops will strengthen their authority, not diminish it, if they but listen. Laity are asked to listen with respect and openness to the teachings of their ordained leaders. Most try to do so. But they believe listening goes both ways. Catholics want pastors and bishops who listen to their experiences of trying to live as Christ has taught. Listen, they ask, to the stories of parents and young believers. Listen to the stories of the divorced and separated, listen to the stories of gays and lesbians, listen to the stories of pastors, and listen to the stories of women. They are stories of faith and grace. They are stories of wounds and triumphs. When a bishop somehow conveys that the laity’s stories of faith—their experiences of living the Gospel—are not very important, he gives the impression that what he says as God’s chosen leader is all that really matters.

Readers of *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* will find in the pages ahead the story of faith, fidelity, and ministry of a bishop striving to be honest. I suspect Bishop Geoffrey Robinson speaks for countless bishops and pastors today who see the need for renewal and reform. I believe he speaks for a multitude of Catholics who look for leaders who will help heal the wounds of their church.

There is more than a note of urgency in this passionate book. Geoffrey Robinson writes as a man whose very integrity is at stake. Perhaps it is. I had the feeling he *had* to write this book, come what may. And, in the words of the writer and poet, Kathleen Norris, he writes from the center. “When we write from the center ... when we write about what matters to us most, words will take us places we don’t want to go. You begin to see that you will have to say things you don’t want to say, that may even be dangerous to say, but are absolutely necessary.” So listen to this man who has listened first. You will not find any of the denials, half-truths, and lecturing we encounter in some of today’s church leaders. A major virtue of this book is its refreshing honesty. Honest truth telling—the redundancy is excusable, even necessary in today’s church—we know is dangerous. The Latin proverb, *veritas odium parit* (truth begets hatred) remains a sober warning to honest men and women who write and speak from the center.

You will find that Geoffrey Robinson’s courage undergirds the honesty in this book. I have little doubt but that he fully understood the controversy and criticism that would follow as he picked up his pen. What keeps a number of churchmen from speaking forthrightly about the need for renewal and reform today is their sense of loyalty to the pope and to the teaching office of the church that sometimes may override their own conscience. Speaking honestly to authority, we know, is challenging in any society. Another reason, more subtle perhaps, is the desire to be held in favor—to secure, perhaps even at the cost of an individual’s integrity, the approval of one’s clerical peers and superiors. On one level, of course, we all want to be held in favor. The problem lies in wanting to be held in favor at all costs—to remain silent when one should speak, to not see when one should see. It took authentic moral courage and a fearless commitment to integrity to venture onto the waters navigated in *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*.

Good stories always inspire, and Robinson's story of his fidelity to the Gospel, his church, and his conscience, does not fail here. He looks to the church's history sensitive to both the workings of the Spirit and the sad lessons to be learned—lessons of deception, infidelity, and the abuse of power. He looks to the future with a vision that is theologically well-grounded and eminently practical. In doing so, Robinson takes an honest and loving look at a church in dire need of inspiring leaders—and becomes in the process an inspiring leader himself.

Thomas Merton, arguably the most influential Catholic writer of the twentieth century, once observed, "In humility is perfect freedom." Catholics may not want much, but they do want bishops who are humble. Church leaders who are not themselves humble, unflinchingly exercise power as control. Our best theologians, however, remind us that church leaders are meant to be tenders of liberation—announcing the paradoxical freedom of God's people in faithful discipleship to Jesus the Christ and the wisdom of the Cross.

We have models of humble church leaders. Catholics love them the way they loved Pope John XXIII, Archbishop Oscar Romero, and Dom Helder Camara, to mention but a few. They love them because they model the very authority and power of Christ. They love them because they are honest, courageous, inspiring, and humble. They love them because they are real.

We find in this book another such church leader who has the humility to insist on his "right to be wrong," who listens to the cry of the people, and who calls for the reform of church structures and systems that fail to serve the pastoral needs and mission of the church.

On the other hand ...

Catholics today are weary and discouraged. They are weary of the stark and deepening divide separating so-called Vatican II Catholics from Vatican I Catholics. They are weary of the meanness and self-righteousness that marks much of their exchanges. They are discouraged by those church leaders and others who want to "reform the reforms" of the Second Vatican Council. They are tired of those churchmen who refuse to take laity seriously, especially the extraordinary gifts of Catholic women.

Catholics are weary and discouraged, but they are also angry. They are angry with those members of the clergy who have used their pasto-

ral roles and status to sexually exploit children, teenagers, and vulnerable adults. They are angry with those bishops and their assistants who have placed the welfare of the institutional church ahead of the welfare of the church as the communion of God's people—and in doing so have denied, minimized, deflected, and outright lied. Most of all, they are angry to the point of outrage that the sexual abuse of their children has too often been unwittingly abetted by administrative decisions designed to avoid scandal and to protect the dignity and authority of the ordained. And in recent years some have grown cynical as report after report accuses too many pastors of embezzlement, fraud, and theft of their hard-earned contributions.

For Catholics who are weary and discouraged, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* is a tall glass of fresh water. For Catholics who are disillusioned or cynical, this book is an oasis of hope. For angry, outraged Catholics, its balanced critique is a hospice for ailing church systems and structures in need of reform.

Like a good pastor, Geoffrey Robinson has listened to the faithful. Like a good clinician, after a succinct yet helpful review of the patient's history, he has diagnosed what it is that ails the church. And like a good doctor of souls and a wise, mature leader, he has offered clergy and laity a prescription for structural reform that will lead to a healthier, holier church.

He deserves our ear.

Donald Cozzens
John Carroll University

Introduction

Sexual abuse of minors by a significant number of priests and religious, together with the attempts by many church authorities to conceal the abuse, constitute one of the ugliest stories ever to emerge from the Catholic Church. It is hard to imagine a more total contradiction of everything Jesus Christ stood for, and it would be difficult to overestimate the pervasive and lasting harm it has done to the Church.

This book is not directly about that abuse, but about the better church these revelations absolutely demand. In order to clear the way to speak about this better church, however, I believe that I must devote this introduction to the specific question of abuse.

In 1994 I was appointed by the Australian bishops to a position of leadership in responding to revelations of abuse, and for the following nine years I was at the heart of this storm within my country. I felt sick to the stomach at the stories that victims told me, I spent many sleep-

less nights and I lived at a constantly high level of stress. Those years left an indelible mark on me, for they led me to a sense of profound disillusionment with many things within my church, typified by the manner in which, I was convinced, a number of people, at every level, were seeking to 'manage' the problem and make it 'go away', rather than truly confront and eradicate it.

Through all of this I came to the unshakeable conviction that within the Catholic Church there absolutely must be profound and enduring change. In particular, there must be change on the two subjects of *power* and *sex*.

That we should look at sex is obvious, but there are two reasons why it is equally essential that we look at all aspects of power. The first is that all sexual abuse is first and foremost an abuse of power in a sexual form. The second is that within the Catholic Church there is a constant insistence that on all important matters Catholic people must look to the pope for guidance and direction. When a major matter arises, therefore, and there is a notable and extraordinary absence of guidance or direction from the pope - as was certainly the case in relation to the sexual abuse of minors - it is inevitable that many will react according to older values rather than with a new mind to meet a new problem. Those older values have for a thousand years included secrecy, the covering over of problems and the protection of the good name of the church.

In fact and in practice, there was a wide variety of responses to abuse within each nation, ranging all the way from the very good to the very bad. This very variety, however, was a symptom of the lack of leadership from the centre in a highly centralised church.

I am convinced that if the pope had spoken clearly at the beginning of the revelations, inviting victims to come forward so that the whole truth, however terrible, might be known and confronted, and firmly directing that all members of the church should respond with openness, humility, honesty and compassion, consistently putting victims before the good name of the church, the entire response of the church would have been far better.¹ With power go responsibilities. The pope has many times claimed the power, and must accept the corresponding responsibilities. Within the present structures of the Catholic Church, it is the pope alone who has the power to make the changes that are necessary.

Even now I cannot see evidence that a true confrontation of the problem is occurring. The staff of those clinical facilities specially set up for the treatment of priests and religious who have offended against minors have not been asked by Roman authorities for their findings on the causes of abuse. The bishops of the world have not been asked to coordinate research and study within their own territories. Until basic steps such as these are taken, I find it impossible to believe that church authorities are determined to confront rather than simply manage the problem.

THE MORE IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF ABUSE

Under this heading I want to indicate areas where immediate study is needed and where the whole church should be involved.

Celibacy is not the sole cause of sexual abuse by priests and religious. It would actually be good if it were, for then, by the simple expedient of abolishing celibacy, one could abolish all abuse. But even if celibacy were abolished tomorrow, there is every reason to believe that the problem would not disappear. As I hope to show a little later, celibacy is a factor in a number of cases of abuse, but it is far from being the sole cause of all abuse.

The presence among the ranks of priests and religious of a number of persons with homosexual inclinations is also not the sole cause, or even a significant cause. Homosexual adults are attracted to other homosexual adults, and an attraction to minors, male or female, is a quite different phenomenon. A homosexual adult is not more likely to offend against minors than is a heterosexual adult. Screening out all homosexuals from the priesthood and religious life will not make the problem of child abuse disappear.

Offenders are not monsters who can be recognised as monsters at first glance. On the contrary, in order to offend, they need to be able to charm potential victims and win their confidence. Far from looking like monsters, they usually look like a very kind relative or friend, and they can be model priests or religious in all other aspects of their lives.

This is one of the difficulties in discovering them.

In short, there is no simple, one-cause explanation of child abuse by priests or religious. If we try to seize on any one single cause or give one simple explanation, we are avoiding the depth and complexity of the problem and we will fail to overcome it.

The best statement I have encountered concerning the causes of abuse, the one with the greatest promise of showing us the way forward, is that child abuse, by priests, religious or, for that matter, anyone else in the community, is most likely to occur when three factors come together: an unhealthy psychological state, unhealthy ideas concerning power and sex, and an unhealthy environment or community in which a person lives.²

Psychologists will admit that there is much about the phenomenon of sexual abuse that is still not understood. Despite this, there are many psychological studies on the subject. If I have a reservation concerning them, it is that they concentrate on the psychological state of the individual offender and look at unhealthy ideas and environment only in terms of contributing factors to this individual's psychological state. I suggest that each of the three factors in the lives of all priests and religious – psychological state, ideas and environment – deserves a complete study on its own, followed by the way in which they can interact on each other to produce the murky world out of which abuse arises.

An Unhealthy Psychological State

In this field I claim no special expertise, so I refer readers to studies that have been published,³ and add only a few points.

There are two types of paedophile: the fixated and the regressive paedophile. The fixated paedophile is the person whose sole or at least overwhelming sexual attraction is towards minors,⁴ and who is consequently not attracted towards adults of either sex. Just as there are no known means by which a homosexual can be turned into a heterosexual, so there are no known means by which a fixated attraction to minors can be turned into a sexual attraction towards adults.

The regressive paedophile is more common and most priest and religious offenders fit into this category. Such a person is basically ei-

ther heterosexual or homosexual, but for a variety of reasons is tempted to offend with minors.

One of the problems in overcoming sexual abuse of minors is that there is no one single psychological profile of regressive paedophiles. As a consequence, there are no practical tests that can be applied to the general population that will tell us which persons will later offend in this field and which will not, so it is not possible to screen out all future offenders in advance.

There are what one writer has called 'red flags' of abuse⁵, that is, signs that should alert others to the possibility of abuse, e.g. childish interests and behaviour, lack of relationships with one's own peers or a history of being abused oneself. It must be added, however, that the presence of such a red flag does not of itself mean that the person is an abuser, while the absence of all such signs is not proof that a person will not abuse others.

The regressive paedophile begins with free choice but eventually lives somewhere on the border between free choice and compulsion. In almost every case there is evidence of careful selection and 'grooming' of a victim, of planning of the circumstances, and of care taken to ensure that the victim does not speak to others of what has happened, so it is impossible to dismiss paedophile activity as the result of a 'sickness' for which the offender is not responsible. In most cases, there is clear evidence that offenders knew what they were doing and were responsible for their actions. On the other hand, there is also much evidence that even those offenders who most sincerely do not want to offend again can feel an urge to do so that is so powerful that, without outside help, they are unlikely to resist it. As in so many other fields, the truly important thing is never to commit the first crime, for there appears to be far more choice in that first offence than there is once the urge to repeat has become powerful.

Other than this, three general conclusions seem to be in order.

- i) A wide variety of psychological problems within the person can be contributing factors when placed together with false ideas and an unhealthy environment.
- ii) There are dangers if professional people, including priests and religious, are not equipped to deal with the high emotional demands of their calling.
- iii) Professional people must have both the external and

internal resources to manage responsibly the authority with which they have been invested. To give great authority to a person who is incapable of handling it in a responsible manner is to invite problems.

Unhealthy Ideas Concerning Power and Sexuality

POWER

All sexual abuse is first and foremost an abuse of power. It is an abuse of power in a sexual form. Unhealthy ideas concerning power and its exercise are always relevant to the question of abuse.

Spiritual power is arguably the most dangerous power of all. In the wrong hands it gives the power to make judgements even about the eternal fate of another person. It needs a sign on it at all times saying, 'Handle with extreme care'. The greater the power a person exercises, the more need there is for checks and balances before it is used and accountability after it is used.

If the governing image of how to act as a priest or religious is tied to the ideas of lordship and control, then, no matter how benevolently ministry is carried out, an unhealthy domination and subservience will be present. The worst case is that of the 'messiah complex', where a person believes that God is calling him or her to be, as it were, a messiah, a chosen one who is called to some special mission and is, therefore, above the rules that apply to ordinary mortals, including the moral rules. In such cases, if sexual abuse does not occur, some other form of abusive behaviour will.

There is an issue here that applies mainly to priests and only to a lesser extent to religious. In my years of training to become a priest, there was a phrase from the Letter to the Hebrews that was much quoted:

'Every high priest chosen from among human beings is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.' (5:1)

The Greek word (*lambano*) here translated as 'chosen' means simply 'taken', but the Latin text that was always quoted said *assumptus*, which means 'taken up'. The implication was that the priest was 'taken up'

from among human beings to some higher level. This is not what the Letter to the Hebrews meant, for the next words are,

‘He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.’ (5:2-3)

Despite this, the idea of being ‘taken up’ was part of the culture and it brought some reflection of the ‘messiah complex’ into that culture. It was not a healthy idea and it must now be confronted.

This in turn led to a ‘mystique’ of the priesthood, a permanent state of being ‘taken up’. And this meant that a priest could not simply be sacked for an offence, as another worker might be. It was this ‘mystique’ that was in large part responsible for the practice of transferring offending priests to new appointments in a way that, say, a lay teacher in a Catholic school would not have been treated.

Closely allied to this can be an inability to accept failure and vulnerability. Priests and religious can be made to feel that, because they have been ‘taken up’, they must be perfect. When they realise that they cannot achieve this, they can feel that they must at least appear to be perfect. Perfectionism is dangerous in most fields, and it is particularly dangerous in a field as vast as the spiritual and the moral, where perfection is simply not possible for a human being. Feeling that one must appear to be perfect even when one knows that one is not, being unable to admit to failure and weakness, is an unhealthy attitude. Inherent in it is the covering up of faults that do occur. There must be room for a painful struggle towards maturity, with many mistakes along the way.

In priests and religious this attitude can be strengthened by the expectations of others. They can feel that religious superiors, people in their parish, the media and the community at large demand that they be perfect and will strongly criticise any lack of perfection. They can be made to feel that what would be described as an understandable failure in another person would be called ‘sickening hypocrisy’ in them. These expectations can cause them to show externally a level of perfection that they know they do not possess. In both priests and religious on the one hand, and in the community on the other hand, there needs to be change in the expectations that are present. Priests and religious are ordinary human beings, and if either they or the community forget this, one kind of problem or another will be caused.

SEXUALITY

In a later chapter I shall detail a number of unhealthy ideas concerning sex and sexuality in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Here I add only a few points that apply specifically to priests and religious.

Eros or desire is the source of passion, imagination and dreaming. It is associated with sensitivity, touch and vulnerability, and is at the heart of compassion. It is an important means by which a person participates in both social and religious life. For priests and religious, desire has often been denied or treated with suspicion. And yet the failure to cultivate desire can take away the natural warmth and spontaneity of love and leave goodwill a vague term not directed at anything in particular. Where *eros* is not given sufficient attention, chastity can become mere control and lovelessness. Given strong reasons, a young person might be prepared to contemplate a life without genital sex, but no young persons in their right mind should be prepared to give one second's thought to the idea of a life without an abundance of *eros* and love.

If *eros* is denied, it is inevitable that in male candidates for priesthood and religious life there will also be a denial of the feminine which nurtures and fashions its energy. If the masculine is not balanced by the feminine, there can be a growing danger of incapacity for interior reflection, an inability to relate with intimacy, a dependence on role and work for self-identification, and the loss of a humanising tenderness. The need for intimacy is particularly important, for it cannot be extinguished and, if unfulfilled, will seek expression in covert and distorted ways.

At the beginning of Chapter One I shall make the statement that in the past the spiritual life was often presented in the negative terms of self-denial, self-abasement and rejection of the 'world'. This negativity certainly extended to the management of one's sexuality and it contributed to the unhealthy world I am seeking to describe.

If some of the ideas of the church concerning sexuality have been unhealthy, I also consider the entire attitude that 'anything goes' to be unhealthy. When put together with other factors, it, too, can lead to one or other form of sexual abuse. Priests and religious who, in the name of breaking away from false ideas of the past, have dallied with this mentality have entered very dangerous territory.

An Unhealthy Environment or Community

Traditional seminaries (for priests) and novitiates (for religious) can be unhealthy places in which to grow to maturity, especially when candidates are taken in as young as eleven or twelve years of age. There are many factors that do not contribute to healthy growth: the one-sex environment, the absence of parents and other nurturing figures, the other sex as a 'threat' to a vocation rather than as a positive and essential influence for adolescents, the absence of any positive preparation for a celibate lifestyle. At a time when adolescents and young adults need to develop their own identity, this is subsumed into a collective vision and expectation. The impersonal nature of the institution can cause a sense of emotional isolation, and this can be accentuated by an emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual at the expense of human development. Ordinary needs for intimacy can seek their satisfaction covertly. While the situation varies greatly from one seminary or novitiate to the next, one must seriously question whether institutions are the place to form priests and religious.

Religious communities can also be unhealthy places in which to live. Most members are trying to live by Christian principles, but this can merely put a coat of paint over the lack of intimacy and the failure to meet profound needs that can be present. It cannot make up for emotional inadequacy and a covering over of conflicts rather than facing and resolving them. A single 'difficult' individual can disrupt a whole community. In a number of communities one must query how much effective communication takes place and at what level. Today it is likely that the members of the community go out to different jobs each day and there is often little opportunity for an effective 'debriefing' on the stresses that are met in these different jobs.

Priests in parishes, on the other hand, more and more live on their own. Today, with fewer and older priests and increasing demands, they feel stressed and overworked. Profound human needs are not being met. The revelations of sexual abuse have caused morale to plummet and have diminished the sense of satisfaction in the work they are doing.

There are few checks and balances on the exercise of power by priests and religious and there is quite inadequate accountability. I shall return to this in a later chapter.

The Sum: A Climate of Abuse

The three factors mentioned can come together to form a *climate*, a murky world in which abuse is more likely to occur. The church must look at the different ways in which this *climate* can be created within its institutions.

There must be a three-pronged attack, a study of the psychological state of priests and religious, a study of their attitudes towards power and sex, and a study of the environment or communities in which they live. In each study we must look at any and all elements that are unhealthy and that could in any way contribute towards creating the climate of abuse. Rather than wait for convincing proof that a particular element has actually caused abuse, we must change all elements that are seen to be unhealthy and could, therefore, contribute. There is no point in making changes in one of the three areas while leaving the other two untouched.

The end result of sexual abuse may occur in only some cases, but unhealthy elements have negative effects on all priests and need to be changed for that reason alone.

Celibacy

We must look well beyond celibacy if we are to find and eradicate the causes of abuse. Nevertheless, celibacy is all pervasive in the life of a priest or religious and needs to be looked at in a special way.

Among the many and complex causes of abuse, there are three categories in which celibacy appears to have made a direct contribution.

While the abuse of children has been the object of almost all attention, there has also been abuse of adults, especially women, and this, too, has caused great harm to the victims. It has not received attention because the police have normally responded that it appeared to be a consenting relationship and so no crime had been committed. In almost all cases, however, there has been the sexualising of a pastoral relationship, and in many cases an abuse of spiritual power to obtain sexual favours. It is hard not to see celibacy as contributing to these cases of abuse of adult women.

There have been cases where persons have been taken into a seminary or novitiate at too young an age and, because of the environment, their psychosexual development has not progressed beyond the age of about fifteen years, so that it is minors towards whom they are attracted. This is the explanation of only some cases of abuse, but they do exist.

In the third category, it is known that in an environment such as a prison, some heterosexual persons can become involved in homosexual sex, not by preference, but because it is all that is available. It would seem that there have been some priests and religious who abused minors, not by preference, but because minors were available, either physically or psychologically. Physically, they have been available in places such as orphanages or schools. Psychologically, it is known that some offenders against minors can claim that celibacy applies only to relations with adult women, so they claim in all seriousness that they have not broken their vow of celibacy. For some priests and religious, this may be the sense in which adult women are psychologically 'not available' but minors are. Once again, this applies only to some cases and it would be foolish to think that with these three categories we had now explained all abuse.

In most cases it is not celibacy itself that is the problem, but obligatory celibacy. There have been saints who were so madly in love with both God and people that the idea of marriage did not even occur to them, for there was so much to do in loving people and caring for them that there would have been no time for marriage. A celibacy freely chosen out of a burning love for people is unlikely to lead to abuse, for it is not unhealthy.

The problem occurs when young persons are attracted to priesthood or religious life but find that it comes wrapped in a package that contains many elements. Because priesthood or religious life can exert such a powerful call, some of the other elements of the package, e.g. celibacy, do not receive the attention they should. The system of removing the candidates from the world and from 'temptation' does not assist them in this. Some time after ordination or profession, they can find that priesthood or religious life still looks attractive, but celibacy does not. Sadly, many priests and religious fall into this category. If the pope were to ask for a disclosure 'before God alone' on this point from all priests and religious, in secret and without betraying their

identity, there might be both surprise and alarm at just how large is the number of those who are genuinely dedicated to the priesthood or religious life but are living it in an unwanted, unassimilated and, therefore, unhealthy celibate state. Many of those who have left the priesthood or religious life in the last forty years have been in this category, but so are many of those who remain.

All of this points to the major problem with obligatory celibacy, namely, that it is the attempt to make a free gift of God obligatory, and one must seriously question whether this is possible.

The law of celibacy assumes that everyone who is called by God to priesthood is also called by God to celibacy and given the divine assistance necessary to lead a celibate life. But is this a mere assertion or a proven fact? Is it a case of human beings making a human law and then demanding that God follow that law by giving special divine assistance to those bound by the law? If church authorities really wish to insist on obligatory celibacy as a requirement for priesthood, should they do far more than simply assume a call to celibacy in those interested in the priesthood? Should they, for example, continue to take students into the seminary before they are adults and have an adult understanding of what celibacy means? May they continue to assert that those thousands of priests who have left the priesthood in recent decades in order to marry were all called by God to celibacy and given every divine help they needed, but deliberately refused this assistance?

Celibacy can contribute to the unhealthy psychological state (e.g. depression), the unhealthy ideas (e.g. misogyny or homophobia) and the unhealthy environment (e.g. an unwanted and unassimilated celibacy) out of which abuse arises. If it is far from being the sole cause of abuse, it cannot be said that it makes no contribution. If the church is serious about overcoming abuse, then the contribution of celibacy must be most carefully considered.

There is one other way in which celibacy has contributed to abuse. A significant reason why the response of many church authorities has been poor is that many bishops and religious superiors, not being parents themselves, have not appreciated just how fiercely, and even ferociously, parents will act to defend their children from harm. If they had been parents, there would surely have been a more decisive response.

At least in the Western world, celibacy has come to be seen as the acid test of whether the church is truly serious about overcoming abuse. Much that is said can be simplistic and involve misconceptions, but this does not change the fact that, unless and until the church puts celibacy on the table for serious discussion, people will simply not believe it is serious about abuse. To start with the statement that the requirement of obligatory celibacy cannot and will not be changed or even examined, as both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have done, is to lose credibility before the discussion even begins. Some may speak all they wish of the benefits of this celibacy for the church, but others will not stop asking, 'How many abused children is celibacy worth?'

THE WIDER FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

It is not my intention to delve further into the matters I have just raised, for they must be the subject of a broader study in which the expertise of many different people in different fields is brought together.

Instead of this, the present book will look at a wider picture, including many elements that may not at first sight appear directly connected with abuse. There are two reasons for this wider study. The first is that we must look at the very *foundations* of attitudes towards both power and sex in the church, for without changes in these foundations, any action taken would not touch the underlying problems. The second reason is that the fact of abuse has revealed a double problem, the abuse itself and the response of church authorities to that abuse, and the second problem has caused as much scandal as the first. It is only by studying the wider church that we can see some of the more fundamental issues involved in both of these questions. The rest of this book will, therefore, be about the wider church rather than directly about abuse.

It will never be possible to 'manage' the revelations, so that they go away and are not mentioned again. I have a serious fear that many church leaders are now feeling that the worst of the problem is behind them, that it has been successfully 'managed', and hence that they do not need to look at deeper issues. This attitude grossly under-estimates the negative effects the scandal has had and involves wishful thinking

for the future. Yes, inroads have been made into the backlog of cases that had built up over several decades and some offenders have been deterred, if not by any moral reasons, then by the sheer terror of an offence being disclosed. But if we remain silent and hope the problem will go away, abuse will continue to occur. One day, sooner or later, the whole problem must be confronted. Granted the present structures of the church, what we must cry out for is a pope who will say publicly, 'Yes, I am genuinely serious about confronting both abuse and the response to abuse, and I will ruthlessly change whatever needs to be changed in order to overcome both of these problems. Please help me to identify all contributing causes.'

A PERSONAL HISTORY

Before beginning the wider study, I must confess that I am not a purely objective student of this matter.

The years I spent working in the field of sexual abuse had such a profound effect on me because I had myself been sexually abused when I was young. The offender was not a priest or religious, nor anyone within the Catholic Church, nor was he a relative. I belonged to that five percent of cases where the offender was a stranger. Neither in my age at the time it happened nor in the duration of the abuse was it as serious as much of the abuse I have encountered in others, and yet, if the man had been caught in any one of his acts against me, he would have been sent to prison. It was never a repressed memory, but for most of my life it was, as it were, placed in the attic of my mind, that is, I always knew it was there, but I never took it down to look at it.

When, in 1994, I was appointed to an official position in the church's response to abuse, I passed through three stages. In the first stage I tried to act as a good human being, a good Christian, a good priest. I soon realised that this was not enough, so I quickly moved to a second stage of listening to as many victims as I could in order to learn from them. Somewhere in this process I moved to the third stage where what they were feeling and saying stirred strong echoes within my own mind and heart. It was only then, some two years after I had been appointed, and some half a century after it had happened, that I finally took my own history down out of the attic, looked at it

again and, for the first time in my life, named it as sexual abuse. With the help of counsellors, I became conscious of some of the effects it had had on me.

Flowing from all of this, my problems with the church's response to the revelations of sexual abuse ran deep and reached up to the highest levels of the church, for I was one of many people crying out for strong and compassionate leadership on this matter and trying to do my best without the support of that leadership. I felt that here was the perfect opportunity for the papacy to fulfill its most basic role of being the rock that holds the church together, but this did not happen, and the church fractured. I found it impossible to accept that I must give 'submission of mind and will' to most words written by a pope, but a failure to give leadership in a crisis seemed to count for little. I felt that the demand was being made that I give my submission to the silence as well as to the words, and I could not do this.

When, in front of several journalists at a public meeting, I answered a victim's question by saying that I was not happy with the level of support we were receiving from 'Rome', I received an official letter (7 August 1996) expressing 'the ongoing concern of the Congregation for Bishops that you have in recent months expressed views that are seriously critical of the magisterial teaching and discipline of the Church.' I was told that 'in a recent audience, the Holy Father has been fully apprised of your public position on these issues and He has shown 'serious preoccupation in your regard.' Two months later (16 October 1996) I received a further letter informing me that 'The relevant documentation will be forwarded, for its information and review, to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', implying that I was suspected of some form of heresy.

I admit that I felt personally hurt by this criticism of the only truthful reply I could have given to a room full of victims, but it also led me to the conclusion that an authority that had to be defended in a manner as heavy as this must have had serious doubts about its own response to abuse.

There has never been a perfect church and there never will be. I must always work within an imperfect church, and must never forget that I am myself an imperfect member of that imperfect church, contributing my problems and failures as well as my assistance. Sometimes, however, circumstances can arise where there is only a fine line

between accepting that I must work within an imperfect church and becoming complicit in the harm that those imperfections are causing to people.

I eventually came to the point where I felt that, with the thoughts that were running through my head, I could not continue to be a bishop of a church about which I had such profound reservations. I resigned my office as Auxiliary Bishop in Sydney and began to write this book about the very foundations of power and sex within the church.

I believe that in this book I describe a better church, a church that is not contrary to the mind of Jesus Christ. How others will react to the book is up to them, but the case for reform must be most seriously considered, for we must confront all factors that have in any way contributed either to abuse or to the inadequate response to abuse.

THANKS

I acknowledge the assistance of a number of people who have read all or part of a draft of this book and offered valuable comments that saved me from errors and gave greater depth to the book. It says much about the need for change that, in the atmosphere that prevails within the church, I would be creating difficulties for them if I gave their names. They know who I mean, and to each one of them I offer my sincere thanks for their comments and support.

FOOTNOTES

¹ The document that is always referred to as the response of the pope to abuse is a letter to the bishops of the USA of 11 June 1993. This letter, however, highlights the problems, for it is addressed to the bishops, not to victims; it makes no call to the church like the one I have just outlined; it spends almost a third of its length decrying 'sensationalism', i.e. blaming the media; and the only solution it offers is that of prayer. Needless to say, I am in favour of prayer, but I would hate to limit my response to victims to saying, 'I will pray for you.'

² See David Ranson, of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, in his article 'The Climate of Sexual Abuse', *The Furrow*, 53 (July/August 2002), pp.387-397. In much of what follows I am indebted to this article.

³ For an excellent summary of the point psychology has reached and for nineteen pages of bibliography on the subject, see *Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Literature*, The John Jay College Research Team, Karen J Terry, principal investigator and Jennifer Tallon, primary researcher. See also *The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States*, a Research Study conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Both documents may be found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at <http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/webstudy.shtml>.

⁴ In much of the literature there is a distinction between paedophiles, who are attracted to children under the age of twelve, and ephebophiles, who are attracted to minors over the age of twelve.

⁵ Stephen J. Rossetti, *A Tragic Grace, The Catholic Church and Child Sexual Abuse*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1996, Chapter Four, *Red Flags for Child Sexual Abuse*, pp.64-79.