

Why We Weep: On the Desperate Need for Church Reform

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I was driving over the three-mile Pensacola Bay Bridge to do my weekly grocery shopping at Publix in Gulf Breeze when National Public Radio broke the story of the Pope's possible involvement in concealing child abuse crimes by a priest in Germany when the Pope was Archbishop Joseph Ratzinger of Munich. I moaned, and then the tears flowed. Of late, there have been many more tears. Each day brings more news about cover-ups, not only in Germany, Ireland, Italy, and other European countries, but, also, in my home town, Milwaukee, and in, of course, Boston.

While the Vatican has denied that the Pope knew about any cover-ups, there has yet to be a *mea culpa* pronounced from every Catholic pulpit in dioceses where bishops wittingly or unwittingly concealed the crimes committed by priests to whom the faithful entrusted their children; yet to be a global expression of sorrow and remorse; yet to be a global day of penitence in which all the guilty kneel and ask not only God's forgiveness, but the forgiveness of all the victims of child abuse and their families; yet to be an act of contrition offered by the guilty to their brother priests, to those good, worthy men who have continued to celebrate Mass, hear confessions, counsel the broken-hearted, worn the white collar in public, despite the suspicions of society; yet to be lamentations over the way in which the guilty have caused sorrow, humiliation and loss of faith; yet to be an excision of the boil that must erupt so that there can be, for once and for all, radical reform in the Church.

As I think about this essay, however, all I hear are justifications for the concealment of the crimes, for the passing on, from parish to parish, from child to child, those who pretended to represent Jesus while they sullied His lambs. I also hear that celibacy has nothing to do with the problem of pedophilia, and that those who want the ordination of women are out of step with Rome. The latter, especially, must be censored, punished and even excommunicated.

Certainly, most celibate priests are courageous and disciplined. While celibacy may be a challenge for them, its implementation would never prompt them to violate a child. But there are other priests for whom the stifling of the powerful and universal sexual urge remains impossible and leads them to disastrous consequences, i.e., the life-long tribulations of their victims and the soiling of the very body and blood of the Church. In a warped way, the molester-priest is also a victim, victim of a church that elevates its priests above the rest of us, so high, that their sins must be concealed, so that, we, the faithful, may not be scandalized. How ironic. In attempts to deny the natural sexual drive, the molester-priest developed unnatural ones.

What if the hierarchy really believed that our Creator loved his creation, that He was completely satisfied with the sexual parts and natures of men and women; that He wonders why his church, which once took married priests for granted, would now deny those who desire it, the gift of conjugal love? What if the hierarchy really believed that Jesus loved women as much as He loved men; that he really revered the mother's womb from which his body emerged; that He had really enjoyed the company of women; that He really spoke first to Mary of Magdala, asking her to announce his resurrection; that He died for men and women alike; that men and women are

equal in dignity and worth? What felicitous, enlightened ecclesiastical decisions would flow if the hierarchy answered in the affirmative to each question? The question must be asked: Would women have allowed the cover-up and continuation of crimes against children? I'm reminded of the lines from an African-American spiritual that we sing at our church: "Holy Spirit you're welcome in this place," and then, "blow winds from heaven, in this place."