

What Church learned from abuse scandal can help others

By JOSEPH YOUNG
United States Conference of the Catholic Bishop

WASHINGTON D.C. - The clergy sexual abuse scandal that rocked the U.S. Catholic Church five years ago was a painful period but a teachable moment. Healing and preventive measures have gained momentum since the U.S. bishops adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in June of 2002, and formed an independent National Review Board.

Subsequently across the nation, in accordance with the Charter, diocesan review boards have been formed, safe environment programs put into place, annual audits on abuse implemented and procedures for more careful screening of priesthood candidates adopted at seminaries.

The Catholic Church has learned much, but what lessons can others learn from the church's experience of multiple acts of sexual abuse committed by some of its clergy?

There is also much that others can learn, said Bishop Gregory Aymond, chair of the USCCB's Committee for the Protection of Children and Young

People and bishop of the Diocese of Austin, Texas. Bishop Aymond noted that two other Christian denominations and one school system already have consulted with his committee about how to deal with sexual abuse by those in authority.

Ann Riggs, Ph.D., a member of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) and associate general secretary for Faith and Order for the Washington-based National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said that from the Catholic Church's experience with clergy sexual abuse, other churches have learned that ignorance is no excuse.

"You have to educate yourself so you are not naïve," she said. Another lesson learned, Riggs said, is that supervisors cannot give candidates for positions in church leadership the benefit of the doubt and dismiss questions about their background "because it is so unlikely to be true."

"You can't just assume their mental health and spiritual honor," she said. Finally, Riggs said, churches have learned from the Catholic experience that abuse compromises an institution's capacity to carry out its mission. Some funding for ministries is

diverted to legal fees and settlements that often include provisions for victim/survivor counseling. Also, in a church wracked by scandal, those in the pew, if they remain in the pew, are less likely to contribute monetarily.

But it is not only institutions that can learn from the Catholic Church's experience, Bishop Aymond said.

"At every level of society, consciousness has been raised about sexual abuse. More and more, even families sitting around the table are discussing it openly," he said.

One topic is the importance of being vigilant, which Bishop Aymond said is perhaps the primary lesson others can learn.

"You need to be very, very vigilant about picking up any signals that sexual abuse may be occurring," he said.

Robert Bennett, Washington attorney and charter member of the National Review Board, said, "people need to realize that child abuse occurs in all sorts of places; you can't be self-righteous and say, 'It can't happen here.'"

Closely related to vigilance is prevention. One preventive measure to be learned, Bennett said, "is not to allow dysfunctional men into the clergy."

Book reviews

The Eremitic Life – Encountering God in Silence by Father Cornelius Wencel, EC
In Praise of Hiddenness – the Spirituality of the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona by A Camaldolese Hermit

Camaldolese Spirituality – Essential Sources by Peter-Damian Belisle
Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine and Rule of Blessed Paul Guistiniani by Dom Jean Leclercq

By BISHOP DAVID RICKEN

The Camaldolese monastic tradition has its roots in an enthusiasm for contemplative life that burst upon the Church in the 11th and 12th centuries and saw the rise of Carthusian, Cistercian and the Camaldolese monastic orders and others that have been lost to history.

In *Praise of Hiddenness – The Spirituality of the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona* brings to light this time period. It saw hermits, solitaries and anchoresses dotting the landscape of Italy, France, England, Scandinavia and the Low countries, and monastic centers drawing the best and brightest of the youth of Europe into the cloister.

The book speaks of the paradox of the life of solitude, so hidden and yet so fruitful for the life of the Church and the whole human community, the life of intimacy with God which is its meaning and its heart, and the expectation of *Eternal Life*.

Hermits are not monks, in the usual sense: They do not

live in community, but in total solitude; there is no cloister to speak of, but only the cells of the individual hermits. The heart of the cell is the solitary altar where the hermit celebrates Mass and has communion with his maker.

In *The Eremitic Life – Encountering God in Silence and Solitude*, we find a book that is the most complete treatment of the life of a hermit (eremitic meaning a life of solitude) written in English.

The book is not only a historical study of the eremitic life in the Church, but is a deep exploration into the reasons for the life and what attracts a person to this kind of solitude.

This is a book addressed to the contemporary and modern man, with his multitude of distractions and occupations, for whom personal salvation and lure of eternal life are not on his list or priorities. The language is as modern as today's newspaper and cogent as the most gripping novel, as it lays down the broad horizons of the life of solitude and implications of a life of intimacy with God.

Camaldolese Extraordinary is a re-edition of a book by Dom Jean Leclercq entitled *Alone with God*, with a preface by Thomas Merton. The original edition has been considerably expanded with new information about Blessed Paul Guistiniani, a little-known contemplative saint.

This book is a rich description of a way of life that Pope John Paul II called one of the "treasures of the Church" and a thorough discussion of the doctrine on this way of life.

The book should make Blessed Paul better known and it makes a large contribution to understanding of the eremitic way of life.

One of the directives of the Second Vatican Council to religious orders was a "return to the sources," a return to the original intent and charism of their founder, and a careful study of the original documents upon which the order or congregation was based. *Camaldolese Spirituality – Essential Sources*, Peter-Damian Belisle does this for the Camaldolese Order, bringing the roots of the order to light.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What about distractions inside of Mass?

Dear Editor:

Father Lukefahr's "How can we overcome difficulties in prayer," in the June 6 edition of *The Wyoming Catholic Register* was an excellent piece.

The author's methods of solving distractions dealt primarily with disturbances caused by turmoil in one's life. Mention was not made regarding distractions from outside sources. Clergymen are probably trained to overlook distractions that might be serious obstacles to we who do not have the ability to turn off things that impose on our prayer time.

Examples come to mind. Father Lukefahr suggests coming to Mass five or 10 minutes prior to the start of the service. An excellent idea, unless when you arrive at church, the rosary being recited aloud. Any personal communication with God

requires ears and mental processes and it is difficult to attempt somehow the quiet communication while also avoiding the spoken words of the rosary. For we seniors this "think-about-this" but "don't-be-disturbed-by-that" is not reasonable.

Priests properly preach of patience with our fellow man.

Does that mean noise created during Mass should be accepted by the rest of the parishioners? Parents who continue to allow overactive children to disturb others are being very unfair. The "bawl room" is available, but does not receive as many parents with noisy children as it should.

Is it unreasonable to come to church expecting an hour or an hour and 15 minutes of spiritual enlightenment minus selfish acts by others? The rosary is a mainstay for most Catholics, includ-

ing this writer. A rosary time that creates conflict puts those opposed against those favoring the public recitation.

Children are the future and the lifeblood of church. They learn from adults, especially parents. Disturbances resulting in reprimands involves many who are within visual or audio range. Parents struggling with a cranky child are to be sympathized. Should these same parents also consider the elderly attending Mass?

Father Lukefahr has my praise for writing an article about what troubles many. I admire those who are able to pray amongst various types of distractions. For those of us who cannot, I offer a request to conduct ourselves in a manner respectful of God and people seeking serenity.

— Frank R. Baner Powell

Enjoy one of these books from the Camaldolese Hermits:



Camaldolese Spirituality: Essential Sources
by Peter-Damian Belisle, 267 pages
\$17



The Eremitic Life: Encountering God in Silence and Solitude
by Father Cornelius Wencel, Er. Cam, 225 pages
\$14



In Praise of Hiddenness: The Spirituality of the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona
by a Camaldolese Hermit, 108 pages
\$9



Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine and Rule of Bl. Paul Guistiniani
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