

SPECTRUM

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Metanoia

Crisis! What crisis?

by Adrian Park

You may have seen "Sins of the Fathers" on A&E last week - I did and it left far more questions raised than answered. A documentary ("Investigative Reports") that looked at the problem of child abuse (more accurately the sexual abuse of adolescents of both sexes) in the US Catholic Church, it came hard on the heels of the Mount Cashel reality and its fictionalized form "The Boys of St. Vincent". Amongst heart-rending testimony from victims and those caught up in the web of trauma were commentaries from Catholic critics (mainly writers like Andrew Greeley, Malachi Martin, Eugene Kennedy and Jason Berry), forensic experts (Ken Lanning of the FBI), psychologists (Charles Socarides) and various bishops. On the one hand, a power structure that seems to nurture such abuse was exposed, while on the other, a series of scapegoats were sought. Celibacy, an institution that provides (inadvertently) a haven for young men with sexual problems, and a culture of secrecy and embattlement, all received comment, positive criticism, and, where necessary, condemnation. Conspicuously absent was any input from senior management, and very apparent was the sense of betrayal felt by many decent ordinary Catholics at the lack of response from a hierarchy in whom they placed great trust. It's a story of pain, anger and suffering, physical, mental and spiritual, familiar to anyone who followed the Mount Cashel business, from the searing testimonies before the Hughes Commission, through the self-serving defenses offered by the perpetrators, the hierarchy's cover-up (ably assisted by government for 20 years), to the Vatican's utterly insensitive response and its curt dismissal of the Winter Report.

As the "Sins of the Fathers" rightly pointed out, this is not a crisis unique to the Catholic Church. Such abuse has occurred, and is occurring in all denominations, as well as outside the religious world in many institutions with similar power structures. Ken Lanning stated that "there are few people as dangerous as a psychopath for God. Such a person, with God for guidance, can rationalize and justify to himself practically anything - any action, any behaviour." Though Lanning makes a very valid point, his principle should be extended to anyone in a position of power - priest, minister, doctor, counselor, psychiatrist, teacher, husband..... As the Catholic theologian Ignaz von Dollinger put it in a phrase referring to Pope Pius IX (and more familiar in Lord Acton's referral to Louis XIV) "power corrupts and absolute power does so absolutely."

That this crisis of power is most

acute and visible in the N. American Catholic Church is simply because the expression of the corruption is sexual abuse in an institution that places the regulation of sexuality so central in its teaching. As Karl Toft's victims can attest, and public court records verify, the corruption of power need not have God anywhere in the rubric, and by no means do all psychopaths wear a cassock.

Where the "Sins of the Fathers" (in my opinion) went seriously off the rails, was in its analysis of the roots of the problem and its remedies. Having correctly identified the problem of "Anti-Catholic" prejudice in reaching a clear understanding (its an old N. American tradition, not least here in New Brunswick) it instantly connected with the issue of homosexual clergy. What followed was basically scapegoating and the equating of homosexuality with child abuse (for a similar substitution of superstition for reason see the letters pages of the Daily Gleaner practically anytime after mid-December). Equating gay men with child abusers is as baseless a lie as suggesting all Catholic priests are potential abusers; both views are grounded in bigotry rather than reality. According to author Malachi Martin, the problem is a "homosexual network" at all levels of the Catholic Church, who cover-up and protect each other. One of Martin's more recent pieces of fiction, incidentally, is a scurrilous attack on the Jesuits, attributing all the Church's "problems" since Vatican II to the activities of a network of freemasons. He clearly sees the need for scapegoats, if he is not actually paranoid! Martin's views were supported by Charles Socarides, a psychologist, whose

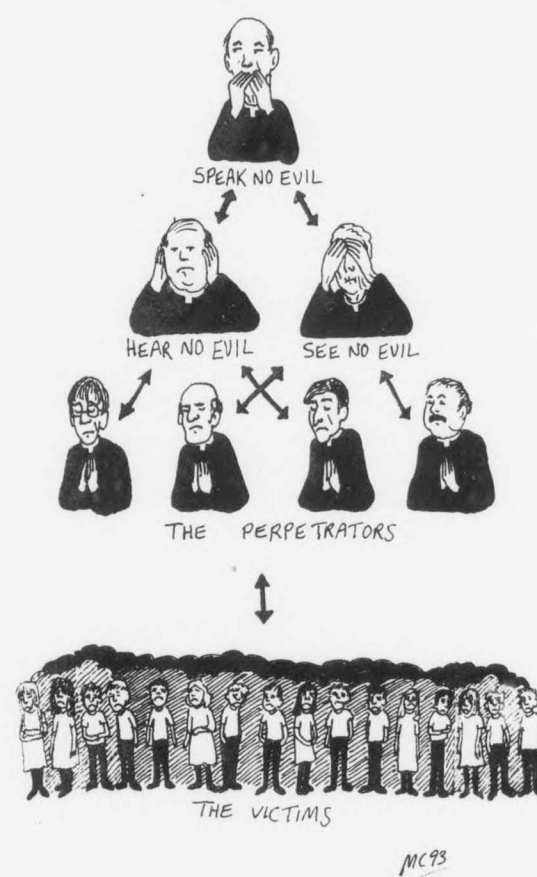
views on homosexuality belong to a long discredited tradition, whose practitioners in the 1950s and 60s, like Irving Bieber, once dominated the field with spurious "cures". The only justification offered for including Socarides views in the programme was that they were not "politically correct"! Quite frankly, substituting quack theology with quack psychology will do nothing to protect anyone from abusive psychopaths - be they in a dog collar, a consulting room or an executive suit.

Refreshingly absent from the interviewees who had suffered abuse was any focused at the institution that had so mortally betrayed their trust and then sought to hide behind lawyers, or deny the crimes entirely, or blame the victims. When the clerical commentators, and Malachi Martin were given free reign the whole discussion was simply hijacked. What was evident in the concluding minutes of the "Sins of the Fathers" was a shifting of responsibility almost as disturbing as the rationalizations of the psychopaths. To both, honesty seemed an alien concept.

What many of us in the gay and lesbian movement seek is a basic honesty. An honest appraisal of human sexuality and an honest integration of sexuality into the rest of life. That honesty cannot be achieved at the personal level by caging your sexuality (hetero or homo) in a closet and letting it off the leash for exercise once a month, or by retreating into marriage seeking a "cure", or by blaming "demons", or by running into the arms of a celibate priesthood. Those paths all lead to potential disaster, in which your own life, and the lives of many others may be wrecked.

ABUSE! Child abuse is not a unique crisis to the Catholic Church. Such abuse has occurred, and is occurring in all denominations, as well as outside the religious world in many institutions with similar power structures.

Hierarchy of Corruption



I've said before in this column that "coming-out" is first and foremost the act of taking responsibility for your sexuality. It is not rationalizing a "problem", blaming your genes, or your up-bringing. It is an honest appraisal of part of self. Those who equate homosexuality with child abuse are basically dishonest (consciously or unconsciously), diverting a general

societal problem into a need for a scapegoat, and targeting an unpopular minority. Such people are part of the problem - witch-hunts merely shore up the existing, abuse-prone, power-structure, leaving the field free for the guilty to carry on as before. Ultimately, far too many commentators in the "Sins of the Fathers" had burning brands on hand.

The Wimmin's Room

St. Bail-out-times Day

MESSAGES! We need new ones and Ms. Thrope has a few including "working my way away from you, Babe!"

by Ms. Ann Thrope

Look out—Another Valentine's day—straight ahead! At least I won't have to worry about rupturing a disk on the way from the mail box under the weight of all those silly cards and letters. Honestly, it's enough to give you a myocardial in fact.

I assure you my attitude has nothing to do with the fact that my younger sister recently married for the fourth time or that my nickname in junior high school was Olive Oil. My negativity is not in the least connected with the fact that my cedar chest is crammed with scrap books of valentine messages from elementary school and the remnants of twenty years worth

of frontless, backless, and crotchless "valentines presents" from the ex.

You may say that I do not appreciate the full meaning of the occasion, i.e. a special day when we can declare our admiration, love, etc. for one other. (Yeah, like asking some unsuspecting person to BE YOUR VALENTINE with all the gender biases and sexual connotations those words carry.)

Okay, fine...you have your day and I'll have mine. I propose that July 12th (my wedding anniversary) be declared "St. Bail-out-times Day." We'd better do it in the summer because under the landLORD's day act you can't kick them out in the snow! Who is "them?" you may ask. Well, how

about the boyfriend, who after two years, still thinks "No" means "maybe"...or the roommate who sticks so close to you that she's foggin up your contacts...or the bore who melts your mascara with garlic breath in the lounge, or the professor who insists on calling you "girl"...the list is endless.

You could send them singing St. Bailouttimes Day messages: I Don't Want to Hold Your Hand, Less Today Than Yesterday, You Makin Loving Scarey or Working My Way Away From You, Babe!

Yeah, yeah! Maybe I'll start a business writing Bailouttime cards with messages like: So long, it's been a slice, Congratulations on your recent divorce, I dislike you a

bushel and a peck, I said, "come in" not "move in."

The gifts...a legitimate reason for shopping at the "It" store: frilled athletic cups, coffee mugs with little holes in the bottom, gloves with disintegrating fingertips...

Then again, maybe it wouldn't catch on. People do nasty things every day. This idea is really not that original is it. Its too bad that people don't always say what they mean...and mean what they say...sometimes they are just mean, the heck with it, its too hard being different, I don't have the time to change now, I have to get an education and a job, wash my hair...Oh, let somebody else burn themselves out...Happy Valentines Day!