

## Clerical Celibacy and Pedophilic Priests

In recent years, reports of Catholic priests sexually abusing children have come to light in virtually every major U.S. city. The victims are often emotionally scarred for decades.

There is convincing evidence that this serious and widespread problem is caused, at least in part, by the Catholic Church's clerical celibacy requirement and other overly repressive Church doctrines regarding sexuality. Thus, persons concerned about the problem of clergy abuse of children should urge Catholic leaders to reexamine and modify their teachings about sex.

Desmond Morris' classic book on human behavior, *The Naked Ape*, reports that homosexual behavior is often "seen in situations where the ideal sexual object (a member of the opposite sex) is unavailable. This applies in many groups of animals."

Morris goes on to state: "Similar situations occur with high frequency in our own species and the response is much the same. If either males or females cannot for some reason obtain sexual access to their opposite members, they will find sexual outlets in other ways."

These findings indicate that Catholic priests, who are required by their Church to remain celibate and taught to abhor sexual relationships with women, might in some cases seek outlets for their sexuality in other behavior. The behavior could include homosexuality or pedophilia.

In fact, statements by Dr. Jay Feierman support a link between sexual repression and pedophilia. As a psychiatrist who has met with hundreds of pedophilic priests at a Catholic treatment center for abusive priests in New Mexico, Feierman is in a position to recognize the connection.

Feierman says that celibacy is not "a natural state for humans to be in." Pointing to the celibacy requirement as being part of the cause of clergy abuse of children, he explains: "If you tell a man that he's not allowed to have particular friends, he's not allowed to be affectionate, he's not allowed to be in love, he's not allowed to be a sexual being, you shouldn't be surprised at anything that happens."

Moreover, research by the University of New Hampshire's David Finkelhor, Ph.D., supports those observations. Finkelhor, a recognized expert on the study of sexual abuse of children, has shown that repressive sexual attitudes linked to many religions may predispose some persons toward sexual activities with children.

Dr. John Money, a leading expert on sexual violence who has pioneered treatments for deviate sexuality at Johns Hopkins Medical School, adds that people raised in conditions where sex is viewed as evil, and where sexual curiosity is considered a punishable offense, are likely to end up with warped sexual identities. Those types of environments often result from conservative religious teachings.

Money describes the harmful effects of such environments as follows: "In girls, often you extinguish the lust completely, so that they can never have an orgasm, and marriage becomes a dreary business where you put up with sex to serve the maternal instinct. *In boys, sex gets redirected into abnormal channels.*" (Emphasis added.)

Money's observations as to the different effects of repressive sexual environments on males and females may explain why pedophilia appears to be a much greater problem among priests than among nuns, who must also take a celibacy vow.

It is also relevant to note that the problem of sexual abuse by priests is not unique to modern society, but has existed for centuries. In the 16th century, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, opposed the Catholic Church's clerical celibacy requirement, partly because of the harm it caused.

Luther wrote of the Catholic Church's leaders: "They were completely unjustified in forbidding marriage

and in burdening the priesthood with the demand of continual celibacy. In doing so they have acted like . . . tyrannical, unholy scoundrels, occasioning all sorts of terrible, ghastly, countless sins against chastity, in which they are caught to this day."

More than four hundred years later, Catholic priests are still caught committing sexual offenses while most Church leaders disregard possible causes of the problem and continue promoting extremely repressive and unhealthy attitudes toward sex.

Unless the Church stops ignoring the overwhelming evidence of the evils caused by its teachings regarding sexuality - and modifies those teachings to be consistent with modern scientific knowledge - there will be many more victims severely damaged by sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergy.

Henry David Thoreau stated: "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root." Advocates for victims of sexual assault can strike at the root of this problem by speaking out against the Catholic Church's clerical celibacy requirement and its other harmful doctrines concerning sexuality.