

At the Mercy of One False Brother

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David Pierre of Media Report has published an illuminating new book, *The Greatest Fraud Never Told: ^[1]False Accusations, Phony Grand Jury Reports, and the Assault on the Catholic Church*. Pierre and his work are often ignored because he is unjustly accused of dismissing accusations of clergy sex abuse, *en masse*. That charge is not true. Instead, Pierre stresses an often-forgotten truth: “a false accusation is truly an affront to those who genuinely suffered as the result of their horrendous abuse.”

When the first hints of clergy sexual abuse began to surface in the late-80s, I served as an advisor to many of the good, new bishops being appointed. On this topic, I counseled the bishops:

- First, do not call this pedophilia – because, for the most part, it is same-sex activity between a cleric and a post-pubescent young man; that’s the truth and, the truth always sets us free. “Pedophilia” conjures up images of five- and six-year-old boys. Further, if the sinful activity had been properly labeled, ironically, the secular media wouldn’t have given it much coverage, since they always promote same-sex relations.
- Second, never settle any case out of court for a variety of reasons, not least that while a pastoral plea demands a pastoral response, a legal challenge demands a legal response. Moreover, when a financial settlement is made, that more than suggests guilt, thus damaging irreparably an innocent priest’s reputation. Regrettably, most bishops listened, instead, to diocesan attorneys and insurance companies.

Owing to the Dallas Charter of 2002, the heavy-handed treatment of accused priests by bishops has resulted in an adversarial relationship, which Cardinal Avery Dulles foretold in 2004. Pierre also observes, quite correctly and sadly, that most priests dread it when the chancery calls. Why? Because “the *mere accusation* against a Catholic priest carries an automatic assumption that the claim is true.” And because the principle of “innocent until proven guilty,” in both ecclesiastical law and American civil law, has been eviscerated by current Church praxis: the accused priest is hung out to dry with an immediate diocesan press release, forced out of his residence within hours, placed on administrative leave, forbidden to wear clerical garb, and required to pay for legal counsel out of his own resources.

Interestingly, none of that happens for a bishop; his legal expenses are borne by the diocese. I should note that the procedure used for accused bishops is the proper one, but the double standard that exists when it comes to priests is responsible for the resentment all too many priests have toward their bishops, which Pierre underscores.

Yet another problem, again, thanks to the Dallas Charter, is the removal of the statute of limitations, causing Pierre to raise two essential questions: “How does one defend oneself against an accusation from 30, 40, 50 years ago? How would *you* defend yourself against an accusation from 40 years ago?” Of course, that is the very reason for a statute of limitations. Quite inconsistently, bishops have fought vociferously against removal of statutes of limitation in the civil realm.

Pierre devotes a chapter to the infamous Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, which he calls “the Grand Fraud” because its approach, content, and language all betray an animus against the Church, starting from the theatrics of the Attorney General, Josh Shapiro, in the press conference releasing the report. Bald-faced lies abound, as do innuendo and inflammatory language. Dead priests account for 53 percent of the accused (one was born in

1869!). Pierre follows up with “Pennsylvania Perjury,” where he tackles the Report’s assertion that the bishops of the State “did nothing” when confronted with abuse; he demonstrates the very opposite.

Concluding his treatment of the Pennsylvania Report, our author expresses astonishment at the relative silence of the Catholic media in the face of this gross miscarriage of justice, not “defending bishops, priests, and the Church when they were publicly wronged.” More disturbing to me was the almost gleeful promotion of the Report, by many would-be “conservative” or “traditional” Catholic outlets, so that “these partisan platforms began airing stories that were simply false, and in some cases, quite bizarre.”

Pierre also highlights the pervasive anti-Catholicism throughout the entire crisis; he cites remarks by the Attorney General of Michigan (the Catholic Church is “a criminal enterprise”) and observes that “a public official would never get away with such a clearly bigoted remark against another religion.”

Chapter Eight is titled “A Disastrous Practice,” which refers to how bishops sent offending priests to treatment centers and then followed the advice of the “professionals,” most of whom assured bishops that these priests were ready to return to ministry. Formerly, bishops often sent problematic priests to permanent confinement in a monastery. But a secular model cowed a spiritual model in recent decades, with psychiatrists controlling the process. To be fair, this “therapeutic” approach was employed by basically every institution, Catholic or not, in the country at the time.

Chapter Twelve is provocatively entitled, “The Catholic ATM.” Pierre notes how expensive litigation is, but goes on to observe that the dioceses cause themselves harm by having what the New York Archdiocese calls “lenient standards of evidence,” thus paying out “on many weak claims.” The result: “the more the

Church pays out on these bogus claims, the more claims it gets. It all makes sense. Why not file suit? There is nothing to lose.”

Rolling over and playing dead is not “pastoral”; it’s irresponsible because it squanders the diocesan patrimony and, far more importantly, gives credence to lies that do irreparable damage to the image of the Church and clergy.

Pierre shares some good news amidst this depressing saga: Some priests are now suing government officials who have violated their civil rights or fraudulent victims who have defamed them. You might ask, “What has taken so long for this to happen?” The answer, in many instances, is that priests were prohibited from doing so by their bishops, who thought it wouldn’t “look good.”

It’s worth reading the material on SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), a viciously anti-Catholic group. One employee eventually saw through the façade and questioned its *modus operandi*, which brought about a hostile work environment and her filing of a lawsuit against SNAP. She delineates a whole series of accusations against her former employer, which should be disturbing, but not surprising.

David Pierre has done all a great service in assembling the hard data. The truth of the matter is that the “mop-up” operation of the past two decades has made any institution of the Catholic Church in this country the safest place for any minor or vulnerable adult. There are nearly 40,000 priests in our country; last year twenty accusations were made – accusations, not substantiated cases. Cardinal Newman, with his uncanny capacity to gaze into the crystal ball, warned seminarians in 1873: “With a whole population able to read, with cheap newspapers day by day conveying the news of every court, great and small to every home or even cottage, it is plain that we are at the mercy of even one unworthy member or false brother.”

Indeed, *even one* unworthy member or false brother.

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