

# The Clergy Abuse Scandal

## Part Three

### What is Going on in the U.S.?

by John Burger

WASHINGTON — When U.S. bishops had a working lunch with Pope John Paul II on April 9, they were surprised that upon entering the room, the Holy Father, not waiting for formal introductions, got right to the 'point: "Tell me what is going on in the United States." The Holy Father plans a meeting with all U.S. cardinals April 22-25 in Rome to discuss just that. The Register, in a series of articles on the clergy abuse scandals, has been answering the same question. First, the series reported that pedophilia wasn't as pervasive as it has been portrayed; second, that the U.S. bishops (with notorious exceptions) by and large haven't been ignoring the problem as has been suggested. Now, the series takes a look at the real source and solution of the problem of clergy abusers: seminaries.

In interviews with the Register, priests, seminarians, seminary rectors and vocation directors past and present described seminaries where homosexuality has been tolerated among their ranks and dissent from Church teaching fostered. But they also spoke about reform measures in place and a younger, more orthodox breed of seminarians studying for the priesthood. Many point out that the sex scandals involve priests who went through the seminary decades ago and suggest that a number of factors may have been at play, allowing potential problem candidates to get through: screening was not as good, officials were somewhat naive and some candidates may have entered the seminary to avoid the military draft. And when the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s permeated all facets of American life, a looser atmosphere in seminaries and a rejection of traditional Church teaching left the door open to sexual experimentation. Faithful seminarians expressing concern about potential abuse were warned not to jump to conclusions.

One former vocations director, who asked not to be identified, felt that those in authority who feared a vocations shortage lowered the standards for seminary candidates. Today, although most dioceses and seminaries screen candidates thoroughly, some observers question the value of the psychological tests given and caution that psychologists used by the Church do not all share the Church's understanding of human nature and sexuality. In addition, although more seminarians tend to be orthodox today, many professors still teaching in seminaries are not, seminarians and younger priests said. Some observers said that many seminaries continue to use moral theology textbooks that question traditional sexual ethics. A new book, *Goodbye! Good Men*, by Michael Rose, says that many seminaries and diocesan vocations teams have been hijacked by a homosexual subculture that has discouraged scores of men with vocations and a desire to serve Christ faithfully from continuing or even starting studies for the priesthood.

Oblate of St. Francis de Sales Father John Harvey, founding director of Courage, the Church's ministry to people with same-sex attractions, agreed that poor seminary formation has contributed to the sex abuse problem. In one seminary, which he declined to name, professors refer to Church teaching as "the opinion of the Magisterium," which gives the impression that the opinions of dissident theologians are as valid as Church teaching. If a moral theology professor teaches that it can be morally good for a Christian to have homosexual relationship as long as he or she is monogamous, a student may very well apply that opinion to himself and feel free to act out on his inclinations, he said. "The way homosexuality is taught needs to be "cleaned up."

One New York pastor charged "Good men have been malformed" in seminaries, and many "walked away in disgust," said Father Joseph Wilson of Queens. Father Wilson studied at Holy Trinity Seminary in Dallas, where, in the mid-1980s, he remembers suffering through a guest lecture on homosexuality, part of a workshop for priests ministering to homosexuals. Seminarians were asked to attend the workshop as well. It was a "completely immoral discussion" that had the effect of undermining the Church's teaching on homosexuality, he felt. The lecturer, a priest, said that "homosexuals are not welcomed in our churches because gay couples can't go up to Communion holding hands." The speaker, Father Wilson said, was Father Paul Shanley, the man who has since left the Archdiocese of Boston and the priesthood. He had been called into Cardinal Humberto Madeiros office repeatedly because of his reported advocacy of doctrine contrary to Church teaching on homosexuality. Father Shanley, who

is now accused of rape, reportedly spoke in favor of sex between men and boys at a 1979 meeting that apparently led to the founding of the North American Man Boy Love Association.

### Efforts to Reform

A random survey of dioceses revealed a variety of approaches to screening and attitudes toward the homosexual candidate. In the Archdiocese of New York, psychological testing begins even before the application process. "I talk to [men who are interested] about having a good prayer life, about the importance of talking to God and being close to him," said Father Joseph Tiemey, vocations director. "That's how your vocation will come." As part of the application process, most dioceses require a battery of psychological tests; an extensive biographical sketch, including family background; and interviews with various boards. After acceptance, many candidates have to undergo a criminal background check to gain entrance to a seminary. "Dunwoodie always looks for the man who sincerely wants to serve the Church," Father Tiemey said, using the nickname for St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., the major seminary of the Archdiocese of New York.

When it comes to homosexuality, the rectors of seminaries in the archdioceses of Chicago and New York said they would not take a candidate who has been involved in a homosexual lifestyle. "I wouldn't accept someone known to be involved in homosexuality," said Msgr. Peter Finn, rector of St. Joseph's Seminary. He said he would "not be inclined" to accept a candidate even if he was a homosexual who has not acted on his same sex attractions. For Father John Canary, rector of the University of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, outside Chicago, homosexual "orientation" does not necessarily exclude a candidate. But Father John Folda, rector of St. Gregory the Great Seminary of the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., said simply, "We don't take homosexual candidates." The reason, he said, is the same as that given by the Holy See. "Because of the way of life a priest lives, there would be a great deal of temptation. You'd be calling a man to something unsuitable for his circumstances." Also, if a student population becomes predominantly homosexual, heterosexual candidates would be reluctant to study there. Father Folda said. In addition to testing, all candidates for the Diocese of Lincoln are required to "spend time in close proximity to the vocations director," he said.

That's the way it is in the Diocese of Providence, R.I., where prospective candidates live in a house of formation with the vocations director and the rector of the major seminary. "The best screening is seeing them interact for a year or two," said Father Marcel Taillon, the vocations recruiter. "In some dioceses, you apply, and they send you away to their seminary." A candidate, he said, should be known to the Church. Once accepted, a candidate is usually under constant scrutiny as he studies, participates in the seminary's prayer life and community life, and undertakes pastoral assignments. At St. Mary of the Lake, each seminarian must pass a yearly vote of confidence by at least 80% of faculty members and 80% of fellow seminarians. Father Canary encourages anyone who knows of issues that may indicate a problem to let him know. Seminarians also undergo evaluations in their pastoral assignments on how they relate to people both professionally and ministerially, particularly how they relate to women. "So much of a priest's working relationship is with women," Father Canary said. Officials look for a "level of maturity and an ability to maintain" professional boundaries with women."

He said that pedophilia, strictly speaking, is "very hard to determine," but that a study done 10 years ago found only one pedophile priest among all those who had served in the Archdiocese of Chicago over the previous 40 years. The rest were homosexual abusers of teens. "We were told that they get stuck at a [certain] age, emotionally," he said. "Some of that you can see in a person, in the level of maturity in a person's work. "They can't handle relationships in mature ways," with the staff of a parish, for example, or with women. "Then you dig deeper, and maybe you send him for assessment." There also seems to be a concern for addressing human problems that future priests might have. Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., is perhaps typical in holding workshops for seminarians on issues such as celibacy and anger. And at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Huntington, N.Y., the issue of intimacy was "repeatedly addressed, for example, in friendships and relationships with fellow priests, parishioners and lay staff," said Father Douglas Arcoleo, a priest of the Diocese of Rockville Center, N.Y., who was ordained four years ago.

Psychologists on staff at St. Joseph's Seminary in New York help students develop interpersonal relationships, and students have the help of faculty mentors and spiritual advisers. "As dean, I had constant conversations with the men on their relationships," said Father Joseph Tiemey, the vocations director. He added that discipline was important: If someone missed Morning Prayer, he would have to report to Father Tiemey. As a faculty adviser, he tried to help students form good habits of a prayer life and maintain a healthy balance between academic work, a social life and exercise.

## Rome Has Spoken

After meeting with the Holy Father in early April, Bishop Wilton Gregory — head of the U.S. bishops' conference — said the Church does need to re-examine homosexual priests and ask "what kind of men we want to be our priests, and importantly, to be the priests who care for the next generation of Catholics." He said the issue of homosexuality in the priesthood deserves discussion, in terms of how it affects a priest's ability to keep his promise of living a chaste life. But while it would be helpful to examine this question. Catholic News Service reported that he said it should not necessarily be linked to the sex abuse issue. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navairo-Valls linked the two when he addressed the issue of homosexuality and the priesthood in March, saying that men with homosexual inclinations "just cannot be ordained. That does not imply a final judgment on people with homosexuality," he said. "But you cannot be in this field." His comments echoed Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who told Catholic News Service last year that persons with a homosexual inclination should not be admitted to the seminary.

The two men's remarks might make it seem like the Vatican is just waking up to the problem, but Rome has been speaking out for some time. The question is whether dioceses and seminaries in the United States have been implementing its directives. A 1961 Vatican document recommended that any person with serious unresolved sexual problems be screened out, saying that the chastity and celibacy required by religious and priestly life would constitute for them a "continuous heroic act and a painful martyrdom."

Even further back. Pope Pius XI, in a 1935 encyclical on the priesthood, said that those in charge of the clergy must not only foster and strengthen vocations but also "discourage unsuitable candidates, and in good time send them away from a path not meant for them. Such are all youths who show a lack of necessary fitness, and who are, therefore, unlikely to persevere in the priestly ministry both worthily and becomingly," Pope Pius wrote in *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*. "In these matters hesitation and delay is a serious mistake and may do serious harm. It is far better to dismiss an unfit student in the early stages to prevent him from being a 'stumbling block to himself and to others with peril of eternal ruin.'"

Fred Berlin, a psychiatrist who has served on the U.S. bishops' ad hoc committee on sexual abuse, said that just as many girls are abused as are boys. As far as sexual abuse is concerned, there is no evidence that a homosexual is more of a risk to a boy than a heterosexual is to a girl, he said. Berlin's claim seems to be starkly contradicted by the facts now being reported ad nauseam by the media, but it represents the advice bishops are getting. Berlin did suggest that there may be more cases of priestly sexual abuse of boys because, in the past, a priest chaperoning a group of boys on a trip, for example, did not raise a red flag, while a priest accompanying a group of girls would have.

Father Harvey of Courage, which seeks to help persons with same-sex attraction live chaste lives, said the homosexual candidate is not the only problematic seminarian. "A heterosexual in the seminary who is constantly masturbating shouldn't be in the seminary" either, he said. But Richard Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist who runs Comprehensive Counseling Services in West Conshohocken, Pa., said that virtually every priest he's treated who has sexually abused children had previously been involved in homosexual relationships with other adults.

One vocations director who asked not to be identified said that the problem calls for dismissal of all homosexual candidates, but he added that the problem is not just asexual one but also a doctrinal one. "Bishops are making the judgment that [homosexual and heterosexual] libido drives are equal," said the priest. In reality, the sex drives of homosexuals is stronger, and the Church is getting a \$2 billion dollar lesson because it ignored that fact, he said. The Church must reiterate that "homosexuality is still a psychological disorder," he added. Psychologist Richard Cross noted that up to one third of all homosexuals have tendencies toward pederasty. This suggests that the clergy abuse problem will not be fixed as long as seminaries continue to accept homosexuals.

Two priests in vocation work now report hopeful signs in spite of the poor play the Church is getting in the media. Since the scandals in Boston broke in January, Father Tierney said that he has actually been getting more inquiries than usual. "They're saying, 'I see the Church is being lambasted in the press. I have been interested in the priesthood for some time now, and I feel even more strongly about serving the Church.'" "We're still getting candidates," Providence diocesan vocations recruiter Father Taillon said. "It's very genuine. Christ is calling them."