

COLUMNISTS

Abuses support case for married clergy

The *National Catholic Reporter* recently published a cover story on the sexual exploitation of nuns by priests and some bishops in Africa (driven in large part by the clergymen's fear of AIDS) and elsewhere in the world (3/16/01). This report, along with the many follow-up stories in secular papers across the country, may drive another nail in the Latin-rite church's long-standing rule against a married clergy (3/16/01).

What is remarkable about the *NCR* story is that the Vatican has not denied its truth. But how could it be denied?

The evidence is presented not in rumors but in official reports and public statements, submitted to official Vatican agencies and to various religious leadership groups by sources with credentials that cannot be dismissed. Some of those sources, including the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine order, have confirmed the evidence on the public record.

The *NCR* story was based on several such reports and statements. One was presented in 1998 by Sister Marie McDonald to the Council of 16, a group consisting of delegates from the Union of Superiors General (of men's religious communities), the International Union of Superiors General (a comparable group of women), and the Vatican's Con-



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

gregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

In March of that year Sister Marie had also addressed the standing committee of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. Since her data had come directly from diocesan congregations and Conferences of Major Superiors in Africa, she was convinced of their authenticity. Nevertheless, many of the bishops felt it was "disloyal" of the sisters to have sent such reports outside their dioceses.

Four years earlier, in 1994, Sister Maura O'Donohue, a member of the Medical Missionaries of Mary and a licensed physician, had also presented a formal report, which *NCR* describes as "one of the more comprehensive accounts" of this problem. The following February

she briefed Cardinal Eduardo Martinez, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for religious life, and his staff members.

Sister Maura had pointed out that, when the sisters and their religious leaders complained about the abuse, it was the victims, not the perpetrators, who were punished — by silencing or by expulsion from their leadership positions or from their communities. The priests involved were sent on a brief retreat, or assigned to graduate studies, or simply moved to another parish.

Sister Maura noted that, although there were incidents of abuse in 23 countries on five continents, the majority were in Africa, where the AIDS epidemic is most severe and the subservience of women to men is widely taken for granted — by women and men alike. There is also a sentiment there among many clergy that the law of celibacy prohibits only marriage, not the fathering of children.

NCR noted these reports were also confirmed in 1994 by Father Robert Vitillo, formerly of Caritas and currently the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Campaign for Human Development executive director.

None of these sources would grant interviews to *NCR*, but a major witness did so: Nokter Wolf, Abbot Primate of the Benedictines worldwide, who was quot-

ed by *NCR* and also by *The New York Times*. He did so reluctantly, but finally out of regard for the seriousness of the problem and the demands of justice.

"I don't believe these are exceptional cases," he told *NCR*. "I think the abuse described is happening."

Abbot Wolf blames, among other factors, the solitude of the priest's life as well as the rapid urbanization of many African societies, which has weakened traditional cultural constraints.

"We must face the problem," he told *The New York Times*, "and that means accepting the consequences."

The consequences include not only working to heal the terrible wounds inflicted upon the victims of abuse, but accepting full moral and financial responsibility for the behavior, without recourse to legal devices of stonewalling or, worse, attacking the victims' integrity.

The long-term consequences, however, involve a reexamination of the standards of admission to the priesthood and of the centuries-old, yet only human, discipline of obligatory celibacy.

These issues can no longer be cloaked in silence.

...

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Jesus offers mercy for those who ask

Second Sunday of Easter (Mercy Sunday) April 22: (R3) John 20:19-31; (R1) Acts 5:12-16; (R2) Revelation 1:9-13,17-19.

Fourteen times in her diary, Sister Mary Faustina quotes our Lord as requesting a "Feast of Mercy" be established on the first Sunday after Easter.

The great sacrament of mercy is confession. Jesus desired that on the "Feast of Mercy," all souls — especially sinners — go to this sacrament. To encourage souls to do this, Jesus promised not only the forgiveness of sins, but also the punishment due to them.

"The soul that will go to confession," Jesus promised, "within eight days before or after Mercy Sunday and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and the punishment due to them."

What a promise — the forgiveness of sins and the punishment due to them, just as was given to Dismas by Jesus when hanging on the cross. "Come," Jesus said, "with faith to my representative ... I myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest ... I myself act in your soul."

Sister Faustina, Helen Kowalska, was born Aug. 25 1905, in central Poland.



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

On Aug. 1, 1925, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, who administer to disadvantaged girls. When she entered the novitiate in 1926, she was given the religious name of Sister Mary Faustina. On May 1, 1933, she took her perpetual vows.

After only a few weeks of convent life, her health began to deteriorate. She contracted consumption, and had several bouts with asthma ending in tuberculosis. In 1938 she spent several months in the sanatorium in Pradnik near Cracow. She was brought back to the convent at Cracow and died there Oct. 5. She was canonized a saint on Mercy Sunday, April 30, 2000. The Holy Father said, "Be apostles of Divine Mercy, like Sister Faustina Kowalska."

In 1934 Sister Faustina, in obedience to her spiritual director, to her superiors and to God himself, kept a diary of the revelations and mystical experiences she had been receiving from Jesus and Mary.

Her diary of over 600 pages is a message from God to trust him, to receive his mercy no matter how great our sins and to be merciful to others.

Here are the ABCs of God's message of mercy:

A — ASK for God's mercy. Jesus wants us to pray for mercy for ourselves and the world. He recommended the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. He asked that a novena be made to the Divine Mercy from Good Friday to the Sunday after Easter (Mercy Sunday). Finally, he asked that at 3 p.m. each day we utter a short prayer that he be merciful to sinners. Jesus said, "In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul who asks for mercy in virtue of my Passion."

B — BE merciful. Mercy comes from the Latin word "misericordia," meaning "having a heart" (cordia) "for the miseries (miseri) of others. It has three ingredients: Compassion: having a heart for the miseries of others. Then, trying to do something about it. And finally, to act out of love for God.

To Sister Faustina Jesus said, "If a soul does not exercise mercy in some way, it will not obtain my mercy on the day of judgment."

C — COMPLETE trust. God's mercy is like a bottomless well. How much water we draw depends on the size of the bucket we bring. How much we draw from God's mercy, depends on our trust. The great act of trust is to use the sacrament of mercy, confession, frequently.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, April 23

Acts 4:23-31; John 3:1-8

Tuesday, April 24

Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7B-15

Wednesday, April 25

1 Peter 5:5B-14; Mark 16:15-20

Thursday, April 26

Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36

Friday, April 27

Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15

Saturday, April 28

Acts 6:1-7; John 6:16-21

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**Kids' Answers
from page 12:**

1. Cyprus
2. Jerusalem
3. Corinth
4. Antioch
5. Asia
6. Ephesus
7. Iconium
8. Athens