

Compliance problem systemic in nature

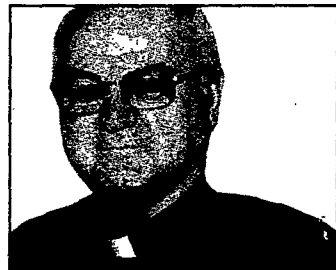
Former Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating resigned last month as chair of the U.S. bishops' National Review Board, which monitors the enforcement of their sexual-abuse policy adopted a year ago in Dallas.

Leaders of organizations, like SNAP, dedicated to the interests of survivors of sexual abuse as well as to lay movements, like Voice of the Faithful, saw the resignation as a telling sign of the bishops' failure to honor their commitment.

Gov. Keating had exposed their stonewalling and foot-dragging. Did they expect the National Review Board to operate as a compliant adjunct of the bishops' conference rather than as a genuinely independent body?

Leading members of the hierarchy felt that Gov. Keating was out of control, that his public attacks on the bishops (not just his comparison of their behavior to that of La Cosa Nostra) had undermined his effectiveness.

Even a majority of the board itself felt that Keating had crossed the line of appropriate public comment and needed to step aside. Some of those members, notably Robert Bennett, a prominent Washington attorney who had served as a defense lawyer for President Clinton, insisted, however, that he shared Gov. Keating's impatience with some of the bishops and he pledged that the board would continue to do its work in as vigorous a man-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

ner as possible.

Bennett put his finger on the essence of the problem that had provoked Keating's outburst. "Those bishops who are not cooperating," he told *The New York Times*, "must start acting like pastors and shepherds of their flock, and stop acting like risk assessment officers of insurance companies."

Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, committed a major error of judgment in selecting him. It was not just that the governor had a reputation for speaking his mind — which could have been an asset — nor his hard-right political record as much as his uninformed and narrow religious outlook.

Too often those characteristics are equated — inaccurately and unfairly — with "conservatism." "Conservative" Catholics are not necessarily any more "uninformed" or "narrow" in their religious views than are "liberal" Catholics. The dividing line between them is how they interpret facts, not whether they are well-informed and open-minded.

Asked several months ago for his own assessment of the sexual-abuse crisis, Gov. Keating tipped his hand in citing two books that he had found most helpful in analyzing the scandal: George Weigel's *The Courage to Be Catholic*, and Michael Rose's *Goodbye, Good Men: How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church*.

Both books offer too simplistic an explanation of the crisis and in too ideological a fashion. Had Gov. Keating also mentioned the writings of Father Donald Cozzens, for example *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, one might have concluded that he was only trying to familiarize himself with all sides of the discussion.

Given his theological perspective, the governor, like so many Catholics of similar orientation, must have assumed at the outset that the bishops as a group are next to God, well above the rest of us on the spiritual ladder but somewhere below the pope who appointed them.

When episcopal behavior contradicted that assumption, he had only the analyses of writers like Weigel and Rose to fall back on.

He saw the problem as a moral failure of individuals, and not also as systemic and institutional. Ironically, the bishops who fired him see it that way, too.

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

Poet's words cited against getting 'real'

To the editor:

Sister Schoelles urges our thinking profoundly, rather than superficially. When she asks us not to be polarizing but to "get real" (July 3), I infer that she wants us to admit that those inclined to homosexual acts are basically different from those who are not and that homosexual acts can be signs of love and friendship. Popularly, this is profound knowledge recently gained through science.

But, is it true? In a moral dimension, the sexual inclination of homosexuals is not different from that of all the other children of Adam and Eve. Basically, we all desire sexual gratification inordinately. A homosexual inclination is one nuance of that inordinacy. No one suffers from every nuance, but we all do suffer. Accordingly, what Chaucer wrote 600 years ago is true, "I seye, forasmuche as man is nat obeisaunt to God, that is his lord, therefore is the flessh to hym disobeisaunt thurgh concupiscence". Similarly, sinful sexual acts, whether heterosexual or homosexual, only masquerade as signs of love and friendship. In the same work, Chaucer stated it this way, "For trust wele, hir (their) flesshly love was deedly hate, as seith the prophete David: 'Whoso that loveth wikkedness, he hateth his own soule.' And whoso hateth his own soule, certes, he may love noon other wyght in no manere." These quotations,

fully in accord with the then ancient gospel, are truly profound.

There is nothing new under the sun. To "get real," I would have to deny that there is an objective standard of behavior, which concupiscence abhors. Due to concupiscence, the gospel, of its nature, is polarizing, not only to the world, but also within everichon of us. I tried to resist the temptation to use Chaucer's spelling of "every which one" in the previous sentence, but I succumbed.

Robert E. Drury
Pre-Emption Road
Geneva

Calls column 'half-baked'

To the editor,

The column by Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, entitled "Debate on sexual behavior needs thoughtful approach" (July 3) was very disappointing. Her comment, "We can become a polarized, absolutist society, or, in my terms, we can 'get real,'" was most incriminating and reminded me of a bumper sticker I saw on the road awhile ago which read "I tried being open-minded but my brain kept falling out." What readers need are words which support the ideas and beliefs of the wonderful Roman Catholic Church not half-baked ideas which have spilled randomly from someone's brain.

Virginia Stefano

Pennemite Road, Livonia

Love sinner, not the sin

To the editor:

Sister Schoelles in her July 3 column about the various attitudes of people toward homosexuality seems to have slipped into indifference and relativism when she wrote: "We can become a polarized, absolutist society, or, in my terms, we can 'get real.' The choice is ours."

According to #2357 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as

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Sister Schoelles
suggesting.

Rev. William
Chestnut

Parenta not abs

To the editor:

In the July
Courier, a well-
letter with corr-
sions ("Inform p-
surgery") did
glaring error.
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