

## The Holy Father That I Know

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It is Holy Week, that time out of time, when we remember the most important events of all time: Jesus' suffering, His crucifixion, and His conquest of death. The world, of course, is filled with distractions. In this holy season some, especially the news media, want us to focus instead on the supposed failures of our Pope, Benedict XVI. The New York Times is again leading the attack, now accusing the Holy Father himself of being complicit in "the widening sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church." I want to share with you my reflections about this subject.

It appears that the timing of these articles is calculated. The March 25 New York Times story suggesting that then-Cardinal Ratzinger permitted a known offender to continue in ministry for almost thirty years was based upon documents provided to it by Jeffrey Anderson, an attorney who has received over \$100 million suing Catholic institutions and who is now suing the Vatican itself. Mr. Anderson received these documents in discovery in December 2008. Why did he wait until now to hand them over to the Times? Was it to help his suit against the Vatican? Was it to coordinate with claimant groups protesting in the Vatican on the very day of the Times report? Was it to promote legislation friendly to plaintiffs' lawyers such as we are fighting here in Connecticut and elsewhere? Was it to sully the holiness of this week? We don't know. We do know that Mr. Anderson controlled the timing, and the Times helped.

The truth is that there is no widening problem of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, at least not in our country. A comprehensive "Causes and Contents" study conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice showed that, by the early 90s, this problem was largely corrected because many bishops already had in place safe environment programs and zero tolerance policies. In 2002 the U.S. bishops took additional steps to reach out to victims and to ensure the safety of children and young people by issuing their landmark Charter and Norms. For our Church serving almost 70 million American Catholics, there were six allegations of childhood sexual abuse by priests occurring in 2009. No other institution working with children gets close to this level of safe environment.

Let us now focus on the stories in the New York Times regarding Reverend Lawrence C. Murphy, the deceased Milwaukee priest who was accused of molesting young people during the 1960s and 70s when he headed a school for the hearing and sight impaired. To be sure, his heinous behavior was utterly reprehensible and destructive. At the same time, however, the Times' story incorrectly reports that Cardinal Ratzinger was complicit when, "instead of discipline," Father Lawrence Murphy was "quietly moved" to the Diocese of Superior where he continued "working freely with children in parishes" for twenty-four years until he died in 1998. The police looked into the

allegations regarding Father Murphy in 1974 and apparently found insufficient evidence to take any action. Nevertheless, Murphy lost his job as head of the school for the hearing and sight impaired in 1974. The documents the Times itself posts show that his removal was not “quiet” but that the police were informed, that there were protests and leafleteering, and that there was “disclosure and public humiliation in 1974.”

Finally, the Times states that Murphy was “never disciplined.” This simply is not so. The Times does not tell its readers that, shortly after new allegations came his way in 1993, Archbishop Weakland promptly suspended Murphy’s faculties and ordered him to cease all public ministry, all unsupervised contact with children, and all contact with persons, places, and situations giving rise to temptations. The Times either hid the fact that Murphy was disciplined by suspension of his faculties because it did not comport with the story it wanted to tell, or because Mr. Anderson withheld the documents from the Times that detailed this discipline.

In fact, if the New York Times had bothered to check with Father Thomas Brundage, JCL, the Judicial Vicar for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee from 1995-2003, they would have found that at the time of his death, Father Murphy was still a defendant in a Canonical trial (an internal trial conducted by the Church) in Milwaukee for the crimes of sexual abuse and solicitation within the confessional. Thus, the New York Times either was less than forthcoming in stating that Murphy suffered no discipline, or Mr. Anderson, through selective document disclosures, played the New York Times like a fiddle. The shameless and reckless assertions by the Times and other media outlets that then-Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, somehow interfered with the trial by the church are categorically false. Fr. Brundage, who was the presiding judge of the Canonical trial, says unequivocally “with regard to the role of then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) in this matter, I have no reason to believe that he was involved at all. Placing this matter at his doorstep is a huge leap of logic and information.”

Here’s what I know about Pope Benedict XVI and sexual abuse. As detailed by John Allen of The National Catholic Reporter, when Cardinal Ratzinger became the Vatican’s “point man” on the problem in 2001, he personally reviewed hundreds of files. He then wrote the bishops of the world that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would henceforth handle all sexual abuses cases involving priests. Under his leadership the Congregation provided bishops with crucial direction and support in canonically removing offending priests from ministry. In most circumstances, the Congregation approved direct administrative actions so that bishops could discipline and remove priests without the delays of full canonical trials.

In 2002, I assisted in writing the Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People. I was also one of the four U.S. diocesan bishops who went to Rome to secure approval of the Norms. I personally witnessed the pivotal and positive role that Cardinal Ratzinger played in helping the American bishops to respond to the sexual abuse crisis. Thanks to Cardinal Ratzinger the United States Norms won approval from

the Holy See. Together with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, the Norms have helped the U.S. Bishops to bring about a true culture change in the Church. State of the art safe environment programs have been developed. Countless victims have been assisted. Priests who posed a danger to young people are out of ministry. Dioceses cooperate closely with law enforcement officials (contrary to yet another faulty op-ed piece in the New York Times). The Congregation also helped bishops of other countries deal with the sexual abuse crisis. When he became Pope, Benedict XVI made resolution of the abuse problem a priority. Instead of attacking this Pope, we should be thanking him for helping the Church confront this crisis in a way that benefits victims, the Church, and society.

There is an additional problem with the New York Times report worth mentioning. It states that Father Murphy “also got a pass from the police and prosecutors who ignored reports from his victims.” This clause is the entire comment that the Times gives to the failure of the one government entity that had the greatest power to conduct an investigation and remove an alleged sexual perpetrator from being around children. The Church has no search warrants or prisons. The police do. When government fails to manage the risk of sexual abuse, the New York Times and other media too often give government a pass. If we really care about protecting children, then the fourth estate needs to focus its spotlight on those institutions with the greatest problems. In January of this year, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that one out of ten young people incarcerated in government-run detention facilities were sexually victimized by their guards during the single year of 2008. This represents 2,370 victims. Where was the Times report? And the number of sexual abuse victims in public schools dwarfs the problem in juvenile detention facilities.

The Times sued our Diocese to acquire privileged documents from court files so that it could re-publish stories of long settled sexual abuse cases that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet it ignores that since 1992 in Connecticut alone, 112 Connecticut public school teachers and coaches have lost their license to teach because of sexual contact with students; and since 2006, 19 foster parents paid by the State of Connecticut have been disciplined for sexually abusing the children in their care. Where’s the outrage and the calls for resignations? Having the Pope and the Catholic Church bear the entire blame of childhood sexual abuse may benefit the trial lawyers and serve the agenda of their media partners, but it does nothing to protect children today. Transferring billions from Catholic dioceses, religious orders, and their charitable and educational ministries in a time of economic crisis only creates new victims. It is time that Church-bashing give way to responsible reporting and even-handed public policy.