

Securing a Father's Foundations

In prayer with our Lenten group, I saw a flag pole waving an image of the Lamb of God; at a closer glance I could see its base had decomposed to the point that the pole began to waver then slammed to the ground, hurting many and scattering others. Last week, I revisited this vision of a predatory priest at a parish funeral of a middle-aged man, abused as a teen by a priest, who drank himself to death; his wife and kids are fighting hard not to abandon the Church altogether.

A priest's faulty foundation damages everyone. How much of a fault-line is same-sex attraction among the celibate priesthood? How does such attraction relate to clerical abuse? How can we best help priests with this foundational problem?

We can say that Catholic clerical abuse is unique in its contrast to other institutions as it is primarily a male problem. The Boston 'Spotlight' scandal and the aforementioned John Jay Report involved 78-85% male teens; a most recent study of clerical abuse came out last fall and includes both the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report from 2018 and the LA Times Survey of Homosexuality among Priests ('Is Clergy Sexual Abuse Relate to Homosexual Priests?' D. Paul Sullins: sullins@cua.edu, The Catholic University of America; published by The Ruth Institute, Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse, president.) The study found that 'the abuse of boys is very strongly related to the share of homosexual men in the priesthood...easier access to males among older victims was an enabling factor.'

Now a disclaimer: I distinguish persons (including priests) with same-sex attraction from men preying upon children. Most same-sex attracted men have no sexual history with minors.

However, the adult male sexuality of teens combined with their youthful vulnerability can be tempting to some men, especially in a culture of secrecy over one's attractions and a nearly male-only community of formation. Further, more than a few Catholic priests were abused as teens, a combustion of shame and lust that stalled development and can tempt one to furtive replays. F. Martel writes 'In the Closet of the Vatican' that 'the culture of secrecy needed to maintain the high prevalence of homosexuality in the Church has allowed abuse to be hidden and for predator's to act' (p. 93).

Faulty foundations. Add to this how the celibate requirement of the priesthood provides one with a seeming 'pass' from reckoning squarely with conflictual desires. No woman needed; no need to work out who one is in relation to her. I have witnessed many persons with same-sex attraction who assume a celibate 'call' rather than a mandate to look deeper at the meaning of their desires—an invitation to a fuller repentance unto spiritual maturity and sexual integration.

My friend Jim—a 6-year candidate for the priesthood--never thought he could be more than an abstaining, same-sex attracted celibate. He then considered: 'how can I authentically lay down natural fathering if I've never longed for a wife and family?' Through a healing community, he is

discovering who he is in relation to woman so he can decide with a whole-enough heart if God is calling him to natural or spiritual fatherhood.

The point should be clear: any priest seeking a secure foundation on which to spiritually father both men and women needs to work out his life as a sexual man in the light of Jesus and His healing community. That means knowing himself, growing in security and purity as a man through connectedness with other men, and learning the good rhythm of his need for the woman's gift. Clear and consistent growth in integration has never been more essential for the priesthood and for the integrity of Jesus' Church and His children.

Amid it all, I have high hopes for men with same-sex attraction who love Jesus and who committed to integration along with others who are equally committed to mastering their traditional idolatries (usually porn addiction). I highly recommend Drs. Kleponis and Fitzgibbons' 'The Distinction between Deep-Seated Homosexual Tendencies and Transitory Same-Sex Attractions in Candidates for Seminary and Religious Life.' Download this most important document, for it highlights what I have discovered after 40 years of pastoral ministry in this area: that the person, not the depth of his moral problem, determines his destiny.

Men who live in the light of truth—that God neither created them 'gay' nor saddled them with desires that cannot be mastered with incisive care and community—can 'transition' into the fathers of God's design. On the other hand, Catholic priests who insist that they are 'gay', that there is nothing to heal, and who seek to reinforce their queer natures with likeminded others are the 'deep-seated' ones--toxic influences who obscure the highway to holiness and make a crooked path for generations-to-come.

So we pray:

1. For an end to a culture of secrecy in all priestly and religious formation, for truthful and merciful onramps on which candidates can work out disordered desires, gender identity formation, childhood trauma, and sexual addiction.
2. For conscientious commitment to helping seminarians ensure that they are becoming mature expressions of their sexual gift and not fleeing sexual conflicts.
3. Hope for priests to overcome homosexuality through persistent repentance unto Jesus' expert care and community; admonition and discipline to fathers who advocate for LGBT 'selves' and invoke the authority of the Church to do so.

May we not protect the foundation of any priest built on sand. Yet we prayerfully honor and ask protection upon those fathers who in weakness have surrendered to the Rock. Long may their flags wave, upright and true!

Please take time to watch our new video and become '[Chaste Together](#).'