

moodyreport

Maine Murderer Takes the fall for Connecticut Priest?

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60 Years and Counting:

It was August 20, 1987. The Prosecution asked the Court to sentence 23-yr. old Jeffrey Libby to 50 years for murdering his grandfather in a fit of rage. The judge, now deceased, sentenced him to 60 years, saying, “There is nothing in this case that can be seen as a mitigating circumstance.” On April 23, 2010, the Maine Governor’s Board on Executive Clemency denied Libby’s petition for a clemency hearing despite a growing list of distinguished supporters.

Bureaucratic Fumble:

Guidelines for hearing a petition for commutation require that 50% of the sentence be served. Libby had served 24 years. Unknown to the Court at his sentencing but fully documented in the Petition to the Board on Executive Clemency was that Libby was sexually abused by a CT priest at ages 13 and 14.

Forensic reports from distinguished psychologists in Maine and Connecticut traced the sexual abuse to the murder 9 years later.

Libby is not in denial about his crime, nor is he asking for commutation. He sought only a clemency hearing 6 years earlier than permissible because of extenuating circumstances surrounding his case. The power to grant that hearing resided in the Governor of the State of Maine. John Baldacci, previous Governor and a practicing Catholic, was unsuccessfully petitioned by the Diocese of Portland to use his executive powers to grant that hearing.

Sexual Abuse in a Shroud of Silence:

Is sexual abuse a legitimate mitigating circumstance in a gruesome murder? More to the point, would the court in 1987 have recognized its impact without psychiatric testimony of the effects of clergy sexual abuse – data scarcely available at that time? Canon Lawyer, Thomas P. Doyle of Vienna, VA, makes a strong case for benevolent action on behalf of Jeff Libby.

For 26 years, Fr. Doyle has met with thousands of victims of clergy sexual abuse and has published 2 books and 10 scholarly articles on the causes and effects.

Among his assertions, taken by affidavit, was that “...Catholics have been taught that priests take the place of Jesus Christ. Because of this deeply ingrained belief, erroneous though it may be, youthful victims and their parents have regularly been paralyzed by fear and have remained silent about clergy sex abuse.”

Fr. Doyle reports that only approximately 35% of child/minor victims ever report the abuse, while the majority of victims are not able to report for 30 years after it takes place. The reason for this is that the victims are controlled by fear and shame – immobilized and paralyzed from speaking out.

On November 9, 2010, Fr. Doyle waded in on the Libby case after reviewing extensive documentation on his sexual abuse and on his petition for clemency. He questioned that the court would have been able in 1987 to understand the impact of the abuse without the massive amount of research that has been gathered since.

No Path for Healing:

Adolescent Psychiatry, a publication for the American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry and Analytic Press, published a study in 2004 of the effects of clergy sexual abuse on male victims. On average, male victims waited 18 years before seeking psychological or legal help. Of 26 males studied, 85% were clinically depressed, 88% were involved with substance abuse, 55% showed symptoms of suicidality, 54% showed signs of loss of spirituality, 73% showed symptoms of sexual dysfunction, including confusion over sexual orientation.

Rage is a common emotion experienced by men and boys who have been molested by clergy. Fantasies of killing their molesters, 50% of whom force themselves on their victims, routinely surfaced in the study. There is no path to healing for the victim.

Parents and relatives prefer to believe the church over the victims. In 1987, at the time of Libby's conviction, the church and the Vatican were spending fortunes defending themselves in court. Children taught to believe that a priest is God's emissary on earth attribute sexual abuse to a rejection by God and all other authority.

Libby, recently examined psychologically and found to be "well-adjusted, stable and ready for release," in 2009 settled his civil suit against the Connecticut Archdiocese. He is now serving a just sentence for his crime. Is he, however, serving additional time for a priest who was not prosecuted? Is the State of Maine complicit in the abuse for failure to factor in so heinous a mitigating circumstance?

To Whom Can They Turn?

We who profess Jesus Christ as Lord too often defer to the state as the arbiter of such pressing social justice matters that have been raised by Jeff Libby. If the Church of Jesus Christ, however, has a history of covering for its pastors, and it indeed does, where can those turn who find themselves beneath the wheel of our criminal justice system?

Columbia Street Baptist Church is recognizing the need to give voice to the voiceless. In the fall of 2014, the building at 45 Columbia St. will become a Christian Center for Human Justice – "The Columbia Street Project: *Where Faith Gets Down to Business.*" We will be prospecting for partners who will work alongside CSBC to empower those who elect to do so to rise above their circumstances.

Please pray that God will lead us to the right candidates for partnership and will grant us wisdom.

Sources:

- Thomas P. Doyle, Affidavit, Diocese of Davenport, May 24, 2004
- Ponton, Lynn, Goldstein & Dana, "Sexual Abuse of Boys By Clergy," *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2004