Responses to the Sexual Abuse Crisis and the Problem of Cover up

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Archbishop Vigano’s accusations of a cover-up by the Pope Francis and other members of the hierarchy of Archbishop McCarrick’s sexual abuse of minors, seminarians and adults require answers. McCarrick’s restoration to ministry and his inexplicable influence have not been explained and his file in the Congregation for Bishops has not been revealed.

Instead, intensely angry comments have been directed against Archbishop Vigano and a noticeable stonewalling has occurred.

In contrast to the Vatican position of non-response to the totally credible McCarrick cover-up accusations, I will answer the recent Crux allegations against the late Fr. John Harvey, O.S.F.S., the founder of the international apostolate for those with same sex attractions, against Courage and against me.

Crux has recently made allegations that Rev. John Harvey, O.S.F.S. and I participated in the cover-up of priest abusers. The article stated, “the cover-up and abuse of minors and knowingly transferring offending priests rather than removing them from ministry in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were decisions that relied upon methods taught by Fitzgibbons and Harvey.” Courage founder pushed bishops to resist zero tolerance on abuse

The author of the article never contacted me to verify the accuracy of any of his information. I have written to the editor of Crux, John Allen, and the author, Christopher White, and requested a retraction of their false accusations.

The following assertions are inaccurate and completely false. Foremost of these false accusations is that the cover-up and abuse of minors in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and knowingly transferring offending priests rather than removing them from ministry were decisions that relied upon methods taught by Fitzgibbons and Harvey.

This allegation is absolutely unfounded. It is also incomprehensible, as it is well known that Fr. Harvey and I have worked for decades to help priests lead chaste lives.

Abuse of Minors

In the mid 80s, before the crisis fully emerged, Fr. Harvey and I gave two conferences with required attendance to approximately 300 diocesan priests on the topic of homosexuality.
Fr. Harvey spoke as always about the importance of the virtue of chastity in addressing sexual temptations and its vital role in his international Courage program for those with same sex attractions.

I addressed the psychological conflicts that result in adult vulnerability to same sex attractions in priests. These include sexual abuse victimization in childhood, loneliness and weaknesses in male confidence and unresolved anger. They also include severe selfishness, narcissism, which leads to a belief that one is permitted to use others as sexual objects. I also spoke about effective responses to these conflicts.

Fr. Harvey’s work with priests as a moral theologian is well known for communicating the fullness of the Church’s truth on sexual morality to priests and encouraging growth in the virtue of chastity. His spiritual direction and retreats to priests with SSA were famous. His writing and his conferences addressed the spiritual problems that made priests vulnerable to homosexual acting-out. His work thereby protected youth from being abused.

My professional work of treating priests with unwanted SSA, in giving conferences in dioceses and seminaries and to the spiritual directors of American and Canadian seminaries has also helped priests and seminarians lead chaste lives. So have my writings on how psychological conflicts can be mitigated, allowing priests and seminarians to avoid making sexual mistakes. There are many priests who can vouch for this approach.

**Cover-up**

As a psychiatrist, I have always attempted to uncover and address, not cover-up, the serious psychological and spiritual conflicts that predispose priests to engage in homosexual behaviors.

In a 2002 in an article in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* on the crisis, titled Letter to Bishops, I wrote:

“Our experience over 25 years has convinced us of the direct link between rebellion and anger against the Church's teaching, and sexually promiscuous behaviors. This appears to be a two-way street: those who are sexually active dissent from the Church's teaching on sexuality to justify their own actions, while those who adopt rebellious ideas on sexual morality are more vulnerable to becoming sexually active, because they have little to no defense against sexual temptations. Growth in forgiveness and growth in humility are essential in the treatment of such priests.

Finally, priests should be screened for homosexuality by their bishops or religious superiors prior to being considered for a position of responsibility in a diocese, religious community or in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The previous attitude of "winking" at homosexuality in priests must end. Otherwise, all Church teaching on sexual morality is undermined. Also, complaints by priests of aggressive homosexual behavior
in rectories and religious communities must be addressed and no longer ignored.” Letter to Bishops (on the crisis)

It is important to note cover-up of the true origins of the priestly sexual abuse crisis began immediately after the release of the first John Jay Report (2004). As we know, the John Jay College study on the crisis revealed that 81% of the victims were males and 76% were adolescent males.

However, the USCCB falsely labeled the problem as pedophilia, not homosexuality. Laity was led to believe that this differed from homosexuality. I am convinced that the powerful influence of Archbishop McCarrick at the USCCB played a major role in that crucial misdiagnosis, which was a mega-cover up, leading attention away from the true problem.

Significantly, Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, and a member of the national review board, declared in the November 13, 2005 issue of the National Catholic Register that the John Jay study had revealed a crisis of “homosexual predation on American Catholic youth.”

The data from the first John Jay Report clearly identified the need for an immediate program to help priests grow in chastity in order to protect them from sexually acting-out and abusing minors. Fr. Harvey’s Courage program should have been used then and expanded for online education for priests and bishops so as to prevent further abuse.

The post crisis programs failed to address the primary causes of the crisis of the rejection of the Church’s teaching on sexual morality that contributed to homosexual predation of youth and psychological conflicts, especially narcissism.

The second cover-up of the true causes resulted from the USCCB’s request of a further analysis of the initial data. That data had clearly identified the victims as adolescent males. This request should not have been made to criminologists but to psychiatrists and psychologists who would have more understanding of grooming behaviors and sexual predation of minors.

Sure enough, the cover-up continued when the The Causes and Context study (2011) by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice concluded that the childhood and adolescent sexual abuse committed by clergy was unrelated to homosexuality.

Instead, they identified the predation and abuse of adolescent males, the primary victims in the crisis, as a crime of opportunity or availability, similar to that which occurs in prison populations. Here too, one sees the influence of Archbishop McCarrick and leaders at the USCCB who think as he does, deflecting the problem away from homosexuality.

In 2011 at the National Catholic Bioethics Center conference for Bishops, attended by Cardinals Wuerl and O’Malley, I gave a conference on “Same Sex Attraction and the
Right to Informed Consent.” In this talk the same criticism of the attempted cover-up of the John Jay data was given and the need an analysis by competent mental health professionals was urged.

The third major cover-up has occurred in the midst of the new international crisis of sexual abuse in Church with the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report. This report identified the origins of the sexual harassment of youth citing the data that 73% of the victims were subjected to homosexual predation.

Pope Francis avoided citing the data from Pennsylvania on the homosexual predation of youth and instead on August 20, 2018, stated that “clericalism” was the root cause of the sex abuse crisis in Pennsylvania. He stated:

“Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”


My August 2011 article in the Catholic Medical Association’s Linacre Quarterly issue on the crisis in the Church made a strong recommendation that priests and seminarians with deep-seated homosexual tendencies had a grave responsibility to protect adolescent males, the primary victims, and other youth from abuse. And this should be done by their recognizing their responsibility to pursue spiritual direction and appropriate treatment.

Sexual Abuse by Clergy

Transfers and return to ministry

Contrary to the allegations in the Crux article, no member of the hierarchy or vicar for clergy office has ever consulted with me about transferring a priest who abused a minor.

The priests that I treated who abused minors had previously been hospitalized at a Church related psychiatric hospital and were removed from ministry with one exception. I did treat one priest who abused a minor while in treatment with me who was then immediately removed from ministry. His ministry was never restored.
Prior to 1990 there was a belief in the mental health field that recovery could be possible for some sexual predators of youth. However, the thinking completely changed as the result of several studies that demonstrated a roughly a 90% rate of relapse. That influenced the Church’s response to abuse and priests were then laicized.

Prior to 1990, in some dioceses and congregations, priests who abused were allowed to live a prayer and penance programs.

**Chief Influencer of Courage**

Another false accusation, although flattering, was I was a “chief influencer” of Fr. Harvey’s Courage program. This program is a highly effective 14-step spiritual program, modeled after the successful AA program. The founders of AA did not rely upon mental health professionals to develop their 12-step recovery program, neither did Fr. Harvey for his strongly spiritual Courage program with its focus on leading chaste lives, chaste friendships and friendship with the Lord.

When I met Father Harvey, in 1979, the Courage program was fully operational. Fr. Harvey never asked my opinion about the weekly Courage program. I thanked him often regarding its benefits for those with unwanted SSA.

Another totally false allegation in *Crux* is that Fr. Harvey relied heavily upon me along with other like-minded individuals such as Dr. John Money and Dr. John Kinane, who allegedly shaped his thought and practice on how to handle priests with a history of abuse. This is completely untrue.

I have no memory of Fr. Harvey discussing with me his thinking about any priest who had been involved in the homosexual abuse of a minor. I have no knowledge of the thinking of Drs. Money and Kinane, but, again prior to 1990, there was a belief in the mental health field that certain abusers of minors might benefit from treatment.

**Forgiveness not Trust**

Regarding the use of forgiveness with abusive patients, the priests whom I treated who abused minors and who no longer had priestly ministry were often themselves victims of emotional, physical or sexual abuse when young. The use of forgiveness therapy in them helped them decrease their sadness, anger and low self-esteem.

The resolution of emotional pain in abusers, in part through, forgiveness should not result in a decision to trust the abuser. A common misconception of forgiveness therapy is that it is associated with a restoration of trust in an abuser/offender. It is not. One can forgive an abuser or offender but at the same time not trust him. A decrease in the abuser’s psychological conflicts does not mean that he should ever be trusted with priestly ministry again.
Another example of the benefits of forgiveness is that of its use in dealing with the intense anger felt by laity, priests and bishops toward Archbishop McCarrick and those who clearly enabled him in the USCCB and in the Vatican. Forgiving them decreases the intense anger, sadness, and mistrust in laity as well as in priests and Bishops. It also decreases the numerous psychological and physical symptoms such emotional pain can cause. However, forgiveness does not mean ever trusting McCarrick again or those who have enabled him.

In fact, the practice of forgiveness enhances the virtue of justice, which requires that Bishops who enabled McCarrick and thereby endangered youth, seminarians and adults should resign. This is the healthy and sensible response.

**Philadelphia priests previously found innocent**

I did criticize the process of the evaluation of the 21 Philadelphia priests removed from ministry. Most of these were previously evaluated and found to be innocent of the accusations against them. I was particularly concerned about what appeared to be the lack of knowledge of the psychological science related to false accusations. This led to a failure to explore the background of the accuser. [Abuse Accusations - True, False and Truthy](https://www.hprweb.com/2015/01/accusations-against-priests/)

The basis of my more in-depth criticism was that the mental health evaluators of the priests were chosen by the District Attorney and that a major testing measure was used, the Abel Screening Measure, which has not been proven to be reliable or valid, except perhaps for recidivistic criminals. [The Evaluation of Accusations and the Abel Assessment for Sexual Interest](https://www.hprweb.com/2015/01/accusations-against-priests/)

The interpretation of the Abel regarding one priest, who was previously found to be innocent and who lived a chaste life as a priest, produced a diagnosis about conflicts with youth that has never existed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals in psychiatry.

I have often wondered how many other of the Philadelphia priests, previously evaluated and found innocent, were instead found guilty because of the Abel Screening Measure’s unreliable findings. [The Evaluation of Accusations and the Abel Assessment for Sexual Interest](https://www.hprweb.com/2015/01/accusations-against-priests/)

The district attorney, Seth Williams, who planned those evaluations was sentenced in 2017 to five years in prison for accepting a bribe and was disbarred.

The claim that even up until 2011, Fitzgibbons continued to play a role in advocating for the return of abusive priests is blatantly untrue. Again, I never worked with an offending priest who returned to ministry.

I did advocate for the priest who was given a diagnosis that has never existed by a psychologist chosen by the DA. Within a reasonable degree of medical certainty, I believed and continue to believe that the accusations against this priest were false and if
he would have been able to have an unbiased evaluation, the diagnosis that swayed the review board would have never been offered, as this diagnosis does not exist.

**Injustice to Priests**

Cardinal Rigali’s agreement to allow the accused priests to be evaluated by mental health professionals who worked closely with the District Attorney’s office was a grave injustice. The priests should have been evaluated by competent mental health professionals using measures with proven reliability and validity, rather than those with a history of working with the DA’s office.

The Abel Screening Measure should not be used in the evaluation of risk in priests until it is thoroughly evaluated by qualified mental health professionals.

**Pornography**

Regarding an allegation that I did not identify severe sexual conflicts in a priest, a CD of photographs taken by the priest, who was out of priestly ministry when I worked with him, was sent to me by the Diocese. The disc that was sent to me had no pornography nor nudity. I did not see hundreds of photos of young girls as was later reported. When I later learned of the kind and the number of photographs, I concluded that I was sent a highly edited version. Had I seen the pornography described I would have notified the FBI and the Bishop.

**Response to the International Crisis of Sexual Abuse**

In my professional opinion, the Courage Apostolate for priests and seminarians should be recommended and developed for international internet use as soon as possible. Growth in living the virtue of chastity and in teaching and living the Church’s truth regarding sexual morality has more potential to help priests lead chaste lives and to protect youth, seminarians and adults from further abuse than any other program in the Church.

Also, with all due respect, Pope Francis should acknowledge the data in the John Jay Report and the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report and cease covering-up the truth about the origins of the sexual abuse crisis by blaming clericalism. The Pope should acknowledge that the worldwide sexual abuse crisis in the Church is caused by clerical homosexual predation. A logical response: encourage priests and seminarians to lead chaste lives.

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