

Priest Pedophiles – Manichaeian Candidates?

by Greg McAllister

As a Catholic seminarian back in the early '60s, I knew several young men who would later be accused of pedophilia. Some of them were loners, some gregarious; some were effeminate, some macho; some were eggheads, others jocks, some neither. They wore no scarlet letter alerting us to their latent tendencies.

When the pedophilia crisis exploded in 2002, the future head of the Bishops' Conference self-righteously characterized the abusers as "moral monsters," and implied homosexuality was to blame.

More recently, the Vatican has tried to place the blame on seminaries, claiming they have become too lax in their discipline, too negligent in their psychological screening processes, and too tolerant of homosexuality. The media is now blaming the hierarchy, with good grounds, since we now know that, back in 2001, the bishops of the Catholic Church were given direct orders by then-Cardinal Ratzinger to keep abuse cases secret, effectively shielding them from prosecution in civil courts.

Whether one blames the individual abusers, the seminary faculty, or the hierarchy who protected their underlings, we are still missing a critical piece of the puzzle.

The one thing all priest pedophiles had in common was the training they received in their formative years, most of them, since, in keeping with canon law, most entered the seminary 'in their tender years,' i.e., right out of the eighth grade. This was the age when they were most susceptible to mental conditioning. Though we usually associate propaganda with Hitler's Germany, the Catholic Church was the first institution to use the term outside a farming context. Their Office of *Propaganda Fidei* (The Propagation of the Faith), founded in 1622, had developed basic mind-control techniques for spreading the faith long before the Fuehrer adapted them to his political agenda.

1. Isolate the individual
2. Break down his ego by highlighting his weaknesses and guilt
3. Offer him salvation through an external structure
4. Give him a new status as a faithful member of that structure

When I entered the seminary 50 years ago, these techniques formed the backbone of our training. I was 16 when I entered. Most of my classmates had entered two years earlier, at 14. From the moment we walked in, every minute of the day was spelled out for us by a document called /The Rule/. There were specified times to study, to eat, to pray, to exercise, to talk, and to sleep. In between, there were long periods of silence.

In many ways, it was a sensory deprivation program. We were not allowed to listen to the radio, watch TV, or read magazines and newspapers. We weren't allowed to leave the campus, except for a monthly group walk into a nearby town. Once there, we were not allowed to go into restaurants or buy magazines at the drug store. We were only allowed to read books that had been approved by the faculty. All our mail was censored, incoming and outgoing.

Our personal relationships were closely monitored. Any contact with the opposite sex was strictly forbidden and even close (/particular/) friendships with other seminarians were discouraged. The Rule contained ominous warnings against these "amicitia inimica" ("hostile friendships")/ /and encouraged us to always congregate in groups of three or more. We were not allowed to enter each other's rooms, and if our foot so much as crossed another's threshold, we would be immediately expelled.

Having thus isolated us, our faculty advisors and confessors constantly reminded us that the Devil was always lurking, tempting us to pride, disobedience, and, especially, 'sins of the flesh'.

A retreat master once suggested to us that we should resist masturbation by sleeping on our stomachs with our rosary beads under our genitals. Later, when we studied Biology, our anatomical dummy was missing its genitals. We never saw those genitals until, four years later (after we had taken the vow of celibacy), they were delivered in a brown paper bag as props for a lecture, in Latin, on sexuality.

We learned from St. Augustine that we had been born sinners, cursed by Adam's Original Sin that was passed from generation to generation through the act of intercourse. This was the core message of our programming, that we were fractured beings in a dualistic world where the body was inherently evil and the spirit good.

Augustine's message had its origins in the dualistic apocalyptic teachings of St. Paul and was codified by the early Manichaeans, followers of the Persian prophet Mani, who described the struggle of this dualistic world.

The implications of the message were stark. Only by denying our bodily desires could we achieve holiness. No girls, no sex, no emotional intimacy. We had to die to the self to become warriors of Christ.

The only way to die to the self was by humble obedience to our superiors and slavish adherence to The Rule. "A superior may err in commanding, but you can never err in obeying."

The Rule spelled out everything for us, and no one questioned it in those pre-Vatican Council days. Some of the more daring might commit minor infractions occasionally, often with a sly wink from their superiors, but no one took issue with the underlying ideology.

Once a week we met with our confessors and revealed to them any of our wayward thoughts or transgressions. We were also encouraged to practice fraternal correction by reporting to them any immoral deeds of our colleagues.

If we proved ourselves obedient and pliable, we were deemed worthy to advance up the ladder of sacred orders – porter, lector, acolyte, exorcist, subdeacon, deacon, and finally, priest. If not, we were "clipped," refused orders for that year.

This was a warning to shape up or be expelled. Expulsion was shrouded in guilt. When our classmates or friends were expelled, we never got to say goodbye. They'd be called up to see the rector and we'd never see them again. We'd walk past their room that night and it would be empty.

We embraced this harsh seminary program as our initiation rite into an intriguing and mysterious hierarchy of desensitized maleness, and we eagerly passed the traditions down to our younger colleagues with pubescent fervor.

We were, after all, the chosen ones, the /Other Christs/ whose words and actions would soon have otherworldly, sacramental power. We were apart from the world, but superior to it, and our Spartan denial of self only inflated our other, priestly persona. We wore the Roman collar with authority. Our narcissism was conveniently invisible to us.

In the 60s and 70s, things began to unravel. Pope John XXIII convened the Vatican Council and questions began to be asked. The answers weren't always adequate and many of us got frustrated and left.

We found ourselves faced with the huge task of deprogramming ourselves from deep seminary imprints. We found partners to help us in the task, wives or lovers who gave us useful feedback on unfounded assumptions or inappropriate expectations. We got jobs where our priestly status counted for nothing and our narcissism gradually deflated. We learned to function without congregational response.

Our remaining classmates went on to the priesthood, carrying their seminary programming with them. Some of them later reconsidered their decision and left the priesthood. The others persisted, determined to be faithful to their vows of obedience and celibacy.

The trigger would come 20 or 30 years later.

Perhaps it was the loneliness of clerical life, especially after the exodus of so many classmates and friends. The desire for companionship and intimacy welled up. But the priest was still locked emotionally at age 15, and these insistent adolescent urges were unfamiliar.

The Manichaeian imprint was still there, darkly closeting such urges as evil, precluding any frank admission of sexual and emotional needs. The priest didn't have close friends he could talk to about such matters.

And who was most available to him in the parish? Altar boys. Young men the same emotional age he was.

The priest reached out blindly, perhaps rationalizing this mysterious connection as a form of initiation or spiritual counseling. If his conscience resisted, perhaps a separate persona broke off, a rogue personality unknown to his consciousness. Maybe later he wouldn't even remember that other personality. In that case, the accused priest's denial would be honest, even though untrue.

Obviously, I have no idea how often this scenario actually happens. It's hypothetical, my attempt to bring compassion and justice to a situation that I feel is still not being adequately addressed.

Indict the leaders of the Church, yes. They are definitely guilty of obstructing justice.

In the process, though, remember that "they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). They were programmed by the same system. They have the same developmental limitations as the perpetrators. None of them have wives or lovers to straighten them out. None of them have kids to

teach them parent lessons. They have no more awareness of their own Manichaean candidacy than the fish does of water. They can't fix what they don't understand.

And indict the perpetrators, yes. Justice and transparency must prevail. But do so with compassion, knowing that there, but for the grace of God, go any of us who submitted as children to that cobbled mishmash of Paul, Mani, Constantine, and Augustine, and mistook it for the message of Jesus.

Thomas Aquinas said that man never chooses evil as evil, but rather always under the guise of good. Repression generates many disguises for good. Guilt rationalizes their validity.

So indict the guilty. But for God's sake, take a close look at the core program behind it all, the repressive coding waiting to be triggered in any true-believing Manichaean Candidate.

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