

## **"Welcome to Wittenberg"**

**Richard Sipe is one of the prophetic voices in the long struggle for the Church to face truth squarely.**

**The New Yorker recently quoted from a Sipe speech in 1992. The address was titled "Welcome to Wittenberg."**

### **TRANSFORMATION & REFORM**

Is reform possible? An alcoholic problem is not cured by merely giving up drinking. What is needed? A spiritual transformation that progressively takes full responsibility for one's actions and their consequences, reevaluates relationships, and institutes a new way of life and being...there are fourteen facts (truths) in the area of its celibate/sexual practice that the Church must face to reform (transform) itself.

1. Sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy is a long-standing problem. Besides the historical accounts in Lea and Boswell we have cases on U.S. file from 1908 through 1917 and consistently from the 1930s through the 1980s.
2. The phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors is a worldwide problem among Roman Catholic clergy. It is every bit as prevalent in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and in Boston as it is in Chicago. Europe and England are ten years behind the United States in bringing the problem to public attention.
3. When the whole story of sexual abuse by presumed celibate clergy is told, it will lead to the highest corridors of Vatican City.
4. Sexual abuse of children is part of a larger pattern of sexual

involvement by priests with others—adult women and men. Although the latter is not illegal, it is still marked in many cases by moral negligence, abuse, and is tolerated by ecclesiastical authority.

5. Seminary training does not prepare clergy for celibate/sexual reality. Seminary training produces many psychosexually impaired and retarded priests whose level of adjustment is adolescent at best. This tends to create a psychic and moral field and situation in which immature liaisons with young children not only become more possible but are psychosexually over-determined because children are actually on a developmental par with these men.

6. The celibate/sexual system which surrounds clerical culture fosters and often rewards psychosexual immaturity.

7. The homo-social system of the hierarchy which excludes women categorically from decision making and power at the same time that it glorifies exclusively the roles of virgin and mother creates a psychological structure that reinforces male psychosexual immaturity and malformation.

8. A significantly larger proportion of the clergy has a homosexual orientation than does the general population. This has always been the case and is due in part to natural sexual biodiversity and the high genetic correlation between homosexual orientation and the altruistic drive.

9. By refusing to deal honestly with the reality of homosexuality in the clerical state (and in general), Catholic teaching fosters self-alienation of its clergy and encourages and enables identity confusion, sexual acting out, and moral duplicity.

10. The Catholic moral teaching on sexuality is based on a patently

false anthropology that renders magisterial pronouncement non-credible. ("Every sexual thought, word, desire, and action outside marriage is mortally sinful. Every sexual act within marriage not open to procreation is mortally sinful. In sexual matters there is no paucity of matter.")

11. Clergy deprived of a moral doctrine in which they can believe are also deprived of moral guidance and leadership in their own lives and behavior. Sexually, priests and the hierarchy resort to denial, rationalization, and splitting in dealing with their own sexual behavior and that of their colleagues. With the laity they often apply the full wrath of the "law" (including the threat of hell).

12. The hierarchy cannot claim ignorance of the sexual practices of their own-themselves and their fellow-priests-and at the same time assert that they are credible and authoritative sources of leadership in sexual morality for the laity.

13. The hierarchy cannot use the psychiatric system to deal with the problems of sexual abuse-whether with children, with adult women or with adult males-and sidestep their personal and corporate roles as enablers.

14. Child abuse by clergy, the tip of the iceberg so painfully visible today, does not stand on its own. Removing it from view will not solve the crisis. Difficult as it is to accept, we are certain that the hierarchical and power structures beneath the surface are part of a secret world that supports abuse. These hidden forces are far more dangerous to the sexual health and welfare of Christ's Church than those that we can already see.

Conclusion

Only a thoroughgoing reform of the celibate/sexual structure of the Church will really address the problem of sexual abuse. Sexual reform of the clergy is the most significant challenge that the priesthood has faced since the Protestant Reformation. Only a transformation similar to the sixteenth-century Reformation—only a penetrating reevaluation and reform of the clergy—will meet the current sexual crisis.

There are those voices within the Church that are still ignoring the celibate/sexual reality. These voices reinforce denial and avoidance. They want to strike up the band of public relations and secretly rearrange the deck chairs. Someone has to tell them that they have booked passage on the sexual Titanic.

Jesus Christ is not on the Titanic; He is where He always is to be found—with His suffering people in the small lifeboats, tossed and buffeted by storms. In our fear and terror He may seem to be asleep; we and He may seem powerless. Have peace; our power is in Truth, and that is far more secure and trustworthy than any sleek and supposedly unsinkable vessel. I hope you derive a modicum of consolation from the light of truth you have shed by your witness. It stands as a warning of danger and also a guide to safe harbor for all.