

But What About the *Lay* Abusers?

One word of truth will shake the whole world.
- *Solzhenitsyn*

If the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly. - *Aquinas*

On May 23, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, of Australia's Canberra-Goulburn see, issued a Pentecostal Pastoral Letter about priestly sex abuse. It was all that faithful Australian Catholics expect from the average postconciliar diocese, and, alas, all that we get. With an uncontroversial Biblical quote here, and a politically correct reference to indigenous peoples there, the letter took 4,150 words to say what could have been said in four: "I feel your pain." As a guide to what in most local episcopates is endearingly mistaken for thinking, it has symptomatic interest. As a policy document it is largely worthless, however sincere.

Not the least offensive aspect of its predominant worthlessness is the automatic equation of sex abuse with Holy Orders. This is precisely what the mass media (and only fools pretend that anything except terror of the mass media now drives antipodean Catholic policy) want. Father O'Sullivan the Rock-Spider will always make it to the newspapers' Page One. So will Father O'Sullivan the merely ostensible Rock-Spider, since the copious proofs offered by, among other researchers, Protestant professor Philip Jenkins – demonstrating that Catholic priests actually have a below-average homoerotic criminality rate – are no match for yahoos lust after Catholic blood.

But what about Australia's *lay* Catholic sex criminals? I don't mean the silly young Mauve Mafioso whose Catholic consciousness is limited to prancing in full pontifical gear, up and down the nave, for the Solemn Feast of Saint Somebody. Instead, I mean chronologically mature lay adults who attain dictatorial influence within Catholic bureaucracies, while depending on Australia's neo-Stalinist libel laws to squelch public discussion of the fact that their morality smells like rotting meat. The case of psychotherapist, polemicist, and archiepiscopal consultant Ronald Conway might have relevance. (Spoiler alert: I deliberately refused the chance to meet Conway, having been told allegations about his presidential approaches towards single males, however unattractive.)

Conway died in March 2009, aged 81, and received a grand send-off at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne. That city's Archbishop Denis Hart (installed only after Conway's retirement) devoted special effort to extolling Conway's relations with his patients. His Grace proclaimed: "We shall never know how much following up he [Conway] did with these people – in some cases, over many years."

Your Grace, with all the respect that is due to your office, some folk *do* know. Even in Conway's lifetime his propensity for cohabiting with male ex-patients aroused comment. Had he been a psychiatrist he could theoretically have been disbarred for such cohabiting. (Admittedly, this is *de facto* doubtful, since decades lapsed before Sydney psychiatrist Harry Bailey got brought to book for outright serial manslaughter; and even then Bailey avoided jail by taking, in 1985, his own life). But Conway was never a psychiatrist. He was a trained schoolteacher, specializing in English, whose undergraduate subjects had included psychology. In Melbourne, and in the state of Victoria as a whole, anyone can legally hang out a shingle and call himself a "therapist". Conway's "therapy" simultaneously included individual practice, Catholic health practice, and the private clinic field.

This last atelier included Melbourne's defunct (since 1992) Newhaven Hospital, cash-cow for Anne Hamilton-

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Byrne, leader of the "Family" cult whose compulsorily peroxide-blond children attained nationwide freak-of-the-week status when police raided the cult's headquarters in 1987. "Family" membership intake included mandatory LSD ingestion; but Conway, while not part of the Family himself, can have had no quarrel with this. His own autobiography (*Conway's Way*, 1988) praises LSD – still legal in Victoria during the 1960s – for therapeutic reasons.

Far better known than his autobiography was his purported analysis of Australian culture: *The Great Australian Stupor* (1971), which generated sequels, notably *The Land of the Long Weekend* (1978), and *The End of Stupor?* (1984). Re-reading these once-famous texts, one finds three characteristics above all. First, a certain epigrammatic, alliterative spite (he taxed Sydney's archdiocese, during the 1940-1971 tenure of Cardinal Sir Norman Gilroy, with having "little else on its pontifical [*sic*] mind but raffles and rosaries"). Second, undisguised resentment of ordinary heterosexual marriage. Third, a reliance on impressionistic comment and literary allusion, drenched in Freudianism, with utter contempt for either hard evidence or logic. Because this contempt is shared in extreme form by most of what passes for Australia's intellectual community, it did Conway no harm whatsoever.

When Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* (1968), Conway naturally sided with the traitors. That a mere Vicar of Christ should order around a sensitive caring therapist he found unthinkable. Despite this, Conway – never a Communist adherent – long supported on tactical grounds B. A. Santamaria's anti-Communist National Civic Council (N.C.C.), only to subject Mr. Santamaria and the N.C.C. to squalid abuse in the December 1990 issue of the monthly magazine *Quadrant*. He combined this last attack (which included, almost unbelievably, accusing Mr. Santamaria of pro-Ceausescu sympathies) with open defiance of *de fide* Catholic prohibitions on contraceptives.

And yet Mr. Santamaria – always charitable to, and beyond, the point of masochism – continued permitting for Conway's verbiage a forum in the N.C.C. publication *News Weekly*, riding out the private protests he received when Conway appeared (*NW*, July 2, 1994) to be defending suicide. This quasi-defense had been inspired by the news that Sydney philosopher David Stove had hanged himself; Conway obviously found unparadoxical having his own intellectual credibility as a Freudian sliced and diced (*Quadrant*, January-February 1989) by Professor Stove's cruel pen.

No-one who, like myself, came to know Mr. Santamaria personally will imagine that he was likely for a moment to suspect Conway's darker secrets. An E-mail to me on June 7 by Mr. Santamaria's N.C.C. successor (and fellow Catholic), Peter Westmore, formally confirmed this. I have not been granted permission to quote this private message's exact wording, but I can say that I have dealt with Mr. Westmore for almost 20 years, on and off, and have found him to be unfailingly decent.

It is unclear why the still-heterodox Conway remained not solely as an archdiocesan marriage-tribunal adviser, but as an "expert" for vetting the suitability to the priesthood of aspiring candidates. These appointments are comparable to making Mao a Taiwanese public-relations flack, or giving Himmler his own synagogue. The only two persons who could have told us definitively how Conway obtained and kept his roles – Archbishop James Knox (reigned 1967-1974) and Archbishop Sir Francis Little (reigned 1974-1996) – have both now gone to their Particular Judgment. Perhaps no other condom-championing LSD advocate except Conway had passed the preliminary interview stage.

Fortunately Mr. Santamaria (who died in 1998) would, if still alive, have had no hesitation about freezing out Conway over recent Catholic announcements (on *Clerical Whispers*, a mostly orthodox website devoted largely to Irish news items, on May 13) that Conway – I can hardly write this without spewing – had sexually abused [more graphic term removed by Remnant editor] certain male

patients. From Paul Collins, Brian Coyne, and other progressive lay theologians in Australia, there has emerged not the smallest attempt to deny this appalling charge, or the lesser homosexual charges. Coyne, on the liberal website *Catholica*, expresses his sense of betrayal: "I knew Ronald Conway well as a friend." Those who have the good fortune not to be progressives will marvel at the voicing of such anguish. So Conway not only preached sexual revolution but practiced it: why, exactly, are we meant to be surprised at this?

Normally when homosexual acts are deplored, all Australia's usual overtly pagan or simply cafeteria-Catholic suspects rush to laud them, renewing their media screams from one end of the nation to the other: "Homophobe! Homophobe! Anyone who censures homosexuality is a homophobe!". Where are these suspects in the Conway case? Missing in action, that's where.

Why did Conway not leave a Church whose teachings he conspicuously despised? Money cannot have been an object, since on occasion he waived clients' fees. He was no simple swindler, like the late and demoniac Marcial Maciel, who saw where the chances for specie and for undetected bisexual ruttage could be found, and helped himself accordingly. Perhaps Conway genuinely believed, in his twisted style, that he was aiding Church reform. A more sinister interpretation is that he wanted to wreck Catholicism from within. The answer to that question is in the Lord's hands.

No reader, incidentally, should make the mistake of assuming that Conway's sins resulted from any failure of intelligence. He had abundant brain-power. But if this is where brain-power leads, many of us will find ourselves echoing P.J. O'Rourke's expression of gratitude: "Thank you, God, for making me dumb."

For Conway, the best possible epitaph appears to be a passage from Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), the ex-Mason turned great Catholic controversialist. "This," he reports someone saying, "is an abyss in which it is better not to look." De Maistre's sad reply: "My good friend, we are not free not to look."

What of the immediate future? Possibly Archbishop Hart – following a recent editorial suggestion, concerning other scandals, in Canberra's Catholic periodical *Oriens* – would like to assess his own cathedral's supply of sackcloth and ashes. Or possibly we should depart this scene by citing Federal Opposition Leader (and former seminarian), Tony Abbott, who in *The Australian* on March 21, 2009, called Conway not only "a prophet who should be much honored in his own country", but a "philosopher of hope and truth."

Well may we ask what more Conway would have needed to do for Abbott to call him a philosopher of nihilism and lies. The current revelations show, if confirmation were needed, that between Catholicism and Conwayism no middle ground can exist.

On July 1, 2010, Archbishop Hart released his own pastoral letter on clerical sex abuse, copies of which he made available to every parish in Melbourne. The letter is about as near to donning sackcloth and ashes as any Australian prelate is likely to come: which is to say, not very near at all. Long on Oprah-type hand-wringing ("this is one of the saddest times of my 43 years in the Catholic priesthood"), and irrelevant statistics ("We have [in Victoria] 11 hospitals, 63 aged care residential facilities and 16 children's welfare facilities"), Archbishop Hart's document not only leaves the Conway matter unmentioned, but nowhere dares to use the term "homosexual". In short, nothing has changed.

Except in the matter of a Congregationalist legislator – Reverend Fred Nile, of the New South Wales parliament's upper house – who, upon being told about Conway's behavior, retracted in writing every word he had once publicly said in Conway's praise. Why, when a Protestant clergyman can demonstrate enough humility to recant his previous ill-informed views on the subject, can no Catholic leader bring himself to do so?

St. Michael the Archangel, Defend Us In Battle!

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