

by Philip Jenkins

Of Priests and Peducators

Over the past decade, I have been involved in public debate over the problem of sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and that experience has taught me a great deal about the way people come to understand—or, rather, misunderstand—social problems. My point is simple enough. While some priests have undoubtedly been abusive, and a few have been criminal predators of the first order, there is no evidence that Catholic clergy are more likely than any other social group to abuse children. At many times, my position has been desperately unpopular because it runs flat contrary to what “everyone knows,” which is that the priesthood is seething with perversion and pedophilia. But how exactly does “everyone know” this? Nobody is claiming to have a detailed comparative chart of abuse rates in different professions, on which priests soar off the charts. People believe in the evil nature of the priesthood because they hear so much about those wrongs, while they hear very little about other horrors committed by other groups, religious or secular. What I have tried to explain is that what we hear about a given group, and what the media report, depends largely on how people expect that group to behave—in other words, on our assumptions, our prejudices.

This issue of expectation is critical. Imagine a hypothetical series of events in which some other group might be labeled similarly as real or potential abusers. For the sake of argument, take public-school teachers. (I am assuming the rate of sexual misconduct among teachers is not significantly higher than that for the population at large). Quite frequently, cases come to light of teachers involved in sexual misconduct or on-line seduction, trading child pornography, and so on. We generally see these cases as isolated examples of individual deviance. But the stories are surprisingly abundant, and newspapers and magazines have published exposés suggesting a widespread underlying problem. A 1998 survey of newspaper archives nationwide by the nonsensationalist magazine *Education Week* found 244 reported cases involving teacher-student relation-

ships in a six-month period, with behaviors varying from “unwanted touching to sexual relationships and serial rape.” That represents over nine cases per week.

Of course, these are only the reported cases, and some activists feel that many other incidents remain undetected or unreported. The website of the advocacy group Survivors of Educator Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Emerge claims that “The best estimate is that 15 percent of students will be sexually abused by a member of the school staff during their school career.” The organization’s president complains, “Schools don’t report rumors. Schools don’t report allegations. Schools don’t report teacher resignations under suspicious circumstances.” No central clearinghouse collects and analyzes such incidents. As a result, there are scandalous cases of teachers who have run into trouble in one school system moving to a new area, where they resume their abusive careers. One investigative study is titled “‘Passing the Trash’ by School Districts Frees Sexual Predators to Hunt Again.” It all sounds very much like the worst image of priestly abuse before the recent upsurge of clerical scandals, though, at the time of this writing, abusive teachers rarely register on the popular consciousness.

But things may be changing. One of the main scholars working in this area is Charol Shakeshaft, whose book *Sexual Abuse in Schools* will be published in January 2003 (by Jossey-Bass). I wonder if her work will detonate a new social problem reminiscent of what happened with priests 20 years ago? As a thought-exercise, let us imagine the pattern that this new problem might follow. Imagine that civil lawsuits started exposing cases not just of actual criminality among teachers but of internal complaints and disciplinary proceedings. Obviously, the number of cases that came to public attention would increase dramatically. At that stage, the media might focus on an emerging social problem, which would be painted in the most sinister terms. Cases involving teachers and older teenagers would be reported alongside stories of child pornography and molestation and presented as part of a single social men-



ace. Media reports would tend to lump together minor acts of harassment with consensual affairs between teachers and students, and even with forcible rape. Perhaps the issue would be framed in terms of memorable phrases—“peducators,” for example. Since teachers are so numerous, even a tiny proportion of offenders would produce an impressive-sounding absolute number of cases, probably far higher than for priests or other clergy.

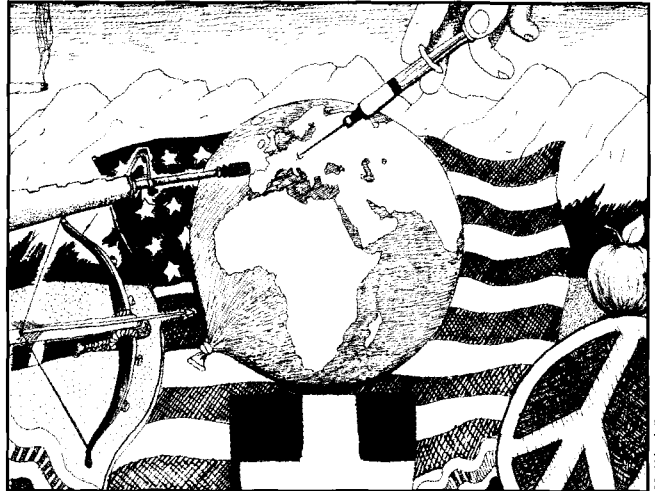
With the image of the pedophile teacher firmly established in the public mind, further litigation would generate ever-larger numbers of known and suspected cases. The news media and talk shows would give the issue daily coverage; the matter would become the subject of jokes on comedy shows, a theme in television dramas. Sensing the new public mood, individuals would be encouraged to come forward and report instances of victimization, often from the distant past. Reporting would encourage further reporting, litigation would stir more litigation, in a spiral that has no logical ending. Numbers beget numbers. With so many cases surfacing, experts would debate the circumstances that created such a dysfunctional culture in the schools and the teaching profession. The scale and seriousness of the problem would be so obvious a part of everyday discourse that any attempt to challenge public perceptions would be viewed as callous or self-serving—almost like trying to defuse concerns about “pedophile priests.”

The lesson is straightforward. If you expect a group to be villainous, you will generally find ample confirmation of that view. And once a problem becomes established, once it becomes a social fact, not much fire is needed to generate a very large amount of dense smoke. •

The Family Against the Globalists

Lederhosen versus MTV

by E. Michael Jones



I once knew a lady who ran for governor of the state of Pennsylvania on the promise that, if elected, she would run the state like a family. Unfortunately, she lost the election, so we will never know what that would have been like. (I am tempted to say that it would be impossible to run Pennsylvania any worse than it is being run.)

Is the family perfect? Yes: It is perfect in the same way that the Catholic Church is perfect, which is to say that it is perfectly suitable for achieving the end for which it was created. That does not mean, however, that it can fulfill functions not appropriate to it. The family is not the same as the state, just as the family is not the same as the individual or the ethnic group. We are all familiar with what happens when ethnic groups take control of governments in such places as Africa or Detroit. We are probably also familiar with families who defend the criminal behavior of their own members, no matter how heinous. (You can admire them for their family loyalty, if not for their moral probity.) What these have in common is that each assigns to a natural institution tasks or characteristics that are completely inappropriate to it.

On the last day of the tenth annual Mut Zur Ethik conference in Feldkirch, Austria, Col. Robert Hickson of the Special Forces University in Florida; Eva-Marie Foellmer, a leading figure in Mut Zur Ethik; Tomasz Kazmierski, a Polish physicist now living in England; and I were climbing the Rothorn, a mountain in Switzerland, atop which (at its almost 3,000-meter-high peak), in typically Swiss fashion, stands a restaurant. I had spoken during the conference on the use of television as a weapon in the global culture wars, but most of my talk had focused on the United States' impending war with Iraq and

whether the Swiss model of direct democracy might help us avoid such wars.

As we climbed, Colonel Hickson began to berate the Swiss for taking thousands of gun emplacements out of operation in the mountains. His point was not that the gun emplacements themselves were so important but that their absence indicated (in his mind, at least) a withdrawal from the idea of communal self-defense and a citizen militia as the backbone of armed Swiss neutrality. He wondered aloud whether the Swiss were still in a position to defend themselves.

I replied that artillery is useless in a culture war. If the Swiss were hoping that artillery would save them from the dangers of globalization, they were as deluded as the American conservatives of the 60's who stood with their eyes fixed on the Fulda Gap, waiting for the Soviet invasion that never came, while American culture was subverted by people acting behind their backs.

During one of the breaks at the conference in Feldkirch, I was invited to lunch by two men, one of whom told the story of how the 200th-anniversary celebration at Switzerland's oldest *gymnasium* had been marred by African drug dealers selling narcotics to the students. Peter Schaller, one of my hosts during my stay in Switzerland, teaches at the *gymnasium*, and he confirmed the accuracy of his colleague's account. Drugs are still illegal in Switzerland, but the police will not enforce the laws if the drug in question is hashish.

So what are the Swiss to do? What would Wilhelm Tell do (WWTDD)? Would he organize discussions about the dangers of drugs? Having heard so much over the past few days about the Swiss idea of direct democracy, I suggested that an appropriate application of those principles would be for the faculty and parents to go out into the schoolyard and tell the drug dealers to leave, and, if persuasion did not succeed, to remove them physically from the premises. (Actually, I said that the fac-

E. Michael Jones is the editor of Culture Wars and the author, most recently, of The Slaughter of Cities: Urban Renewal as Ethnic Cleansing (St. Augustine's Press).