

11-21-07 - Researchers miss cause of abuse

BY ANDREW GREELEY, Chicago Sun-Times

I was troubled by the meeting of the Catholic bishops last week, not because the new president and vice president are both Chicago priests. It was a perfect Chicago balanced ticket -- one Cub fan and one White Sox fan, good men both despite the calumny spread about them. It seemed to me, however, that the bishops backed off on both their opposition to the war (consistent, if unheard) and that the people who are doing research for them on the cause of pedophilia were telling them what they thought the bishops wanted to hear instead of what they needed to be told.

They now are calling for a "responsible exit" from Iraq, which sounds dangerously like what we hear from the White House and the Pentagon these days. "Responsibility" seems to mean a process of climbing out of the Big Muddy that would take years and endless continuation of the "long war." Because the United States created the mess in Iraq, it has a moral obligation to undo the mess, by which the White House and Sen. John McCain mean "victory." In fact the only responsible exit would be one that was as quick as possible. Our invasion and occupation were irresponsible and our behavior there will not become responsible unless and until we get out and leave the country to the Iraqis to whom it belongs. We will not expiate our sins by lingering -- and creating an even deeper Big Muddy.

The team searching for an explanation of pederasty gave a verbal preview of their findings to be reported in full later in the year. The cause of the problem seems to be change in sexual morals and media imagery. The bishops will love that and so will the Vatican -- a cause of the problem that is external to the Church. Blame the people for their sexual mores and the media for their exploitation of the human body, not why so many bishops denied the problem for so long.

The writer who has the best insights on the problem is a professor of sociology from Purdue, Anton Shupe. He argues (his most recent book is *Spoils of the Kingdom*) that the explanation for abuse is not psychological but sociological, neither homosexuality nor celibacy, but sociological -- power. Routinely the strong abuse the weak if they think they can get away with it (in all five of the denominational situations on which he reports). You desire the money that often seems to be lying around inviting theft, you desire the young body that is available to you by reason of your sacred power. Because no one seems likely to stop you, you take what you want, whether you're married or not and whether you are straight or gay. This abuse of the weak -- young or older -- by those with power (and especially sacred power) is part of the human condition and always has been. It will be stopped only when those in power restrain their partners in power (clergy, teachers, cops, doctors, etc.) from such abuse.

I believe I was the first priest in America to write about the problem in the priesthood in 1986 in the paperback edition of the first volume of my memoirs. I warned the Archdiocese of Chicago that it was sitting on a time bomb. I wrote articles, scores of columns and several novels about it (the most recent *The Priestly Sins*, based on a true story). I finally gave up because the problem had been stretched on an ideological procrustean bed in which the real issue -- power -- was ignored. I hope that the scholars who are doing the research for the bishops think of something better than media images. They might even read Professor Shupe.