**Our Myth, Their Lie**

**Clericalism, not heresy, caused the crisis**

**Notre mythe, leur mensonge**

**Le cléricalisme, pas une hérésie, est la cause de la crise**

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Ten years ago, I believed a myth. In the beginning, there was Vatican II. It was good but messy, and the Bad Catholics hijacked it to undermine doctrine. They took over seminaries and turned them into cesspools where heresy was mandatory and depravity rampant.

Il y a 10 ans je croyais au mythe.

Au commencement il y avait Vatican II. Bien mais un peu foutoir : les mauvais catholiques attaquait le mythe pour saper la doctrine, ils prenaient le contrôle des séminaires et les transformaient en fosse d’aisance où l’hétérie était la règle et la dépravation omniprésente.

Then Pope John Paul II came along. He drove out the Bad Catholics and cleaned up the seminaries. Too late!

Alors Jean-Paul II arriva. Il mit dehors les mauvais catholiques et mis de l’ordre dans les séminaires. Trop tard.

The Bad Catholics had already committed terrible crimes, which were covered up without the pope’s awareness. In 2002, their abuses exploded into public view, and the JPII Catholics got blamed for crimes committed by a dying generation of clerics.

Les mauvais catholiques avaient déjà commis de terribles crimes qui auraient été cachés sans la présence du pape. En 2002 les abus furent révélés et les catholiques JP II condamnèrent les crimes commis par cette génération de prêtres qui disparaissait.

The JPII bishops took it on the chin, but they fixed the problem with the Dallas Charter. Then Benedict XVI, the great theologian, appointed orthodox bishops who would carry forward the renewal. The horrors of the Scandal were behind us.

Les évêques JP II prirent ça en pleine figure mais ils résolvèrent le problème avec la charte de Dallas1. Alors Benoît XVI le grand théologien nomma des évêques adhoc pour mettre en place le renouveau. Le scandale était derrière nous.

The two primordial forces of the postconciliar church, orthodoxy and heresy, had fought a great battle, and orthodoxy had been vindicated.

Les deux forces de l’Eglise post concilaire, l’orthodoxie et l’hérésie s’étaient livré une grande bataille et l’orhodoxie avait été confortée.

My diocese, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, was proof. In the 1980s, we were led by Archbishop John Roach. Appointed by Pope Paul VI, Roach fit the “Spirit of Vatican II” archetype to a tee.

Under Roach, Saint Paul Seminary was taken over by dissenters, one of whom described the Eucharist as “cookie worship” that he had “moved beyond.” There were open homosexual affairs. Those who dared adhere to church teaching were punished.

Mon diocèse (St Paul – Minneapolis) était sauf. Dans les années 80 le séminaire de St Paul avait été gagné par les contestataires, l’un d’eux traitait l’Eucharistie de prière de salon, qu’il avait dépassée. Il y avait des affaires homosexuelles publiques. Ceux qui osaient dire qu’ils adhéraient à l’enseignement de l’Eglise étaient punis.

Saint Paul soon experienced one of [the first abuse scandals](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/catholic-church/betrayed-by-silence/ch2/) in the American church. For years, Roach and his cronies had secretly shuffled abusive priests between parishes. When this came out and the diocese was sued, Roach found himself under oath, where [he became conveniently forgetful.](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/784191-deposition-of-archbishop-john-r-roach-july-24-1989.html)

Mon diocèse vit un des premiers scandales sexuels. L’évêque J. Roach et ses copains déplaçaient les prêtres abuseurs entre les paroisses. Quand ce fut rendu public et le diocèse poursuivi, Roach affirma sous serment qu’il avait été étourdi.

The diocese lost, with the victim awarded $3.5 million—paltry by today’s standards, but shocking at the time. In response, Roach imposed “tough policies,” which won praise from newspapers. Privately, he declined to enforce them.

Le diocèse perdit. Roach édita un règlement sévère mais en privé il affima ne pas l’appliquer.

Finally, in 1995, Roach retired. John Paul the Great—as we called him—appointed Archbishop Harry Flynn. Flynn was a kindly Irishman with an adorable accent. He came from the Diocese of Lafayette, where he’d handled another early abuse scandal. He’d healed the victims of Lafayette, and he’d largely written [the USCCB’s new abuse policy.](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1175789-restoring-trust-nov-1994-ad-hoc-committee-on.html)

Jean Paul II le Grand comme nous l’appelons, remplaça Roach par Flynn, un irlandais venant du diocèse de Lafayette qui avait largement contribué à la nouvelle politique anti abus.

Flynn was a JPII man. He loved prayer and took strong stands. He turned the feeble St. John Vianney College Seminary into the biggest minor seminary in the country.

After Archbishop Flynn’s arrival, the sex-abuse story finally faded from the headlines. We were so *proud* when Flynn [led the American church](https://www.npr.org/news/specials/priests/bishops.html) in drafting the Dallas Charter.

Flynn était un homme de JP II. Les affaires sexuelles se calmèrent. Nous étions fiers d’avoir un évêque responsable de la charte de Dallas.

In 2008, Pope Benedict appointed Archbishop John Nienstedt, an orthodox leader who led the campaign against redefining marriage in Minnesota. While much of the country was roiling from Boston and its aftershocks, we enjoyed a palpable sense of peace.

En 2008 nous eûmes Nienstedt un orthodoxe qui se battit contre la redéfinition du mariage dans le Minnesota.

The Good Catholics had saved Vatican II from the Bad Catholics, and our Charter would keep it from happening again.

Our myth—their lie—collapsed in 2013. Archbishop Flynn was no healer, we learned.

He was [the USCCB’s damage-control guy.](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/catholic-church/betrayed-by-silence/ch1/) In 1986, Flynn went to Lafayette and killed the bad publicity.

He said he’d visited all the families of the abused there. He hadn’t. He said he’d got the abusers out of ministry. He hadn’t. He got the media to think he had, but focused on getting the records sealed by court order. The scandal went quiet—but it was the quiet of a muzzle, not of healing.

Le mythe, - leur mensonges – s’effondra en 2013.

A Lafayette Flynn avait dit avoir visité les familles de victimes, c’était faux. Avoir révoqué les prêtres abuseurs, c’était faux.

When Flynn came to Minnesota, he did the same. We pew-sitters were led to believe the scandal ended here because Flynn’s policies solved the problem. In fact, it ended because Flynn’s legal team convinced a court that Minnesota’s statute of limitations on sex crimes barred most lawsuits.

Il fit la même chose dans le Minnesota.

Flynn drafted the Dallas Charter, but he never bothered much with following it. In 2004, the diocese found pornographic images on Fr. Jonathan Shelley’s computer.

To some, it seemed to be child porn; others considered it only “borderline illegal.” The borderline caucus won, and Flynn kept Shelley in ministry. That same year, Fr. Daniel Conlin provided marriage counseling to two of his parishioners, then fathered a child with the wife.

Flynn removed Conlin from the parish…and [transferred him to the marriage tribunal](https://www.twincities.com/2013/07/19/hes-a-priest-hes-a-parent-and-nothings-simple-after-that/), where he came into contact with *more* vulnerable women. All of this and more was covered up.

Il maintînt dans le ministère un religieux accusé et un prêtre lui aussi fut simplement transféré au tribunal des mariages où il fut en contact avec des femmes en souffrance. Tout ceci fut gardé sous silence.

Archbishop Nienstedt mostly [continued the lax practices of his predecessors.](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/catholic-church/betrayed-by-silence/ch4/) While more proactive than Flynn, Nienstedt still fell far short of church policy and law. Nienstedt made one excellent choice: he appointed Chancellor Jennifer Haselberger, a canonist devoted to interpreting ecclesial law as written—not bending it to favor Roman collars.

When Haselberger rediscovered Fr. Shelley’s “borderline illegal” porn in 2011 and showed Nienstedt, chancery officials spent more than a year debating what to do, instead of just calling the police. As [similar cases mounted](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2013/09/clergy-abuse/), Haselberger resigned and blew the whistle.

Our beloved myth exploded. Twin Cities Catholics like me came face-to-face with an unpleasant fact: the orthodox Good Clerics hadn’t taken over from the Bad “Spirit of Vatican II” Clerics and cleaned house. The Good Clerics were *buddies* with the Bad Clerics.

Notre mythe bien aimé s’effondra. Les catholiques comme moi se retrouvaient devant une situation désagréable : les bons n’avaient pas gagné sur les méchants et n’avaient pas nettoyé la maison, ils étaient copains.

They did everything in their power to *protect* the Bad Clerics—even violating moral, civil, and canon law on their behalf. We’d believed there were two sides in the Church: orthodoxy and heresy. We often cheered for the clerics on our “team” and booed the other guys. But we were wrong. Everyone in the chancery was working together...against us.

I know there are good priests. There may even be good bishops. But don’t trust your instincts. I knew most of the people in our diocesan crisis.

Je sais qu’il y a de bons prêtres et même de bons évêques mais ne vous fiez pas à votre instinct.

Reading the depositions, I saw old family friends pitted against each other. My childhood babysitter called the priest who used to be so sweet to us kids at the big parties a liar and an obstructionist.

The man I worked for in college closed ranks with my wife’s childhood pastor to protect the priest who celebrated my wedding from the scrutiny of my *alma mater*. I never saw any of this coming.

Their orthodoxy (or lack thereof) had nothing to do with it. My judgment of their character (or lack thereof) missed the mark. There was only one consistent pattern: the closer they were to power, the more my shepherds collaborated to keep the sheep deaf, dumb, and victimized.

One could blame all this on some kind of network of unchaste priests and their allies, who supposedly work to shield one another from accountability while undermining Catholic teaching on sexuality—a [so-called “lavender mafia.”](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/gay-priests-catholic-elephant-is-still-in-the-sacristy/)

Or one could blame it all on clerical celibacy and sexual repression. A rumor circulated for years that Archbishop Nienstedt cruised for gay sex and punished priests who refused his advances.

Most of us scoffed at this rumor as an obvious smear. But a 2014 investigation into Nienstedt’s past [revealed so much evidence](http://stmedia.startribune.com/documents/1archnew072116.pdf) that Auxiliary Bishops Piché and Cozzens concluded Nienstedt should resign and immediately flew to Washington to confer with papal nuncio Carlo Viganò.

Instead, the nuncio ordered the investigation be [drastically narrowed](https://www.archspm.org/archspm_news/bishop-cozzens-statement-regarding-review-board-bishops/). (Viganò fiercely disputes suggestions that this was tantamount to ending the investigation.) Fr. Christopher Wenthe, while serving as my associate pastor, [told a vulnerable woman](http://stmedia.startribune.com/documents/Wenthecomplaint.pdf) about the difficulties of his vow of celibacy, just before [abusing her](https://www.twincities.com/2011/12/13/st-paul-priest-gets-year-in-jail-for-sex-abuse/) in my childhood parish’s rectory.

Yet when A. W. Richard Sipe articulated how a priestly culture of secret unchastity created space for child abuse, people like me dismissed him as an anti-Catholic kook.

So, yes, in our scandal, as in many others, you can point to some malefactors who fit the “heresy” narrative and others who fit the “repression” explanation.

But there are many more who don’t fit either. I’ve never heard anyone suggest that Archbishop Flynn was unchaste, yet his indifference toward victims was depraved. Likewise the nuncio.

Vicar General Peter Laird was an up-and-coming communications-savvy “John Paul II” priest, an exemplar of the new generation. Yet, like so many other chancery clerics (the [“transitional presbyterate,”](http://canonicalconsultation.com/blog/its-a-travesty-of-a-mockery-of-a-sham-of-a-mockery-of-two-mockeries-of-a-sham) as Haselberger memorably put it), Laird consistently downplayed the risks of keeping problem priests in circulation.

They were Team Chancery. We were Team Lay. They played to win.

Ils appartenaient à la cour diocésaine. Nous étions des laïcs. Ils se jouaient de nous.

**Political contingency, not scriptural necessity**

**Eventualité politique, certainement pas scripturaire**

Modern priests live with priests, learn with priests, work with priests, die with priests. They’re expected to form no permanent ties with any single parish or community, because reassignment looms. They vow celibacy, so other clerics become their (dysfunctional) family.

The bishop can cut their pay, give them vacation, reassign them to Siberia, put them up for promotion...anything, for any or no reason, without recourse.

Priests have relatively few rights, often lack means to exercise them, and are conditioned in seminary to accept indignities, even evil, as “holy obedience.” Absolute power over priests corrupts the bishops, and absolute submission does no favors to priests.

Les prêtres vivent entre eux dans une famille fermée.

Les évêques ont tous les droits sur eux mais les protègent.

Theoretically, the Holy See is supervising, but there are more than three *thousand* ordinaries reporting directly to the pope. I don’t know about you, but in my workplace no one person is allowed to manage more than a dozen direct reports.

More than that, and management becomes distracted and ineffective. With so much on its plate, Rome won’t intervene, and probably won’t even notice, unless someone is convicted of a crime. Besides, a few well-cultivated contacts in today’s Rome will get you a lot further up the career ladder than holiness.

Théoriquement les évêques rapportent à Rome mais il est impossible de « manager » 3000 évêques ; on ne peut imaginer une telle situation dans le monde des entreprises

Power flows from the top of the hierarchy down through overt and covert cliques. Powerful clerics are accountable to those cliques, not to the faithful. The laity are needed only for their wallets.

The structure I have just described could hardly be better at catalyzing abuse. Look at Cardinals Egan and McCarrick. One was considered conservative, the other liberal, but both were notorious on abuse—and St. John Paul gave both the red hat.

How about Cardinal Mahony and Cardinal Pell? Archbishops Finn, Wilson, and Bruskewitz? Or Cardinal Law, the great conservative prelate whose punishment was promotion?

The same story unfolds today in [Honduras](http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/honduran-seminarians-allege-widespread-homosexual-misconduct), [Chile](http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2018/02/10/the-bishop-barros-crisis-how-bad-is-it/), and [Australia](https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/30/asia/cardinal-george-pell-trial-may-intl/index.html). Now we’ve learned [from Pennsylvania](https://www.npr.org/2018/08/14/636855561/report-reveals-widespread-sexual-abuse-by-over-300-priests-in-pa) that dozens of bishops, perhaps a cardinal, are implicated in a broad, deep, clerical conspiracy—[a conspiracy](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/IND.0595.001.0024.pdf) that was [well established](https://cbspittsburgh.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/interimredactedreportandresponses.pdf#page=458) years before my old scapegoats, Vatican II and the sexual revolution, were around to take the blame. This crisis was not caused by Marty Haugen tunes and the Land O’ Lakes statement.

At the root of this crisis is structure—the particular way church governance has [calcified in the past couple of centuries.](https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/trent%E2%80%99s-long-shadow) That structure has to go.

La racine de la crise est la structure, cette manière de gouverner l’Eglise qui s’est calcifiée durant ces deux derniers siècles. Cela doit changer.

Portions of the church’s structure are divinely instituted, so their reform is neither possible nor desirable. But most of the details were dreamed up by humans. Those can change. Consider the College of Cardinals.

It evolved from political contingency, not scriptural necessity. Pope Francis could dismiss it tomorrow and ask half-a-dozen ordinary Catholics to choose his successor instead.

Par exemple le collège des cardinaux : son existence est politique et ne vient pas des Ecritures. Le pape peut le dissoudre demain et nommer une demi-douzaine de catholiques pour élire son successeur.

Three consecutive papacies have run aground trying to reform the Curia, which grew in parallel with the College of Cardinals. Perhaps it is time for the Curia to simply dissolve.

**The modern, insular seminary**

**Un séminaire modern et sclérosé**

Consider mandatory clerical celibacy. It’s only a thousand years old. As recently as 867, Pope Adrian II’s still-living wife and daughter accompanied him to the Lateran Palace upon his election.

Le célibat des prêtres a seulement mille ans.

Or consider the seminary, [den of so many recent iniquities.](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/gay-catholic-inside-the-seminary-closet/) The modern, insular seminary was born at Trent, a mere five centuries ago.

Nos séminaires sont nés à Trente, ils ont 500 ans.

Consider the auxiliary bishop, who “leads” the flock of a fictitious “titular see” while actually assigned to help another bishop lead his flock. This novelty was invented under Pope Leo X just before the Reformation. The idea of a bishop leading a non-existent see would have baffled the fathers of the church.

Les évêques auxiliaires ont été créés par Léon X, juste après la Réforme.

But it helped dioceses get very, very big. In England, in 1086, the entire country had around 1.7 million residents, and, by my count, twenty dioceses: about 85,000 people per diocese.

Today, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis *alone* has 3.1 million residents, of whom nearly 850,000 are Catholic. In medieval times, our diocese would be split into ten, twenty, even forty smaller dioceses, with scaled-down bishops who’d have no choice but to share “the smell of the sheep.”

Instead, with help from the auxiliaries, the archbishop is able to run his unthinkably large and unaccountable archdiocese more like a corporation—a corporation desperate to [protect its assets](https://cruxnow.com/church/2016/05/25/lawyers-say-minnesota-archdiocese-hiding-1-billion-in-assets/). And the Twin Cities is not even close to the worst of the mega-dioceses.

En Angleterre au XIème siècle il y avait 85000 personnes par diocèse. Aujourd’hui notre diocèse serait ainsi divisé en 40 petits diocèses. Au contraire il n’est qu’une société qui ne cherche qu’à protéger ses avoirs.

Consider, finally, the appointment of bishops. They have always required the *consent* of the pope, but have typically been *selected* by others. Bishops, especially in the patristic era, were often elected by their own dioceses or by their brother bishops (a practice that continues in the East).

St. Ambrose was made bishop of Milan by acclamation of the laity before he was even baptized! Even in the nineteenth century, the first *terna* used by the pope to select American bishops came from the priests of the diocese.

Les évêques sont dans les faits choisis par les autres évêques : St Ambroise a été élu par les laïcs avant même d’être baptisé.

Direct papal selection, mainly on the advice of the nuncio and the Congregation of Bishops, is pretty new—and clearly isn’t working well. Among other things, the older system encouraged bishops to be promoted from within the diocese to serve the diocese for life.

La nomination papale ne fonctionne pas, les évêques s’élisent entre eux.

The new system sees far more bishops imported from a thousand miles away, then exported again when a job in a more prestigious diocese opens up.

I note these changeable things not to endorse any one of them in particular, but rather to make clear that structural change is *possible*. Moreover, some structural change is *necessary*.

This crisis calls for radical changes like those of St. Gregory the Great. The mechanisms that turn clerics against their flocks cannot be broken otherwise.

La crise demande des changements radicaux. Les mécanismes qui opposent les clercs au troupeau ne peuvent être démontés autrement.

New policies, new preaching, and new personnel aren’t enough. They would help, but the Saint Paul Archdiocese is proof: if we do not reform the church’s fundamentally clericalist structure, the abuse scandal will just happen again, and again, and again.

Si nous ne changeons fondamentalement pas la structure cléricale rien ne changera.

1 Charte de Dallas pour la protection de l’enfance et de la jeunesse, publiée par la

Conférence des évêques américains