

A chapter from the 2015 book, *Sins of the Press: The Untold Story of The Boston Globe's Reporting on Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church* by David F. Pierre, Jr.

“That 1985 Report”

Early in its 2002 coverage, the *Boston Globe* prominently cited an important report that had been written back in 1985 by a trio of men that foresaw the scope of the crisis that the Catholic Church was facing regarding abuse by priests.

The 1985 report, entitled “The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner,” was written on the heels of the first nationally renowned story of sex abuse by a Catholic priest, the notorious case of Gilbert Gauthe in Louisiana.

Three men authored the report:

- Rev. Thomas P. Doyle, a Dominican priest and canon lawyer;
- F. Ray Mouton, Jr., a lawyer, who in the mid-1980s had defended Gauthe; and
- Rev. Michael R. Peterson, a priest-psychologist who had founded St. Luke Institute, a psychiatric hospital in Silver Spring Maryland, which often treated abusive clergy.

The trio convened to write the report to address what they rightly believed to be a glaring and growing problem in the Church. (Astonishingly, Rev. Doyle has openly admitted that Cardinal Law was “very supportive” and an early ally of the group’s report.)

What did the 1985 report say? For starters, the report correctly noted that the Church was facing a major crisis. Catholic priests had abused children, and there was colossal harm being wreaked upon victims as well as the Church.

The 92-page report also aptly observed that American society had transformed in its litigiousness in recent years. Whereas there was once a time that suing a doctor was unthinkable, malpractice lawsuits had now become commonplace. This change in the culture had serious implications for the Catholic Church, the report correctly indicated. The trio also accurately noted that contingency lawyers clearly had the Catholic Church in their crosshairs.

However, most of the report was spent outlining a number of steps which bishops and the Church should take in dealing with abusive priests on both the pastoral and legal levels.

Most notably, the trio wholeheartedly believed that priests who abused children could return to active ministry following psychological treatment.

In a supplemental chapter to the trio’s 1985 report, Rev. Peterson would write, “These are lifelong diseases for which there is now *much hope for recovery and control of the disorders*” (italics added).

That’s right. The authors of the 1985 actually believed, as almost all psychologists did at the time, that there could be “recovery and control” for abusive pedophiles.

Peterson also added (emphasis added):

“**It is a fact** that treatment can help rehabilitate clerics so that they may return to active ministry in most instances irregardless [*sic*] of jail time or no legal complications.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It's true. Peterson clearly believed and advocated that priests who abused kids, if properly "treated," could most certainly return to active ministry, even if they have served time in prison or been sued!

Yet years later in 2002, the *Globe* deceived its readers by grossly misrepresenting and manipulating the contents of the report.

On only the second day of the paper's 2002 coverage, January 7, the *Globe's* Michael Rezendes essentially left his readers with the impression that the 1985 report had conveyed to Cardinal Law and other bishops that it would be reckless to ever return abusive priests to active ministry.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the beginning of his article, Rezendes emphatically quoted from the 1985 report at the beginning of his article:

"Recidivism is so high with pedophilia ... that all controlled studies have shown that traditional outpatient psychiatric or psychological models alone do not work."^{iv}

For Rezendes, this quotation from the report was the equivalent of a "smoking gun." And in subsequent weeks, in addition to other colleagues at the *Globe*, other newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*, would use Rezendes' citation as a way to plaster Cardinal Law.^v Even a number of reputable Catholic writers would find Rezendes' citation useful.

However, these other media outlets were completely oblivious to the fact that Rezendes' quote was completely deceptive.

While Rezendes gave readers the impression that the report concluded that treatment of abusive priests was futile and that such priests should never be returned to ministry, we know that the exact *opposite* was the case. The trio's report strongly recommended psychological treatment as a first course of action as soon as a priest was found to have abused a minor.

When Rezendes artfully cited the line that "traditional outpatient psychiatric or psychological models alone do not work" with pedophiles, the key words in the citation are "*outpatient*" and "*traditional*."

The report was asserting that priests could not simply make routine *outpatient* visits to a psychologist, which had *traditionally* been the case. Instead, the report recommended a more comprehensive, "family model" approach to treatment which involved months-long *inpatient* therapies.

The report explained that in addition to professional management, "This means that members of the religious family involved with the priest prior to treatment should be involved in the treatment and in the post treatment plans."^{vi}

Yet this important aspect of the report's recommendations was deftly omitted by Rezendes and the *Globe*. Rezendes craftily cherry-picked a quote to give readers the impression that the report was alerting bishops that psychological treatment of abusive priests was futile, when the truth was something entirely different.

See the deception?

The bottom line: the *Boston Globe* would have you believe that if Church leaders had followed the advice of a report back in 1985 written by a trio of guys who understood the scope of the problem, a

major crisis could have been averted. The implication from the *Globe* was that Cardinal Law and other American bishops somehow “ignored” the 1985 re-port.^{vii}

But the fact is that too many bishops, including Cardinal Law, *did* follow the advice from the report that Doyle, Peterson, and Mouton gave to them in 1985. Church officials routinely sent abusive priests off to treatment facilities where professional psychologists would later claim that the clerics were fit to return to ministry.

The results of this common practice, perhaps no better illustrated than in the maddening case of John Geoghan, were *disastrous*.

NOTES

ⁱ Kristen Lombardi, “Failure to Act,” *The Boston Phoenix*, October 4, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Rev. Michael R. Peterson, M.D., “Guidelines,” December 9, 1985.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Rezendes, “In 1985, Law had report on repeat abusers,” *The Boston Globe*, January 7, 2002, p. A12. [Important note: It should be noted that the “recidivism” quotation that Rezendes cited were nowhere in the 92 pages of the 1985 report written by the trio. Nowhere. In truth, Rezendes was citing a supplemental paper by Rev. Peterson written months after the original 92-page report.]

^{iv} Michael R. Peterson, President/Executive Medical Director, St. Luke Institute, “Guidelines: With Materials by Berlin, Doyle, Mouton, and Others,” December 9, 1985.

^v See: Derrick Z. Jackson, “Why won’t Law back disclosing past sex abuse?” *The Boston Globe*, January 18, 2002, p. A23.; R. Scott Appleby, “Betrayal: Covering the Church Crisis,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2002; Gail Gibson and John Rivera, “Maryland center claims success treating priests,” *The Baltimore Sun*, April 11, 2002.

^{vi} Rev. Michael R. Peterson, M.D.; Rev. Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D; F. Ray Mouton, Esq., “The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner,” June 1985, p. 56.

^{vii} It is true that bishops did not follow a piece of advice from the report that a national “Crisis Control Team” be formed to work with bishops and priests on the sex abuse issue. Bishops felt that abuse cases would be best handled on a local, diocesan level. However, it is unclear at best how the formation of such a committee would have been able to stem the avalanche of lawsuits against the Church in subsequent years.