

Commentary on "MERCY TOWARD OUR FATHERS" BY SR. CAMILLE D'ARIENZO

I was a victim of sexual assault. I use the word "was" because I remained a victim until I forgave my abuser and moved on with my life, a process that concluded some years ago. Having said that, I want to comment on "Mercy Toward Our Fathers" by Sister Camille D'Arienzo, and on some of what has been posted here in the aftermath of this excellent article. As a Catholic and sexual abuse "survivor," I watched with much concern as the priesthood scandal unfolded in 2002. I was riveted to the story of one of the victims, a middle-aged man, who angrily revealed in front of TV cameras, the harm done to him some thirty years ago. I listened as this man blamed everything that had ever gone wrong in his life on the priest who took advantage of him. I listened as his lawyer held press conferences describing why his scores of clients each deserved enhanced settlements from the Church (minus a 40 percent contingency fee, of course). Six years went by, and I recently listened again as the same man addressed a meeting of Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) saying the very same things he said six years ago. The only addition – a six-figure settlement and a personal meeting with the Holy Father notwithstanding – was a claim that the Church has not done enough to ease his suffering or to respond to the crisis. I listened as someone in these pages equated such suffering with the horrors of the Holocaust. I have listened enough. I will not hear another word from these so-called survivors and groups like VOTF that seem intent upon enabling them to never move on. I have heard enough. It was the comparison with the Holocaust that has driven me over the edge. I have never before heard such narcissistic, self-serving, irresponsible rhetoric, and I will not hear any more of it. It offends every part of me, but it especially offends that part of me that worked so hard to recover from sexual victimization. Enough is enough. The sexual abuse of minors has been an epidemic in our society, and we have found a convenient scapegoat in the small percentage of priests who offended and in a Church that failed to act in 1975 as it would in 2005. There will not be true justice for victims until we move beyond the false notion that the Church and priesthood have been a special locus of sexual abuse, a myth that has benefited no one but personal injury lawyers and THEIR enablers in SNAP and VOTF. There will not be justice for victims until every institution in our culture embraces the transparency that has been embraced by the Catholic Church. Where is the public release of documents about accused clergy from other denominations? Why are public schools shielded from civil liability for abuse? Most alarming of all is the rhetoric about the so-called "cycle of abuse." Why did Congressman Foley get to shift blame for his own misconduct on the priest he claimed abused him? The so-called cycle of victimhood is such a convenient

phenomenon. If it is true, then who is keeping an eye on the hundreds of middle-aged men who have received windfall financial settlements claiming abuse by priests in their childhoods? As long as we allow VOTF, SNAP and others with an agenda to keep us bound up in the cycle of blame and vilification and loathing, there can be no healing for the victims, for the Church, for anyone. It is time for some of the so-called victim advocates in this picture to recognize that they are doing far more harm than good. I applaud Sister D'Arienzo for having the courage to write so openly against a seeming tidal wave of angry, unproductive rhetoric. Arguing for anything less than forgiveness and healing is to perpetrate and perpetuate abuse. It is time to turn off the TV cameras, send the lawyers packing, stop vilifying the new class of lepers we have created among the accused in our Church, and act like the Catholic Christians most of us strive to be. Santiago Cruz [santiagocruz01@hotmail.com](mailto:santiagocruz01@hotmail.com)

By Santiago Cruz on October 11, 2008 at 6:09

Re: Mercy toward our Fathers (Sr. Camille D'Arienzo, America 8/18)

After reading Sr. Camille's wonderful article, I followed the comments here with some agreement, but much concern for the tone of most. How interesting that the view of Santiago Cruz seemed to be the final word. Well, I want to echo the thoughts of Mr. Cruz. He wrote what I believe many Catholics have thought and felt for some time, but have been hesitant to write for fear of being demonized by SNAP, VOTF and other "advocates." I agree with Mr. Cruz that real advocacy would lead victims to survive their victim-hood, not to wallow in it, profit from it, engage in smear campaigns because of it. I do not blame the victims of clergy sexual abuse for being hurt and angry, but no one should be more alarmed, insulted, and dispirited by false claims than real victims of sexual abuse. I believe that many of those who have used the current climate to demand financial settlements with no offer of proof are victims of nothing more than their own greed and lack of morally guiding principles. Santiago Cruz is right. Why is the victim of a priest so much more harmed than the victim of a teacher or coach, or minister? Yet teachers and school systems - which have been proven to have exponentially greater incidences of abuse - are exempt

from litigation and vicarious responsibility. Why are SNAP and VOTF okay with that? The fact that they seem to have nothing to say about it is evidence that they are merely using The Scandal for some other agenda that has nothing to do with protecting children. I recently read that SNAP called a press conference from the office of a contingency lawyer to announce a lawsuit against the Jesuits because of the alleged behavior of a now elderly priest over 40 years ago. No one can prove or disprove such a claim, but the smear campaign and bullying into a lucrative settlement are already well underway. It is time for SNAP and VOTF to fold up and go away. They have done far more harm than good to real victims of abuse like Santiago Cruz. I thank him for opening my eyes to this. The only way VOTF can survive and serve our Church is to publicly denounce SNAP, its tactics, and its open promotion of contingency lawyers' goal to bankrupt Catholic institutions and then move on to some other trough. The abuse scandal is over. What we are seeing now is the abuse of the abuse scandal, and some rather shameless profiteering by what has become a gang of thugs masked as advocates. It's time for the Church's leaders to be shepherds again, and not sheep to be fleeced. It is time for them to stop throwing their priests to the litigious wolves. Greed ranks right up there with lust among the Seven Deadly Sins.

By Ryan A. MacDonald on November 22, 2008  
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