

WHY WERE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED IN NEW ZEALAND ?

AND WHAT WENT WRONG TO CREATE SEXUAL ABUSE IN THEM ?

by a former Marist Brother

With added insights, May 22nd, 2021

This little thesis is not a pedantically researched, peer-reviewed academic work; I have just tried to pull together my 40 years of reflecting on my life as a Marist Brother in the 1960s and 70s into a logical and coherent sequence.

RITUALS AND STORIES THAT UNIFY

A quick dip into sociological and archeological research tells us that for at least 10,000 years there have been special places, rituals and mythic stories promoting behaviour that united small groups into larger ones, thus giving members increased mutual protection and greater chances of survival.

Research tells us that with passing millennia, these groups grew from families to clans to tribes to kingdoms to empires. People responded best to leadership by individual persons, rather than by adhering to abstract rules, so when group size exceeded about 10,000, the supervising leader was said to have super-natural powers, knowing everyone's actions, and in even bigger groups the leader become an immortal ideal person.

THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The unconscious mind and collective unconscious were unknown until a century ago, and from what I understand from texts by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, humans evolved a logical conscious 'left-brain' thinking to cope with immediate individual survival, and an unconscious symbolic 'right-brain' association of ideas to improve long-term population survival by building us into larger and larger groups– social Darwinism. There are stories about archetypes that are common to many religions and many cultures.

[When I go to Mass each week my mind switches from its Lone Ranger analytical left half to its communal associative right half. Belief is shown by actions. Many who call themselves 'Christians' say they 'believe' in God and Jesus, but their comfortable, self-centred, environment-destroying consumer actions show they don't really believe.]

LEFT-BRAIN ROMANS

In the 4th century, the legalistic "left-brain" Romans bound their empire together by making Christianity their state religion. Judaeo/Christian stories had encapsulated the truths needed to unify people, in an intuitive, associative "right-brain" manner.

But the Romans legally codified them as “left-brain” facts with rules to be adhered to under punishment of “eternal hellfire.”

For example, “The kingdom of heaven” in Eastern societies had been a state of bliss you attained when your mind ‘died’ to self-centred behaviour and switched to caring for others, to being one with the community and the environment. But the Romans in the West made it a place where your conscious mind literally went after your physical death.

And “God” who had been the persona of the commandments that created a harmonious social world became a real person who literally created the physical world, while blessing wars and social divisions!

A religion built on mythic stories of ‘*mysteries*’ and the growth of unselfish loving relationships became a religion of sterile dogmatic *facts* and paralyzing rules.

In the following centuries, egotistical argument over what ‘facts’ were actually correct has led to disintegration instead of unity. Shopping malls and airport terminals have become the new cathedrals for the self-centred money-making that is now the dominant world ‘religion,’ with disastrous ecological consequences that are going to kill billions of today’s children.

STAGES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT

In our Marist teacher training centre we studied physical, intellectual and social development of humans, but not their spiritual development. I have found my developing relationship with God has been similar to that with Father Christmas:- total pre-schooler experiential awareness, then a schoolyard literal explanation “He’s not real; it’s just a story,” and then as parents with total commitment and love for our two-year old, seeing his joy, “Father Christmas is really our totallove!”

Professor James Fowler gives the self-centred ‘Literal’ stage of faith development being normal for 12-year-olds, and this is, I feel, the level the Roman Empire reduced Christianity to.

In our novitiate and training college, we were taught Catholic dogma at this literal level, and it was the level practiced in our communities.

Rule-bound spiritual stagnation may have been a factor that led to some Brothers to abuse children.

Some Brothers I worked with compensated for being rule-bound with no chance of spiritual growth by becoming obsessive schoolboy rugby coaches, where they were the ones who could do the ruling and dominating. Zealous principals (especially Brother Maurice) made it compulsory for the kids to play in a school rugby teams, and for us to take the teams (a dead-end occupation we all endured) until 1967. Then I began taking the kids I taught on weekend tramping trips, with open-ended goals and no losers. The kids grew in care and respect for each other, their self-confidence grew and their personalities flourished. I think that was the best religious education I did in my 15 years teaching in the Brothers. My self-confidence and personality flourished too. My nickname in class became ‘Brother Jungle.’

ENGLISH-IRISH CONFLICT

When the Roman Empire collapsed and the English empire developed, Roman Christianity was modified to suit English leadership. Roman Catholic practices however, permeated right through the whole Irish culture, especially recourse to the Jungian protective Great Mother. So when England invaded Ireland, Irish used Catholic rituals and beliefs to support their cultural identity.

When England overran New Zealand, in the 1840s, English land owners brought Irish and other Catholics as labourers. These workers built Catholic churches to unite themselves into a bigger group, thus giving themselves greater chances of economic betterment.

With Ireland still fighting for independence from England, prejudice was still evident in NZ in my 1940s childhood. There were rival Freemason and Hibernian societies, derogatory Mick and Paddy jokes, juvenile urban taunts of Cat-licks and Proddy-dogs... However, none of that occurred in the close-knit North Island hill-country community of my childhood.

NZ's UNIFYING RITUALS

People in my childhood village were united by the rituals of meeting the evening mail-bus from town, by weekly Sunday afternoon rugby matches, summer pony club activities, and seasonal activities of shearing and haymaking. On many occasions a shared cup of tea with scones was their 'sacramental' bonding ritual. Mythic biblical stories of care for others hovered in the back-ground of everyone's decision-making, but the glue that made the valley a peaceful haven was the caring unselfish actions (heroically so after the Tangiwai disaster) that people did for others. I didn't know it, but I was living in a real "kingdom of heaven."

Since the 1980s, we have been united all across New Zealand by sport rituals, watched live or on TV, and these have inculcated our "sporting" ways of behaviour. People's aroha is expressed by giving money for the needy via the internet. Consequently, traditional formulaic church attendance has shrivelled.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLING

Catholic education of children goes back to monasteries in the Middle Ages. Monasteries had flourished even before the time of Jesus Christ. Treasured literary, philosophical, scientific and practical knowledge of Roman, Greek and Eastern civilisations were kept intact in Europe for hundreds of years by large, stable communities of 50 or more celibate men or women in self-sufficient walled monasteries and convents. This communal celibate lifestyle had many advantages over a peasant's sexual life on flea-infested straw in thatched huts with hungry babies, exploding populations, famine, plague, ignorance, bandits and endless toil. Despite legalistic doctrinal pronouncements from Rome, the monasteries generally nurtured deep love for others, making these sequestered communities peaceful places, "kingdoms of heaven."

Older monks and nuns passed their knowledge, attitudes, insights and wisdom to the younger ones, and one or two of them taught a few sons and daughters of the region's leaders, (who would need to read, write, calculate and know some history and philosophy so they could rule in their turn). The religious houses also had members with healing knowledge who treated local illnesses in small hospices in their region. The teachers probably moved to another monastery only once or twice in their lives.

.....the teachers were a tail being wagged by a large dog.

INDUSTRIAL URBANISATION

With the advent of industrial cities in Europe, thousands of children needed schooling to avoid a life of drudgery, exploitation and crime, and urban workers needed treatment when injured or sick. Capitalist factory owners were unwilling to establish and staff these facilities, therefore Catholic schools and hospitals were set up with small religious houses attached. In NZ these 'mini-monasteries' usually had 6 to 12 bedrooms, a small chapel, a study, a common room, a dining room/refectory, and a kitchen where a house-keeper/cook prepared weekday meals.

Instead of five pupils, with a hundred lay-brothers and highly educated monks, there were now five lay-brothers with two hundred primary school pupils.

In the Middle Ages the atmosphere of the monastery had permeated school life. A mature well educated monk, or nun, fitted a few hours of teaching into a week of prayer, manual work, study and sleep.

But after the mid-1800s, less-educated lay-brothers or lay sisters were fitting these monastic occupations into a week of lesson-prep, teaching, marking, yard supervision and school maintenance. Teachers were frequently being moved to different schools and different religious communities.

.....the tail was now wagging the dog.

However, in times of economic depression, or conscription for wars, the security of a Religious teaching or nursing Order was often preferable. So, in the first half of the 20th century there seemed to be no shortage of religious teachers and nurses.

POSTWAR BABY-BOOM

Then came the post-WW2 baby boom and a call from Catholic parents for more Catholic secondary schools for these extra children. But our bishops did not have enough money to pay married teachers (£1000/year), so they relied on Religious Brothers (£300/year) and Sisters (only £150/year !). Consequently, there were many "prayers for vocations" in Catholic churches and families. And teenagers got the hint.

Why were parents so keen on Catholic education? There were two reasons: they didn't want their children led astray by horrid Protestants in state schools, and they certainly did not want teenage pregnancies.

600 years previously, the Black Death in Europe wiped out 1 person in 4. (Excess deaths in India are about 1 in 1000 so far). People decided that using a prophylactic

length of knotted sheep gut was kinder than conceiving babies who would probably die in agony a few months after birth. This raised the probability of the whole population dying out, so the Pope in Rome passed a law forbidding ‘artificial birth control’ for Catholics.

450 years later, vaccination and scientific agriculture saw population numbers explode, in great part because young Catholics had been conditioned to feel guilt about using contraception, thus giving rise to accidental pregnancies and many social and financial problems.

The parents’ solution was segregated Catholic schools where priests and religious teachers inhibited teenage sexual experimentation with the fear of eternal torment in the fires of Hell for any teenager who performed, talked about, or even thought about sexual activity before marriage.

In the later part of the 20th century, the advent of a wide range of hormonal contraceptives made Catholic parents realise artificial birth control was needed to counter our technological society’s huge range of artificial death controls, so Vatican laws were quietly ignored, Catholic colleges became co-ed, and the era of schools run by Marist Brothers and Mercy Sisters threatening hellfire came to an end.

I AM RECRUITED INTO THE BROTHERS

But back in 1952, I constantly heard “prayers for vocations.” I was asked to consider “a vocation” to the Marist Brothers while I was still an idealistic pre-pubertal 12 years old. I spent the next five years in a small-town Catholic boys college, periodically threatened with hellfire for any sexual ‘thoughts, words or deeds,’ but otherwise well educated in a high-school solely staffed by 5 hard-working well-educated SM Marist priests. On leaving school, and having already been awarded a 5-year studentship for state teacher training, I decided instead to “try my vocation.”

Traditionally, young men had entered monasteries about the same age as they joined the French Foreign Legion, and for much the same reasons. But, with a skyrocketing post-war need for FMS Marist Brother teachers, I was welcomed into the Marist novitiate, although I was still a very immature 17 year old. The novitiate was situated far from home, on isolated farmland in the lower South Island, and I underwent 2 years of spiritual conditioning there. Twenty-four similar teenaged boys entered with me, most of whom, (unlike myself), had done their senior secondary schooling already preparing to be Brothers as boarders at the Marist Brothers “Juniorate” near Tuakau. Most of the pedophile Brothers were educated at the Juniorate.

To prevent adultery, we were trained not to look at women; and to prevent homosexuality, we were trained not to have special friendships with any other Brothers. To make really certain we didn’t commit either of these evils, about a third of the younger teaching staff, sometimes more, were shifted to other towns at the end of each school year. Consequently few of us formed any long-term bonds of mutual understanding and care with anyone we encountered. In 15 years, I was shifted 10 times.

I had been told before my entry into the novitiate I would be unable to return home for two years. But it was seven years before I was allowed back there. For two weeks. I

was 24. Five more years went by before I had a holiday with my parents again. For two more weeks. I was 29.

Those Marist rules broke down the friendships and bonds of care that my hill-country relatives and friends had for me, and the rules also broke my bonds of care for them. With no opportunity to make close friendships in an endless succession of schools, I was completely alone.

MY TEACHING CAREER

Catholic schools were suffering a great teacher shortage in the 1950s and 60s. To prepare me for teaching senior science classes, I was rushed through with one year training as a primary (?) school teacher - given very little practical classroom teaching experience – and then just 2 years at University. Fortunately there was a shortage of biology teachers, so I began studying topics that included ecology, human development and evolution, which eventually led to this little essay.

But when I started teaching in 1965, aged 24, I was still immature and undertrained. In my first two years (filling-in for others in 3 different communities in 3 different high schools in 3 different cities) I was struggling to get onto the students' wavelength: it was highly stressful, lonely and exhausting.

Our days started with a handbell ringing at 5.25 am. "Laudetur Jesu Christe!" We washed, dressed and were in chapel by 5.50 for prayers, left the chapel at 7.30 for breakfast, then some last-minute class-preparation, across the yard at 8.40 am to the school, 8 periods in classes that finished at 3.15, a cup of tea, exercise, sport coaching or a lecture at university, with maybe an hour of lesson prep.

At 5.30 pm we were in the chapel again for more prayers, 6 pm evening meal, 6.30-7.30 community recreation, TV or snooker. 7.30-8.30 spiritual study in our common study. 8.30-9.30 a second hour of class preparation, 9.30 communal evening prayers for 10 minutes in the chapel, and then bed....Or another two or three hours of university study, lesson prep and marking tests and homework. Often I was too tired to be woken by the 5.25 am bell. I was always frustrated because that 3½ hours of prayer etc each day stole the prep time I needed to teach my students well.

In 1966, my 3rd year of teaching (...and 4th community, school and town) the headmaster, and also our community director, was a Brother Maurice. Totally unlike the other kindly and intelligent senior Brothers I had met, Morrie had a personality eerily similar to Donald Trump's. As part of a staff of 12 mostly young and inexperienced Marist Brothers, and with only 3 years training and two years classroom experience, I was made 'Head of Science,' taught my 7 different maths and science classes diligently and proficiently, but was treated by Morrie as if I were an irresponsible teenager.

Within a few months, Morrie's narcissistic and unpredictable behaviour had made me increasingly anxious. When I went to our community's GP with a chronic pain in my solar plexus, he gave me valium, without telling what it did, without explaining what was causing the pain, and without telling me of any other cure ...such as leaving the situation I was in. Obviously I was not the first young Brother with the same ailment.

.....the tail was now wagging the dog so violently that the dog was disintegrating.

Brother Maurice damaged the psyches, spirit and careers of many young Brothers ...and students too. I am still puzzled why senior Brothers on our “Provincial Council” made Morrie a principal or a community Director. A desperate shortage probably. Years later Brother Maurice was the subject of a scathing article in ‘North and South,’ written by angry old boys.

My spirits were revived by five good years at the Marist Brothers High School Suva, where there was a stable community of excellent Brothers, where 50% of the teachers were proficient lay people of varied religions and nationalities, and where I had fascinating school holiday adventures working in the remote Fijian highlands.

The old Brothers there, Bros Lambert, Peter and Clarent, had been young lions in the 1930s who fought much opposition to start the first high school in Fiji that taught not just sons of white people or Fijian chiefs, but any boy. Most of their old boys achieved overseas degrees and by 1950s had filled professional posts all over Fiji, including those now staffing a dozen more high schools. We were highly appreciated there.

But after 5 stable years in Fiji, I had 7 more years with constant moves around New Zealand to fill-in for Brothers who were now leaving the Order by the dozen. I was burnt out by lack of class preparation time, chronic anxiety, constant shifts and consequent isolation. I thought I would be unable to earn a living elsewhere, and I felt I was trapped in the Brothers for life, as it provided food and accomodation. But in 1979 I finally got out.

Our years in an endless succession of secondary schools in a religious teaching order gave us neither the calm, the time to study, the supportive long-term companionship and the stability of life of a traditional enclosed monastery, nor the sexual comfort, the long-term companionship and stability of a married life.

And the compulsory 3+ hours of daily ‘spiritual’ exercises prevented us from having enough time each day to properly prepare lessons, correct student’s work, deepen the knowledge of our subjects and have the 8 hours of sleep available to secular teachers.

I left the Brothers as a skilled maths and science teacher, but I never taught in a classroom again. Fortunately, the job I found in a university research glasshouse was a lot like the quiet, contemplative and stable monastic lifestyle. The next decade there was a healing time for me.

I never did see or hear any indication of sexual abuse of children by Brothers in any of the 15 communities at schools I taught in, although I did spend different years in communities with six of the named offenders who would have been subject to the same regime as me; Bros Aiden, Bosco, Giles, Mike Beaumont, Claudius and Charlie Afiaki.

RELIEVING STRESS

Five years before I left, I made pets of three white laboratory rats that had been tormented by students in previous years. I gradually tamed them so they would follow

me around the room, run up my arm and sit on my shoulder - it was very stress-relieving to touch and respond to these small, soft, warm creatures after classes each day.exhausted at the end of a long day, I longed for simple normal human touch and connection.....

However I never had the slightest thought of using any of my pupils in a sexual way, nor did I have any realisation that children could be used that way, and were so mis-used by some Brothers and priests. After all, every one of us went to Holy Communion at Mass every morning. And Communion could not be received if you were “in a state of mortal sin” from sexual activityeven activity with an enthusiastic female!

Not long after I left, I read “Hero with a Thousand Faces” by Professor Joseph Campbell, a New York Catholic. He wrote:-

“When I began to read American Indian myths, I found the same motifs there that I was being taught by the nuns in school— creation, death and resurrection, ascension to heaven, virgin births. Later I became interested in Hinduism and Arthurian medieval material, and there were the same stories again.”

Campbell’s explanation of myth in our lives resolved so much conflict for me, and took away so much stress.

I also read Professor Lodge’s “How Far Can You Go?” and I realised I was not the only young Catholic stressed out by our religion in the 60s and 70s. In fact, being in the Brothers all through those times had actually allowed me to avoid the trauma of a Catholic sexual relationship, with all the stress of trying to raise six or more unplanned children!

My apologies for rambling on at length on about my experiences – I hope it gives you some idea of the environment in which those brothers who became pedophiles lived.

MY CONCLUSIONS

Some outsiders have claimed young men entered Catholic religious orders or trained to be priests so they could pander to their pedophile fantasies. But that seems ridiculous to me.

Pondering on this situation, I wonder if the Brothers who abused children did so because a succession of events like those I have described above created an abnormal mental state in men who had been programmed to live by impersonal rules, to have no close friendships, to have no enduring personal caring love for, or from, anyone except a mythic Great Mother, to have no other affectionate living being to touch and to be touched by, and who were placed for years in an abnormal environment, under more and more stress.

The offending Brothers should have been nurtured in a religion built on mythic stories and unselfish, loving relationships. But they were isolated and uncared-for in a religion of rules and codified dogmas.

I never had any personal experience of abuse from pedophiles when I was a child; all the adults in my childhood were kind, caring and helpful, and as a young adult I copied my elders' behaviour.

I wonder, does a stressed-out pedophile offender copy the stress behaviour of the adults in his own childhood? If he had been sexually abused himself when a child, was pedophilia a reflexive way for him to relieve his own stress? How many of the offending Brothers had been victims of paedophilia themselves?

The logical thing for him to do would have been to get away from the cause of his stress, the confining obligations of his Religious Order or Priesthood. However:-

(1) we had years of institutional conditioning to “persevere” - *Don't be like Lot's wife who looked back, and was turned into a block of stone,*

(2) the frequent shifts to fill teaching roles in completely different subjects in other schools damaged one's teaching competence and confidence, raising doubts about whether one could earn a living outside the religious order,

(3) some, like Charlie Afiaki, and probably Br Aiden, had family pressure to keep on being the “vocation” whom the family had “given to the Church to do God's work.”

Certainly, I cannot imagine any carefree young teenager would have entered a novitiate or seminary, and then undergone years of privations and thousands of hours of sleep-depriving prayer rituals just because it would give him access to young children 15 or 30 years later.

PREVENTING INSTITUTIONAL PEDOPHILIA TODAY

The sectarian Irish-English identity conflict is now about over, with Catholic and Anglican church congregations today being mostly diminishing numbers of nice old ladies, plus immigrants who need a cultural link to their homeland.

Teachers in Catholic schools now get their salaries paid by the government, and the board of governors can afford to hire plenty of fully trained married teachers, so intelligent and controllable young men and women living celibate communal lives are not needed any more.

I think pedophilia may still arise in communities where young adults are isolated and indoctrinated by ‘them-against-us’ dogmatic rules from alpha males, whether in a fundamentalist Christian community like Gloriavale, a Wahhabi Arab Muslim centre, or a ‘health-and-pure-living’ hippie sect.

I think most of these people in these isolated, rule-controlled communities will do much good, as with those in Catholic Religious Orders did in the 1950s-80s, and many will find satisfaction and contentment, but the stress of being on the outer, isolated from normal social support, will cause a few to commit evil.

SUGGESTED WATCHING / READING

Dear reader, if you are personally unfamiliar with Catholic life of the 1950s-70s, then these will introduce you to that very different world the abusive Brothers and I were a part of.

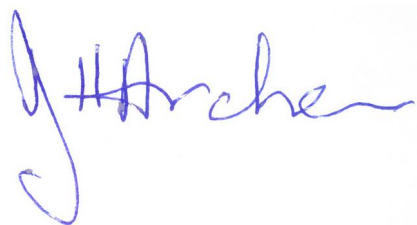
Professor David Lodge (1980) “**How Far Can You Go?**” - the lives of a group of young Catholics from the early 1950s up to the late 1970s. They are confronted with a wide range of issues and experiences including marriage, contraception, adultery, and the changes in the Catholic Church brought about by the Second Vatican Council and the 1968 papal encyclical against contraception, *Humanae vitae*. Whitbread Book of Year.

Fred Schepisi (1976) **The Devil’s Playground** - a semi-autobiographical film which tells the story of a teenage boy in a Catholic Brother’s Juniorate in Australia. Its focus is on the trials of the flesh and the tensions that arise for both Brothers and students from the Church’s injunction to control one’s sexuality. Schepisi himself went to this Juniorate. Winner of several Australian Film Institute Awards.

Statement of Truth

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and it was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (on an anonymised basis).

Signed



John H. Archer BA, Dip Tchg

Friday May 22nd 2021