Comment: *Being Interviewed*

Perhaps one should simply never grant an interview with the press. When approached recently to say something about 'the paedophile priest crisis', for a 'feature' in the Glasgow *Sunday Herald* , I agreed, with reluctance certainly, but it seemed cowardly to refuse to make any comment on what is, after all, one of the gravest scandals in the Catholic Church at the present time. Whether 'the outcry' will 'transform the Catholic Church', as the headline asserts, is another matter. Perhaps 'tremors from the US abuse scandal are felt around the world' is journalistic hype (Jenin? Johannesburg? Afghanistan?). Whether it 'could cause the US church to split from Rome' seems rather unlikely. This would happen, I think the idea is, if American bishops ordained married men and women in the belief that this would cure the dysfunctionality in the clergy.

The interviewer, on the telephone, was friendly and knowledgeable. The photographer who came round, took dozens of pictures. The picture that appeared, taken from a kneeling position at the foot of a flight of steps, makes me look gaunt, glassy eyed, distinctly glum and even somewhat dotty (see the *Herald* 21 April 2002, page 11). Admittedly, I did say to the photographer that a picture of me grinning would hardly be appropriate in the circumstances. The interviewer's picture, at the head of the piece, cannot be flattering, either.

The caption, anyway, attributes to me the belief that celibacy will become an 'optional extra' for the priesthood. This was picked up by the London broadsheets next day.

As 'the renowned Dominican scholar', and 'perhaps the most eminent Catholic thinker in the country' (Scotland, that is), I am said to be 'lining up' beside Keith Patrick O'Brien, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, whose portrait (at least ten times the size of mine) is captioned by the news that he 'wants priests to be able to exercise "the God-given gift of love and sex" in marriage'. In fact, even judging by the quotation from the Archbishop in the body of the article, it is not clear that he actually said that he 'wants' any such thing.

I guess that he, and the others interviewed (all devout Catholics teaching in universities: Philip Esler, John Haldane, Francesca Aran Murphy, Patrick Reilly, and Mario Aguilar, a former priest), doubted that there is a direct connection between sexual abuse of minors and celibacy. I certainly did so, rightly or wrongly.

Interestingly, Patrick Reilly, presented as standing for the 'old guard', emeritus professor at Glasgow University and now teaching philosophy part-time in the Scottish national seminary, is the only one of those interviewed who is said to be concerned that some men may be attracted

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2002.tb01805.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the priesthood because 'the vocation allows access and opportunity to exploit children'. I wonder, again, if he said quite that.

For myself, anyway, nothing is quoted that I did not say in the course of the conversation, nothing is distorted or completely misunderstood. I did predict that marriage will be an option for priests 'in under twenty years'. I did say that celibacy was introduced to stop the sons of priests inheriting church property; and that supporting a married priest with children would be difficult for many parishes. I didn't say that was the only reason, historically, for the rule of celibacy; I didn't say there were no other reasons besides money for delaying or refusing a change of discipline. Rightly or wrongly, I did say that 'accepting married Anglican priests into the Church was the beginning of the end of celibacy' — at least I said something like this, namely that ordaining a significant number of married men who were previously priests in the Church of England has made many people, including and perhaps particularly priests, question the longterm future of the celibacy rule. I may be wrong about this; I did say it.

The claim on which the interviews were predicated was that 70% of America's 64 million Catholics believe that ending celibacy and ordaining women will end child abuse by priests. 'Few of Scotland's Catholic thinkers', the interviewer discovered, 'believe scrapping the chastity vow will magically remove paedophilia from the priesthood'. (I imagine that Catholic thinkers can tell the difference between celibacy and chastity.) Apparently, we countered, some of us, that 'there are just as many paedophiles in the Church of Scotland or the Free Church or among Jews or Muslims, as among Catholics'. Well, I don't know what the others said. I said that sexual abuse of minors takes place most often within families; I mentioned the paedophile rings in children's homes; and so on. It would amaze me to hear of child abuse on a significant scale among Church of Scotland ministers.

I thought I insisted quite strongly on the (at best) clumsy and (at worst) near criminal handling of some of the child abuse cases by the bishops concerned. From what one reads, it certainly seems as if the credibility, and thus the authority, of some bishops have been irreparably eroded. I am not quoted as saying anything about this.

'The end of celibacy?', the article is headed, in big black letters. Well, I think not; but, all things considered, since there could only be summaries, paraphrases and selections, the interviewer did a reasonable job. The child abuse allegations are the gravest scandal in the Catholic Church in the West; we may not flinch from discussing the crisis, and we shall have to put up with the inevitable infelicities in newspaper coverage, however friendly.

F.K.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2002.tb01805.x Published online by Cambridge University Press