

**CODE WORDS IN REFERENCE TO  
CATHOLIC CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

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## **CODE WORDS IN REFERENCE TO CATHOLIC CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

1. If one is searching church documents for evidence of prior knowledge of incidents of sexual molestation or abuse by priests or searching for documentation on sexual abuse in general, the words pedophile, pederast, molestation, sexual abuse, sex, sodomy or similar words or phrases will rarely if ever be found in documentation from Church sources. One will generally not find any kind of direct reference to actual behavior. There are two basic reasons for this: the first is to camouflage sexual violation by clerics so that the true meaning of the references will be known only by clerics receiving or reviewing such documentation. The other reason is based in the Catholic Church's centuries-old theology (or philosophy) of human sexuality. The negative and fearful attitude towards human sexuality especially sexual acts, resulted in the practice of never using correct sexual terms out of a fear that to do so might give scandal or lead someone into sin.
  
2. In correspondence with medical providers such as psychiatrists and psychologists, code words and euphemisms have been widely used in the past and continue to be used in the present. All of the euphemistic terms or phrases used to describe the sexual violation of minors or to describe a priest who is sexually abusing minors listed below were found in medical, church, or criminal records.
  
3. The Catholic hierarchy (the popes and bishops) have known about inappropriate and illegal sexual behavior by clerics of all ranks, for centuries. In the present era (20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> centuries) the hierarchy has been aware of sexual abuse even though they have denied any knowledge until the mid-eighties. The extent of this knowledge has become decipherable as more and more church documents come to light and are examined.
  
4. An example of coded language is found in correspondence between Cardinal Norberto Rivera, former archbishop of Mexico City, and Cardinal Roger Mahony, former archbishop of Los Angeles. This correspondence concerned a priest, Nicholas Aguilar, who had been sent back and forth by the two cardinals. Cardinal Rivera used coded and oblique language in his

March 23, 1987 letter to Cardinal Mahony and in his declaration in the civil case as well. The letter said that Aguilar wanted to go to Los Angeles for “*family and health*” reasons. This has long been used by bishops and other church authorities to camouflage the real reasons that generally are related to inappropriate sexual activity with minors. In this case there is evidence of sexual activity with minors surrounding the letter which only adds to the reality that the phrase is coded language.

5. The other phrase that Rivera used was “*homosexual*” to describe Aguilar’s sexual behavior with males. This word was commonly used by Catholic Church officials and clergy in general to describe sexual activity between clerics and minors. The terms “pedophile” and “ephebophile” were rarely used until the present era when the intense coverage of sexual abuse by Catholic Clerics forced a more accurate awareness of the issue. I have reviewed over two thousand clergy personnel files and have seen the term “homosexual” and its variants regularly used to describe sexual behavior between clerics and minors particularly in files that date back to the years before the public revelations that began in the mid to late eighties.
  
6. More important however is the fact that Cardinal Rivera submitted a declaration on March 26, 2007 in which he admitted he had used *coded language* and further admitted that this is “*used within the church.*” Concerning his January 27, 1987 letter to Cardinal Mahony he said: *However, because I suspected that Fr. Aguilar might be homosexual, I cautioned that the motivation for Fr. Aguilar’s trip to Los Angeles was for “family and health reasons.” The phrase “family and health reasons” was used within the church to warn that a priest suffers from some sort of problem. I anticipated that Cardinal Mahony would request a more detailed account of Fr. Aguilar’s history and problems if he decided to consider Fr. Aquilar as an employee of the Los Angeles Archdiocese.*
  
7. He not only admitted that it was a code that any bishop or cardinal would understand, but also tried to defend his position in sending the priest who was soon arrested for sexual assault on minors in his new placement because he thought the priest was “only homosexual.”

8. Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Former Archbishop of Milwaukee confirmed the use of coded language in a deposition he gave on June 6, 2008. He was asked by the attorney: *In the third paragraph, second sentence it says, 'In his earlier years there was a moral problem having to do with a boy n school.'* When this says there is a moral problem in a communication between bishops, in your experience when bishops are talking about a moral problem in this context, that's often code for sexual abuse?" In response the archbishop said "Yes."

### **Codes and Euphemisms in Psychiatry**

9. Coded language was also used in the psychiatric community especially when referring to clerics being treated for sexual abuse of minors. Richard Sipe had reviewed many reports and medical histories of priests whose presenting symptom was sexual abuse of minors. Such priests were often misdiagnosed as pedophiles even into the 1970's when in fact their victims were not pre-pubescent children but young adolescents. This diagnosis might have been noted but was rarely if ever used as the primary diagnosis. It was usually classified as another more acceptable and available diagnosis. It was common to note the symptomatic behavior and to classify the causes as *schizophrenia*.
10. This distortion was not entirely the fault of the medical professionals or the treating institutions. Rarely did bishops reveal the real reasons for the referral of a cleric for medical treatment. Many bishops concealed or twisted the facts to make the priest and the diocese look as good as possible. Inappropriate sexual behavior, especially sexual violation of minors, was often omitted from the reasons given for the referral. This often impaired the treating professionals from conducting a relevant analysis and arriving at a true diagnosis. Then, upon discharge if the report made no mention of psychosexual behavior or problems, the bishops could claim that the priest was "cleared" of the allegations of sexual abuse.
11. In cases where the sexual abuse became known and the priest treated accordingly, the recommendations relative to continued ministry and the after-care plan reflected the psychosexual disorder. It was not uncommon for bishops and religious superiors to disregard the report and recommendations if these did not suit the bishop's conclusions about re-

assigning the priest. If the report and recommendations were not rejected outright, another tactic was to twist or re-interpret them (incorrectly) to suit their own judgment and needs. Finally, some bishops went so far as to contact the treatment professionals and strongly urge them to re-write their reports and recommendations to make them more acceptable to them.

12. Certain Catholic-sponsored treatment facilities were compromised in that they colluded with the bishops to destroy medical documents that recorded and verified criminal behavior by clerics. In 1989 the superiors at the Paraclete Fathers' facilities advised bishops in writing that they should destroy treatment files after they had reviewed them. The Paraclete fathers themselves destroyed numerous files. In 1990 Bishop James A. Quinn, auxiliary bishop of Cleveland, gave a lecture at the convention of the Midwest Canon Law Society. In it he advised the audience, made up of canon lawyers and church administrators, to send files that could be potentially incriminating, to the Papal Nuncio's office in Washington D.C. where, he told them, the files would be protected by diplomatic immunity. After 1985 a number of bishops ordered that their personnel files be reviewed and purged of incriminating documents. In February 2019 at the "summit" of the presidents of the bishops' conferences throughout the world, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich, publicly admitted that the global Catholic Church destroyed files to prevent the documentation of sexual abuse reaching back decades.
13. From the 1920s through the 1950s it was common to classify priests involved sexually with children or minors as schizophrenic. Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald, the founder of the Paraclete Order and the founder of a number of facilities where priests were treated, wrote in 1957 to a bishop who wanted to send a pedophile priest to Via Coeli, "*From our long experience with characters of this type...most of these men would be clinically classified as schizophrenic.*" (Letter to Bishop Matthew Brady of Manchester, NH, 9-26-57). He was also convinced by that time that priests who got involved sexually with children could not be cured.

Hospital records from 1982 give the diagnosis of "*paranoid schizophrenic*" to a priest who had been treated twice before for "depression." He admitted a history of abusing at least five boys each year during the course of his ministry. The reason for this categorization did have logic: the conscious

decision of a priest was to be celibate. He could not be a priest if he did not promise that. Since he wanted to be a clergyman and his behavior was diametrically opposed to this desire he had to have a “split-personality.” His behavior demonstrated primarily that he was “crazy”, and schizophrenia was an available diagnosis at that time. If his craziness could be controlled then he would behave appropriately, but that diagnosis was not seen as amenable to cure, just management.

14. *Alcoholism* has long been known as a problem among Catholic clergy. The lifetime incidence of alcoholism is twice as high in Catholic clergy (20 percent) than recorded in the general population. Since the 1930 special treatment centers for clerics and religious order members were established to provide confidential care that would remain hidden from the public. The high incidence of alcohol abuse was named as a major motivation for founding these centers. Alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence (alcoholism) was incorrectly considered to be directly related to sexual abuse of minors. Some bishops claimed to rely on spurious information that named sexual abuse of minors as a symptom of alcoholism. Consequently “*alcoholic*” was used as a label for many priests who abused children. They were often sent to Guest House where the exclusive focus was recovery from alcohol addiction not treatment for a psychosexual disorder. In the early 1990’s Guest House established a policy of refusing to admit clerics whose primary issue was psychosexual in nature.
  
15. A surprising number of priests and bishops were acting out sexually with children or adolescents. Drinking was a more benign diagnosis—less damaging to the reputation of the clergy and the church than any direct recognition of sexual involvement. It was not politically tolerable to use the word pervert or to label a priest a pedophile. Consequently, alcoholism and alcoholic became code words sexually abuse priests. This was supported by a number of “good Catholic” doctors including a number who were psychiatrists. They were often chosen by the bishops because of their” fidelity to the church and great love for the priesthood.” Their focus, more often than not, was to protect the priest and the institutional Church rather than to get to the true reasons why the priest was compelled to sexually violate minors.

16. The logic behind this psychiatric decision rested in the belief “if you could keep father sober, he would not act in these sinful ways.” Some how the idea that a person was drunk at the time of a sexual encounter rendered the sexual element more understandable and less culpable.
17. The psychiatric designation *depression* is well known and common in US culture. Mental health research has estimated that 7.9 to 8.6 percent of adults will experience a major depression during their lifetime (DSM-IV, 2005 imprint. Pp. 339-345). Richard Sipe found that during his years in training and on the staff of a Catholic hospital (Seton Psychiatric Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland 1965-1970) it was common to diagnose priest-patients who had sexually abused children or minors as suffering from depression. Many did in fact suffer from depressive symptoms because they had been caught.
18. In many cases the diagnosis was rendered as a cover, a diminishment, or a disregard of the major psychiatric element—inability to control sexual behavior toward children and adolescents. It was much more acceptable and safer to say that father was in the hospital for depression (or *exhaustion*, another euphemism) than to admit he was caught abusing children or to classify him with a psycho-sexual disorder.
19. The logic of applying a diagnosis of depression is similar to diagnosing a sexually abuse priest an alcoholic. The purpose was to help father feel better, enhance his self-esteem, and control his dark moods so he won't do these bad things. The excuse of alcohol abuse has been used when public figures have been caught in embarrassing sexual misbehavior. “I was drinking,” they say. For example, Congressman Michael Foley of Florida resigned his post in 2006 because of sexual advances he made to young Congressional Pages. In the aftermath he was “depressed,” entered treatment for alcohol addiction and then announced another factor often seen as superior to being identified as an abuser of minors— “I'm homosexual.” This triad of drink, depression, and gay identity is often juggled around to find the most acceptable—or least damaging—public explanation of criminal behavior.

20. Sometimes a priest's abusive behavior was so notorious and publicly known that a denial of his admission to a mental health facility was ludicrous. Even then the fact that a child had been abused by a priest had to be softened and covered as much as possible. The offending priest was treated for a psychiatric disorder and/or until 1973 when it was dropped from the DSM), he was labelled a *homosexual*.
21. At one time, in the 1960's the psychiatric cover of homosexuality was somewhat understandable. Some texts described pedophilia as "*a pathological sexual interest in children which is regarded as a variant of homosexuality in which the homosexual strivings are directed toward children.*" The perpetrator was considered weak and impotent, his actions reincarnations of his wishes for his mother's love, and because of insecurity and self-doubt he functioned on an immature psychosexual level (Lawrence C. Kolb, M.D., Noyes' Modern Clinical Psychiatry, Seventh Edition. W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia: 1968.)
22. Equating *pedophilia*, *ephebophilia* and *homosexuality* has been long-standing and detrimental to the understanding and treatment of men who are genuinely addicted and highly compelled to have sex with minors. In the early years immediately after the wide-spread public revelations after the case of Gilbert Gauthé in Lafayette, Louisiana, the issue was commonly referred to as the Catholic Church's "pedophilia problem." Sexually abusive clerics were commonly referred to as pedophiles and to some extent still are. This stems from the fact that former Fr. Gauthé, the priest whose serial abuse and subsequent cover-up by his bishop, was a true pedophile. He was only sexually interested in pre-pubescent boys (and one girl) and after they began to show signs of puberty he was finished with them. In reality between 10 and 15% of Catholic clergy who are sexual abusers, are pedophiles. The majority are sexually interested in young adolescents (ephebophiles).

### **The Law and the Church**

23. Prosecution and incarceration have not been the usual path for priests and bishops who have been found to abuse minors or been discovered in other sexually compromising circumstances. In 1967 a Monsignor was arrested consequent to picking up a 15-year-old hitchhiker, driving him to his (the



cleric's) parent's home, forcing alcohol on him, and attempting to rape him. The boy escaped from the house (breaking some furniture in the process) and screaming, roused a neighbor. When the police came at 1:30 A.M. they found the boy confused and distraught lying on the floor of the neighbor's home. The police traced the priest's identity through his parent's home.

### ***What happened?***

24. The Police handled it: "by filing a secret information with the Court." The Police determined: "more harm than good could be done by prosecution." The Sheriff said: "present the information to Bishop G---- and let him handle the matter, as has been done in the past." The Police discounted the idea that the priest might be an "active or latent-homosexual" but that he could be "*under severe strain*" combined with "*apparent intoxication.*"

### ***Church response?***

25. The priest was sent to a Catholic General hospital for a 30-day check-up and the announcement was made that he was recuperating from exhaustion due to *over-work*. As a parochial dean in 1983 he destroyed written complaints about child abuse by another priest. He was promoted and continued in ministry until 2000.
26. In 1987 the former bishop of Providence RI, Louis Gelineau, was arrested for sexual solicitation at a truck stop in Massachusetts. The arresting officer, a devout Catholic, did not discover that the man was a bishop from another state until after he had written the citation. He and his superior were concerned about the possible adverse consequences. The officer in charge of the State Police detachment called the Catholic police Chaplain and had him drive the bishop home to the neighboring state. The priest chaplain made a note of the incident. The arresting officer was troubled by his part in the incident and feared scandal. He consulted a well-placed cleric who assured him that he had not betrayed the church by doing his duty. He also made a note of the incident.

### ***The outcome?***

27. All police records were destroyed by some unknown agent. This event among others involving minor boys was kept secret by the church and by the

local law enforcement agencies. Although allegations of this bishop abusing orphans while he was a seminarian are on record, they never have been made public. Priests and bishops have been sent for treatment to Catholic hospitals under court order. The arrangement, informal or formal, was an agreement that the understanding judge would not press, or would suspend, charges if the cleric would submit to psychiatric treatment. Senior members of the staff of Seton Psychiatric Institute testified that the practice was long-standing there. The medical director of St. Luke's Institute wrote to a judge in 1991 assuring him that there were "many" patients there who were safely "on probation." In 1953 Father Gerald Fitzgerald reminded a bishop who sent a priest to him for abusing minors that priests were spared criminal prosecution only because they were clerics.

### **The Church Speaks in Latin**

28. It may surprise some people to know that even in the early 1960s the moral theology books used in seminaries could be in English save for the chapters on the sixth and ninth commandments. They were written in Latin lest lay people discover them and be scandalized and to avoid leading the seminarians into temptation by a discussion about human sexuality in a language they could readily understand. It is but one more indication of the degree of secrecy accorded anything that had to do with sex.
  
29. The various aspects of sexual intercourse were carefully and meticulously explained *in Latin* in the canon law textbooks so that priests would understand the essential elements of a canonically valid marriage. Conversely this information was also essential to the canon lawyers if people approached them asking to have the marriage annulled. A valid marriage in traditional Catholic teaching, required that the spouses exchange their vows in the presence of a priest whose participation was essential for validity. This is known as *matrimonium ratum*, a true marriage ratified by the exchange of vows. Once the couple had normal and complete sexual intercourse, the marriage became consummated or *consummatum*. Once the marriage was consummated, the bond that came into existence by the exchange of vows was rendered indissoluble by any power on earth.

30. The sections in textbooks devoted to human sexuality were commonly referred to as *de sexto* in reference to the sixth commandment, “thou shall not commit adultery” which in the Catholic interpretation covered every possible or imaginable form sexual communication by thought, word, action or desire with oneself or another. Hence the code-word *de sexto* commonly found in bishops’ letters or reports written by clerics, to describe sexual interaction with minors.
31. *Stuprum* is a classic Latin word originally used in ancient Roman law to mean criminal sexual intercourse between a man and an unmarried woman other than a slave or concubine. In the early medieval period, it was used to describe rape. It was also interpreted as sodomy which referred to sexual contact between adult males. In the canonical literature of the medieval period (10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) the phrase *stuprum pueri* was used to describe sexual intercourse between an adult male and a young boy. This was the predominant definition of the canonical writings from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is still found in documents pertaining to sexual abuse of minors. Hence, *stuprum* or *stuprum pueri* is a code term for abuse of minors by clergy.
32. Another phrase found in church documents is *de re turpe cum infantibus* which literally means disgraceful acts (more precisely, “things”) with infants or pre-pubescent children. In the moral and canonical literature “*in re turpe*” commonly referred to illicit or disgraceful sexual acts. When used in connection with sexual abuse by clerics it generally refers to sex with young children.
33. Two Latin words commonly used in Church writings to describe crimes in general are *crimen* and *delictum*. In canonical literature the Anglicized version of *delictum* is “delict” which is more commonly used than the word “crime.” These words are used to describe a variety of crimes and do not always refer to sexual crimes, especially if they stand alone in a document. However, the phrase “*delictum cum pueri* or *delictum pueri* are used to refer to sexual crimes with young boys.

34. The medieval canonical literature described sexual acts between members of the same sex as *delictus contra naturam cum eodem sexu* which literally means a “crime against nature with the same sex.” This phrase was commonly used in medieval and post-medieval or early modern Church documents to describe sex between an adult male and a young boy (not a prepubescent boy). The term has been found in documents generated at Via Coeli, the Paraclete Fathers Treatment Center in New Mexico. Documents from there after 1964 used the term “Code 3” to signify sex between clerics and young boys.
35. When referring to relationships between clerics and adult women, the clerical authorities always presumed that such relationships included sexual intercourse. The code language used the Latin word *mulier* which means an adult woman or *femina* which generally referred to a younger woman. There have been several variations such as *delictum cum mulieribus* or sexual “problems” with women (plural) or *delictum cum femina*.
36. One also finds the Latin phrase “*casus conscientiae gravis*” in official or semi-official documentation. The phrase, literally translated means “a grave case of conscience.” In its strict usage it is found in various Church textbooks usually about moral theology or canon law. It refers to instances when a superior makes a decision concerning a subject but cannot reveal the reason for the decision because it is a “*casus conscientiae gravis*.” This generally means that the information was revealed in a highly confidential context and because of its nature it cannot be revealed. In letters or documents concerning sexual abuse by clerics the phrase refers to a sexual offense committed by the cleric.

### **Bishops and Catholic Treatment Centers**

36. Bishops consistently used the vaguest terms and the most developed code words when they communicated with each other, with individual psychiatrists, psychologists or physicians, or with treatment facilities when speaking about priests who had acted out sexually. Often reference to sex with minors was simply stated as “*father is having a problem*.” Bishops knew what that meant. In addition to that the bishops frequently dissimulated when they referred a priest to a treating psychiatrist by posing

the presenting problem as “father is depressed” or “father is drinking too much.”

37. Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald founded the Servants of the Paraclete in 1947 and in that same year opened up his first foundation to assist priests with alcohol, sexual or spiritual problems. By his own admission, half of the priest-guests as they were called, were there for alcohol or other substance problems. The other half were there for sexual problems and most of these were priests involved with minors. By 1948 Fr. Fitzgerald said that his house (Via Coeli) was packed with alcoholic priests. The first known case of a priest with a sexual problem involving minors dates from 1948. In his response Fr. Gerald said that it was not his policy to accept a priest who had a ‘problem’ with children. Although he said then that his policy was not to accept priests who had sexually violated minors, he was obviously persuaded to change or abandon this policy because the records clearly indicate that most of the priests sent there for sexual problems were there because of sexual behavior with minors.
38. In 1957 Bishop Buddy of San Diego sent a priest to Via Coeli who had abused several minor girls with the description that he had made some *mistakes* that were so well known he would be ineffective in his diocese. He went on to say that if the priest learned “discretion” he could be very useful to another bishop. *Indiscrete* or *indiscretion* are code terms for sexual behavior usually with minors. Generally, when bishops were referring to priests who had become involved with adult women (married or single) the reference may have been veiled but it was clear that it was with a woman.
39. By 1957 Fitzgerald was experienced enough with the dynamic of child abuse that he could speak more directly about it and strongly urged that priests who even “*attempted to seduce little boys or girls*” should be automatically and involuntarily laicized (or defrocked to use the common but inaccurate term for being fired from the priesthood). He wrote to the bishops who had sent priests to his facility because they had been sexually involved with minors. He used a number of very derogatory terms to describe them: devils, rattlesnakes, reptiles. He did not believe they could be cured or even effectively controlled, and he urged that they be dismissed from the

priesthood.

40. *Troublesome involvements* is another label often used to indicate sexual activity, but usually meant such activity with adult women or men. Being *overly familiar* is another vague euphemism commonly found in bishops' correspondence. The reference often was "Father is *overly familiar* with some of the young boys of the parish."
41. The Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul had a brochure that was on their website. It was titled "*If you or someone you know has been sexually exploited by a member of the clergy.*" Then the brochure says, "*We want to listen and address the hurt that may have occurred when pastoral care was exercised improperly.*"
42. The above paragraphs provide an explanation and a context for the use of coded and euphemistic language to describe sexual interaction between clerics and children, minors or adults. The following is a list of known coded language all of which refers to sexual violation of minors.
  - Father has a problem *de sexto*
  - Father has *moral issues* with young people
  - A *homosexual* involvement
  - Father found himself in an *uncomfortable situation*
  - Father was *depressed*
  - Father displayed *misplaced affection*
  - Father has an *area of difficulty*
  - Father has been *over worked and under severe strain*
  - Father was engaged in an act of *stuprum*
  - Father is suspected of a *delictum contra naturam cum eodem sexto*
  - Father is suspected of behavior *in re turpi cum pueri*
  - Father has a possible *moral impediment*
  - *Boundary violations*

- *Unacceptable practices*
- *Problematic behavior*
- *Actions of questionable morality*
- *Unacceptable behavior*
- *Unacceptable behavior patterns*
- *Questionable relationships*
- *Imprudence or imprudent behavior*
- *Emotional or moral weakness*
- *Adverse homosexuality*
- *Psychological immaturity*
- *Questionable emotional stability*
- *Troublesome involvements*
- *Overly or excessively familiar*
- *Relational adjustment problem*
- *Inappropriate association with a minor*
- *Imprudent touching*
- *Overly familiar embrace*
- *Wrestling*
- *Youthful horseplay*
- *Errors in judgment*
- *Particular friendship*
- *Sentimental attachment*
- *Pastoral care exercised improperly*

43. Common terms to describe an absence from the assignment or parish due to sexual abuse of a minor:

- *Father has left for health reasons*
- *Father is dealing with family problems*
- *On sabbatical*

- *On special assignment*
- *Assigned to special projects*