

THE MEDIA SLANDERS POPE BENEDICT XVI

By Jim Seghers

The Murphy Case

On March 25, 2010 in a fallacious front-page article the *New York Times* charged Pope Benedict XVI with failure to act against Fr. Lawrence Murphy when, as Cardinal Ratzinger, he was the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Murphy was accused of molesting boys at a school for the deaf in Wisconsin. Subsequently, media sources uncritically reproduced or cited the *New York Times* article without checking its accuracy, which they could easily have done by examining the supporting data available from the *New York Times* website that refuted the allegations. It is sad to realize this and other similar articles reflect the current state of American journalism. What are the facts in this case?

Fr. Murphy left St. John's School for the Deaf in the Milwaukee Archdiocese in 1974, after accusations of sexual abuse. He was granted a "temporary sick leave" and moved by Archbishop William E. Cousins of Milwaukee to the Diocese of Superior in northern Wisconsin. Nineteen years later in 1993 Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, who became archbishop of Milwaukee in 1977, oversaw an investigation in which Fr. Murphy admitted to sexual misconduct with nineteen boys. According to Canon Law (the legal code of the Catholic Church) it was the responsibility of Archbishops Cousins and Weakland to administer penalties against Fr. Murphy for his reprehensible behavior.

The current archbishop of Milwaukee in a homily on March 30 clearly placed the blame for mishandling the Murphy case on his predecessors:

“Mistakes were made in the Lawrence Murphy case. The mistakes were not made in Rome in the 1996, 1997 and 1998. The mistakes were made here, in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, in the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s, by the Church, by civil authorities, by Church officials, and by bishops.”

On July 17, 1996 Archbishop Weakland wrote to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith headed by then Cardinal Ratzinger. This was in preparation for a full canonical trial of Fr. Murphy, which Archbishop Weakland ordered. Fr. Murphy received official notice from Archbishop Weakland of a canonical trial against him on September 10, 1996. Preparation for this trial continued in Milwaukee in 1997. In 1998 Fr. Murphy wrote to Cardinal Ratzinger asking that in light of a recent stroke he be allowed to end his days in peace. As a result Cardinal Ratzinger's deputy, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, not Cardinal Ratzinger, *suggested* that the trial might be terminated in lieu of sanctions against Fr. Murphy administered by Archbishop Weakland.

However, that suggestion was never followed. The documentation available on the *Times* website indicates that the canonical trial against Fr. Murphy was never stopped by anyone other than the death of Murphy on August 21, 1998. Two days prior to Murphy's death Archbishop Weakland stated that he intended to halt the canonical trial and proceed to remove Fr. Murphy from the priesthood, an action he should have done without a

canonical trial back in 1977. The canonical judge in the Murphy case, Fr. Thomas Brundage, reported on March 30, 2010 that, contrary to the *Times* article, the canonical trial was never halted-- by the Vatican or by the archdiocese-- and Father Murphy was a defendant at the time of his death.

Father Brundage was the judicial vicar for the Milwaukee archdiocese at the time of the Murphy case. He also reports that reporters never contacted him to verify details of the case. Moreover, he declares that statements attributed to him in the *New York Times* article were taken from handwritten notes were not written by him but by someone else.

Misrepresentation by the Arizona Daily Star

On April 1, 2010 *The Arizona Daily Star* repeated the slanderous allegations made in the *Times* article and claimed that Bishop Moreno's "frustration" with the slow process of cases against Fathers Michael Teta and Robert Trupia was caused by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith headed by Cardinal Ratzinger. Both these priests were laicized in 2004 after long delays; Teta was suspended in 1990 and Trupia in 1992.

However Bishop Gerald Kicanns of Tucson affirmed that the frustration expressed by Bishop Moreno "clearly refers to the challenge of getting the case resolved locally and it did not refer to a frustration with the Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith." Then he added:

"Pope John Paul II's decision to transfer the competency for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [in 2001] and his granting of an administrative removal of a priest from the clerical state have been immensely helpful to our Diocese in resolving these difficult situations,"

In regard to the cases involving Teta and Trupia, Bishop Kicanns asserted that Cardinal Ratzinger's office sought to expedite these cases not impede them.

ABC News

On April 1, 2010 an ABC News headline read: "New Questions About Pope Benedict's Role in Sex Scandal." The implication, of course, is that Pope Benedict was soft on priests who committed sexual abuses. However, the text of the story gives a very different picture. It claims that Cardinal Ratzinger was prevented from censuring Fr. Marcial Maciel by powerful friends inside the Vatican. However, the article affirms that when he was elected Pontiff, Benedict XVI promptly took action against Fr. Maciel.

The Hullerman Case in the German Diocese of Essen

In 1979 Fr. Peter Hullerman was accused of abusing boys. The priest was transferred to the diocese of Munich, which was then administered by Archbishop Joseph Ratzinger. Fr. Hullerman was sent to the Munich diocese for therapy. At that time it was generally believed that therapy could be effective in curing sex offenders. Subsequently, Fr. Hullerman was returned to the ministry and continued to abuse boys.

Newspaper articles around the world, including the *Times* on March 26, 2010, claimed that Archbishop Ratzinger was at fault, because he personally approved Fr. Hullerman's

reassignment. However, Mgr. Gerhard Gruber, then the Vicar-General of the Munich Archdiocese, acknowledges that he alone made the decision to return Fr. Hullerman to pastoral work. Furthermore, he declared that Archbishop Ratzinger was not aware of his decision.

Conclusion

It is ironic that these slanderous accusations are made against Pope Benedict XVI, the man who has done more than anyone else to combat sexual abuse in the Church. "No one has been more vigorous in cleansing the Church of the effects of this sickening sin than the man we now call Pope Benedict XVI," reports Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York last Sunday.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Cardinal Ratzinger did not become routinely involved in sex-abuse cases until 2001 – four years before Cardinal Ratzinger was elected Pope. His decision in cooperation with American bishops to bypass full canonical trials, often criticized by canon lawyers and some Vatican officials as a betrayal of due process, allowed bishops to act quickly and decisively when sex-abuse accusations arose.

The dramatic progress that the Catholic Church in the United States has made could never have happened without the insistence and support of Pope Benedict XVI who now being maligned by groundless innuendo and false statements.