In my opinion, the following article is the most important thing written thus far on the McCarrick scandal and the wider abuse crisis of which he is the tip of the iceberg. Dr. John Lamont exposes the deadly technique of every revolution: it combines the destruction of legal restraints aimed at by all of Liberalism with the failures and problems of the prior order (revolted against) and which gave rise to the conditions capitalized on by the revolutionaries to succeed. The Communist revolution of 1917 combined Marxist ideology with the repressive totalitarian institutions of the Czar. The Czar's secret police became the KGB enforcing blind obedience to Lenin and Stalin rather than Nicholas II. Yet, Lenin and Stalin had more power than Nicholas ever dreamed of possessing since their revolution destroyed the social institutions (such as the Russian Orthodox Church) that acted as a check on that power. Lamont brilliantly applies this repeated historical technique to the French Revolution in the Church which combined the old tyrannical techniques of learned servility with a destruction of the morality and philosophy that restrained its most destructive abuse in the pre-Vatican II Church.

My only minor critique of the article is that I think Dr. Lamont downplays somewhat the radical revision of Church law contained in the new Code of Canon Law of 1983. In the canons he quotes from the new code there is an introduction (common to the rest of the new code) of legal ambiguity. Although the new code permits severe penalties, such as removal from office and deposition, for these egregious offense, it only mandates a vague "just" penalty that can include the stipulated penalties of the 1917 code. Given the destruction of Thomistic clarity on the nature of justice, this opening is partly responsible, in addition to the important causes Lamont names, for the failure to discipline abuse.

CFN is grateful to Rorate Caeli for their permission to reprint this excellent article.

– Brian M. McCall, Editor-in-Chief

Tyranny and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Jesuit Tragedy

Dr. John R. T. Lamont

In the light of new revelations about sexual abuse in the Church, many Catholics are asking how the situation that these revelations have disclosed can possibly have come about. The first question that occurs, a question of long standing, is; why did bishops deal with sexual

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abusers by concealing their offences and moving them to new assignments, rather than by removing them from ministry? No sufficient answer has yet been given to this question. It has now been made more pointed by a further question; how did Theodore McCarrick get appointed as Archbishop of Washington and Cardinal, and even become a principal drafter of the American bishops' policy on sexual abuse in 2002, when his own involvement in sexual abuse was widely known in clerical circles and had been made known to the Holy See?

These things did not happen because of the law of the Church. Until November 27, 1983, the law in force in the Latin Church was the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Canon 2359 §2 of this code decreed that if clerics commit an offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue with minors under sixteen years of age, they are to be suspended, declared infamous, deprived of every office, benefice, dignity, or position that they may hold, and in the most grievous cases deposed.

This canon was replaced by Canon 1395, §2 in the 1983 Code, which states that 'a cleric who in any other way has committed an offence against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, … with a minor below the age of sixteen years, is to be punished with just penalties, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state if the case so warrants.' The 1983 Code addressed offences of the kind committed by Cardinal McCarrick with Canon 1395 §2, which states that 'A cleric who in another way has committed an offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, if the delict was committed by force or threats or publicly or with a minor below the age of sixteen years, is to be punished with just penalties, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state if the case so warrants.' These canons do not present these punishments as options; they require that such offences be punished by ecclesiastical authority. So our question now becomes; why did ecclesiastical authorities break the law by not enforcing these canons?

No doubt a number of factors combined to produce this disastrous situation. There is one factor however that has not been widely discussed or understood, but that has had an effect that is second to none in giving rise to the scandalous situation that now engrosses our attention. This is the influence within the Church of a conception of authority as a form of tyranny, rather than as being based on and constituted by law. This essay will present the nature of this conception, describe how it came to be influential, and explore some of its more significant results.

The intellectual origins of this conception of authority and obedience are largely to be found in nominalist theology and philosophy. William of Ockham notoriously came down on one side of the Euthyphro dilemma by asserting that good actions are good simply because they are commanded by God, and that God could make idolatry, murder, and sodomy good, and

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abstention from these actions evil, if he commanded that they be performed. This conception of divine authority lends support to a tyrannical understanding of authority in general as based on the arbitrary will of the possessor of power, rather than on law.

A law-based understanding of authority, in contrast, holds that law derived from the nature of the good provides the source of the authority of a ruler, and delimits the sphere in which a ruler can give commands. Scholars have long known that the dominance of nominalist thought in the fourteenth century left its mark on Catholic thought for centuries, with key nominalist theses remaining entrenched even in scholars who believed themselves to be upholding anti-nominalist traditions. The nature of authority was one of these theses. Catholic theologians and philosophers during the Counter-Reformation all held that law and moral obligation are to be understood as resulting from the command of a superior; Suarez gave a characteristic description of law as 'the act whereby a superior wills to bind an inferior to the performance of a particular deed.'

Restoration of discipline among clergy and religious was one of the main goals of the Counter-Reformation. The theories of law and authority that guided this restoration differed from a pure nominalist position, but these differences were lost when the practical principles for training in obedience were devised. These principles embodied a tyrannical understanding of authority, and a servile understanding of rightful obedience as consisting in total submission to the will of the superior. The most influential formulation of these principles was given in the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola on obedience. The key elements of the Ignatian notion of authority are the following:

> — The mere execution of the order of a superior is the lowest degree of obedience, and does not merit the name of obedience or constitute an exercise of the virtue of obedience.
> — In order to merit the name of virtue, an exercise of obedience should attain the second level of obedience, which consists in not only doing what the superior orders, but conforming one's will to that of the superior, so that one not only will to obey an order, but wills that that particular order should have been given – simply because the superior willed it.
> — The third and highest degree of obedience consists in conforming not only one's will but one's intellect to the order of the superior, so that one not only wills that an order should have been given, but actually believes that the order was the right order to give, simply because the superior gave it. 'He who aims at making an entire and perfect oblation of himself, in addition to his will, must offer his understanding, which is a further and the highest degree of obedience. He must not only will, but he must think the same as the superior, submitting his

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> own judgment to that of the superior, so far as a devout will can bend the understanding.'
> — In the highest and most meritorious degree of obedience, the follower has no more will of his own in obeying than an inanimate object. 'Everyone of those who live under obedience ought to allow himself to be carried and directed by Divine Providence through the agency of the superior as if he were a lifeless body which allows itself to be carried to any place and to be treated in any manner desired, or as if he were an old man's staff which serves in any place and in any manner whatsoever in which the holder wishes to use it.'
> — The sacrifice of will and intellect involved in this form of obedience is the highest form of sacrifice possible, because it offers to God the highest human faculties, viz. the intellect and the will.

It should be said that St. Ignatius's practical exercise of authority did not agree with his own writings. He was accustomed to send Jesuits on independent missions where they had to use their initiative. Literally construed, his writings on obedience could have no application in these situations, because the superior was not there to give the commands to which this kind of obedience is due.

We can explain the contradiction between his theory and his practice by the influence of the accepted philosophical and theological ideas of his time, and by the goals that his teachings on obedience were aimed at. His doctrine on obedience was intended to provide for an initial training in discipline, of the kind practiced in the military profession that he had once followed. Once this training was completed, it was also intended to ensure that Jesuits on independent missions internalized the objective that their superiors had sent them to accomplish, so that they would correctly and wholeheartedly carry out the missions they had been given. But St. Ignatius did not intend to give religious superiors a totalitarian control over all the thoughts and actions of their subordinates.

Unfortunately, the interpreters of his works read his writings literally, and credited him with upholding a totalitarian control of this kind as the model of religious authority. Some expositions of his teaching described obedience to an order than one suspects but is not certain to be immoral as an especially high and praiseworthy form of obedience. This statement about the exceptional merit of obeying orders that are morally dubious is made in St. Ignatius's letter 150. The letter was in fact written for him by Fr. Polanco, his secretary; but since it went out under St. Ignatius's signature, it benefited from his authority.

The full development of a tyrannical conception of religious authority and a servile conception of obedience can be found in Alphonsus Rodriguez S.J.'s *Practice of Perfection*

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and Christian Virtues. This work, the most widely read manual of ascetic theology of the Counter-Reformation, was published in 1609. It was required reading for Jesuit novices up to the Second Vatican Council. Its contents were accepted as the correct interpretation of St. Ignatius's teaching on obedience. In his proposed examination of conscience, Fr. Rodriguez (who is not to be confused with St. Alphonsus Rodriguez) requires the penitent:

> II. To obey in will and heart, having one and the same wish and will as the Superior.
>
> III. To obey also with the understanding and judgment, adopting the same view and sentiment as the Superior, not giving place to any judgments or reasonings to the contrary.
>
> IV. To take the voice of the Superior … as the voice of God, and obey the Superior, whoever he may be, as Christ our Lord, and the same for subordinate officials.
>
> V. To follow blind obedience, that is obedience without enquiry or examination, or any seeking of reasons for the why and wherefore, it being reason enough for me that it is obedience and the command of the Superior.

Rodriguez praises obedience – as he understands it – in illuminating terms.

> One of the greatest comforts and consolations that we have in Religion is this, that we are safe in doing what obedience commands. The Superior it is that may be wrong in commanding this or that, but you are certain that you are not wrong in doing what is commanded, for the only account that God will ask of you is if you have done what they commanded you, and with that your account will be sufficiently discharged before God. It is not for you to render account whether the thing commanded was a good thing, or whether something else would not have been better; that does not belong to you, but to the account of the Superior. When you act under obedience, God takes it off your books, and puts it on the books of the Superior.

Like other writers, Rodriguez makes the usual exception for obedience to commands that are manifestly contrary to the divine law. It has however been noted that the Jesuit doctrine of probabilism tends to nullify this exception. According to this doctrine, there is no sin in

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doing any action that a reputable authority maintains to be permissible; and one's religious superior normally counts as a reputable authority. There is also a psychological fact that tends to make this exception nugatory. Internalising and practicing this notion of obedience is difficult, and requires time, motivation, and effort. When it has been done successfully, it has a lasting effect. Once one has destroyed one's capacity to criticise the actions of one's superiors, one cannot revive this capacity and its exercise at will. Following the directive to refuse obedience to one's superiors when their commands are manifestly sinful then becomes psychologically difficult or even impossible – except perhaps in the most extreme cases, such as commands to murder someone, which are not the sort of sinful commands that religious superiors often have an interest in giving in any case.

This conception of obedience did not remain a peculiarity of the Society of Jesus, but came to be adopted by the Counter-Reformation Church as a whole. It became prevalent in the new institution of the Counter-Reformation seminary; the *Treatise on Obedience* of the Sulpician Louis Tronson gave St. Ignatius's teaching and writings as the summit of Catholic teaching on obedience. The Sulpician adoption of this conception was particularly important because of their central role in the training of priests in seminaries from the seventeenth century onwards. The servile conception of obedience remained the standard one into the twentieth century. Adolphe Tanquerey, in his widely read and translated (and in many ways excellent) work *Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique*, could write that perfect souls who have reached the highest degree of obedience submit their judgment to that of their superior, without even examining the reasons for which he commands them.

The Jesuit approach to the manifestation of conscience contributed to inculcating a totalitarian understanding of authority. St. Ignatius not only encouraged but required the manifestation of conscience, and he required that the manifestation be made to the religious superior. The manifestation of conscience included 'the dispositions and desires for the performance of good, the obstacles and difficulties encountered, the passions and temptation which move or harass the soul, the faults, that are more frequently committed … the usual pattern of conduct, affections, inclinations, propensities, temptations, and weaknesses.' He required that such a manifestation be made every six months, and he directed that all superiors and even their delegates were qualified to receive these manifestations. Instead of restricting the purpose of the manifestation of conscience to the spiritual well-being of the manifestee, he not only permitted but required the superior to use the knowledge of his subordinates gained through the manifestation of conscience for the purposes of government.

The overweening power that this practice gives to the religious superior needs no underlining. The ancient religious orders resisted the introduction of an obligatory

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manifestation of conscience on St. Ignatius's model, but many modern religious institutes adopted it. The abuses of the practice were so severe that the papacy eventually had to forbid it. It was banned for all religious by canon 530 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law (the Jesuits, however, were permitted to preserve it by a special decree of Pope Pius XI). By this time, however, the practice had had several centuries to leave its mark on the understanding of authority, the forms of behaviour, and the psychology of superiors and subordinates within the Catholic Church.

The novelty of this understanding of obedience can be seen by contrasting it with the position of St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas considers the proper object of obedience to be the precept of the superior (*Summa theologiae*, *2a2ae* q. 104 a. 2 co., a. 2 ad 3). St. Ignatius's lowest degree of obedience, which he does not consider to be virtuous, is considered by St. Thomas to be the only form of obedience. He holds that St. Ignatius's alleged higher forms of obedience do not fall under the virtue of obedience at all:

> Seneca says (*De Beneficiis* iii): 'It is wrong to suppose that slavery falls upon the whole man: for the better part of him is excepted.' His body is subjected and assigned to his master but his soul is his own. Consequently in matters touching the internal movement of the will man is not bound to obey his fellow-man, but God alone. (*2a2ae* q. 104 a. 5 co.)
>
> St. Thomas does not consider obedience to involve the sacrifice of one's will as such. The virtue of obedience in his view only involves the sacrifice of one's self-will, which is defined by its adherence to objectives that are contrary to our ultimate happiness. Rodriguez however makes it clear that it is not self-will, but the entire human faculty of will itself, that is to be sacrificed. This is a sacrifice in the sense of an abandonment and a destruction, since it involves eliminating the operation of one's will and handing it over to the will of another human being. Nor does St. Thomas think of obedience as a virtuous form of personal asceticism. He does not hold that obeying a command we dislike is better as such than obeying a command we are happy to fulfil.

A good person will be glad to carry out any suitable command, since such commands further the common good. He does not consider that all good acts are motivated by obedience to God, because he considers that there are virtues the exercise of which is prior to obedience – such as faith, which religious obedience presupposes. Nor does he consider that the essence of sin consists in disobedience to God, or even that all sin involves the sin of disobedience. All sin does indeed involve a disobedience to God's commands, but this

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disobedience is not willed by the sinner unless the sin involves a will to disobey the command in addition to a will to do the forbidden act (*2a2ae* q. 104 a. 7 ad 3). Obedience is simply an act of the virtue of justice, which is motivated by love of God in the case of divine commands and love of neighbour in the case of commands of a human superior. These loves are both more fundamental and broader than obedience.

The conception of religious authority and religious obedience that became dominant in the Church from the sixteenth century onwards was thus a fundamental innovation that departed from previous Catholic positions. It came to influence the Church through the training given in seminaries for diocesan priests, and the approach to discipline in religious congregations. The daily life of seminarians and religious was structured by a multitude of rules governing the minutiae of behaviour, and activities that fell outside this routine could generally be pursued only with the permission of the superior. Such permission was arbitrarily refused from time to time in order to encourage submissiveness in subordinates. Reasons for orders were not provided, and questions about the reasons for orders were not answered.

This approach to authority had damaging effects on clergy and religious. The exaction of servile obedience from subordinates destroyed strength of character and the capacity for independent thought. Exercise of tyrannical authority by superiors produced overweening pride and incapacity for self-criticism. The fact that superiors all started off in a subordinate position meant that advancement was facilitated for those proficient in the arts of the slave — flattery, dissimulation, and manipulation.

The laity could not hope for advancement in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, so the effect of promotion of a servile understanding of religious obedience was to infantilize them in the religious sphere. This infantilization can be observed in religious art and devotion, especially from the 19th century onwards, and in willingness to give blind obedience to the clergy. The resulting dissociation between adult maturity and religious belief undermined religious faith and commitment among the laity, and contributed to the steady secularization of Catholic societies.

The effects of this conception of obedience were mitigated by countervailing factors. Canon law, liturgical discipline, and the rules of religious orders provided detailed prescriptions that limited the tyrannical exercise of authority by superiors. Scholastic philosophy and theology, classical education, and the requirement for proficiency in Latin all imposed objective standards for the knowledge and intellectual capacity demanded of the clergy. Jesuit secondary schools, which were by far the most important and successful of their apostolates, were governed by an excellently designed *ratio studiorum* that laid down in detail what was to be studied and how. As long as the tyrannical conception of authority was

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restrained by these factors, it was crippling but not fatal to the Church.

An insidious feature of this conception of authority is that at the outset it seemed to be a success. It was used to put an end to the financial and sexual misbehaviour of the clergy that had helped to produce the Reformation. By so doing, it contributed to the brilliant achievements of the Counter-Reformation. The situation of the Church was like that of Rome under Augustus or France under Louis XIV; the peace and order produced by absolute rule permitted a flowering of the talents produced by the free society that had existed prior to absolutism. When the inheritance of freedom was spent and the full effects of absolutism were felt, these talents withered. The brilliant constellation of saints and geniuses that illuminated 17th century Catholic France was succeeded in the 18th century by failure and frequent capitulation in the face of the anti-Christian attacks of the Enlightenment.

This exposition of the history and nature of a tyrannical conception of authority in the Church explains many features of the crisis of sexual abuse. Psychological maturity is needed in order to successfully resist sexual temptation. By attacking this maturity, the inculcation of a servile understanding of authority makes chastity very difficult. The warped and inadequate personalities of those who are attracted to perverse sexual activity will not be identified in a system of training that is based on inculcating servile obedience. Such persons are often good at servility and dissimulation. They will thrive in a system based on servile obedience, while men of intelligence and character will struggle under it.

Superiors will not think of their own authority as bound up with the authority of the law, and they will not be inclined to respect and obey the law as such. They will have a strong incentive to conceal sexual abuse, because the authority of the clergy over the laity will rest on an infantilized conception of clerics as godlike father figures who can do no wrong. Such a conception is destroyed if serious wrongdoing by the clergy is made public. The laity who hold this conception will easily be persuaded or intimidated into silence about the cases of sexual abuse that they encounter. Both superiors and subordinates in a tyrannical system are taught to worship power and those who hold it, and to despise inferiors, the weak, and victims. As a result they will not tend to feel sympathy for victims of sexual abuse, especially children. Their sympathy will go to the abusers, who have been exercising tyrannical power in an extreme form. All the above phenomena have been observed time and time again in the cases of sexual abuse that have come to light.

The infantilization produced by this understanding of authority contributed to sexual abuse in several ways. An infantilized person cannot exercise independent judgment and is not able to stand up for himself or others. Infants are not able to comprehend evil, and they are not able to admit or even understand that their father figures are evil. Those priests who took the tyrannical understanding of authority seriously, rather than conforming to it in

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order to realize their ambitions and enjoy the pleasures of tyranny, were thus psychologically unable to speak out against sexual abuse and take risks to correct it. The ambitious did not do so because there was no percentage in it for them.

As for the laity, the brutal truth is that much sexual abuse of children by priests occurred with the collusion of the parents of these children. Without this collusion, the sexual abuse of children and adolescents by priests could never have taken on the dimensions that it did. Witness this statement by 'James', a boy repeatedly sexually abused by Cardinal McCarrick:

James said he had tried to tell his father that he was being abused when he was 15 or 16. But Father McCarrick was so beloved by his family, he said, and considered so holy, that the idea was unfathomable. … James says that as a boy, he had no safe place to discuss what was happening to him. "No place. No place. My father was just not going to hear it." … "I tried a couple of times with my mother, but she would say 'I think you're mistaken.' My father was born in 1918, my mother was born in 1920. They were raised in a way that the Catholic Church was everything. My father was a holy guy. He'd walk around with a rosary in his hand all day. My parents were very holy, and their parents were very holy. Their whole idea about life was that way."[1]

This erroneous conception of holiness was not the result of the stupidity of this man's parents. It was what they had been taught by the clergy — following a tyrannical conception of authority. It meant that they were incapable of grasping that priests could be evil – and that they thought that this incapacity was virtuous and a religious duty.

The chaos that engulfed the Church in the 1960s and 1970s was probably due in large part to rebellion against the tyrannical exercise of authority that had been inflicted on clergy and religious prior to the 1960s. Like other revolutions recorded by history, however, this revolt against tyranny did not lead to the triumph of freedom. Instead, it produced a more far-reaching and thorough tyranny, by destroying the elements of the *ancien régime* that had placed limits on the power of superiors. It did away with the factors listed above that had counteracted the influence of a tyrannical conception of authority in the Counter Reformation Church.

The progressive faction that seized power in seminaries and religious orders had its own programme and ideology that demanded total adherence, and that justified the ruthless suppression of opposition. The tools of psychological control and oppression that had been learned by the progressives in their own formation were put to most effective use, and applied more sweepingly than they had ever been in the past — the difference between the two regimes being rather like the difference between the Okhrana and the Cheka.

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Part of the progressive ideology was the falsity and harmfulness of traditional Catholic sexual teaching; the effect of this tenet on the sexual abuse crisis need not be laboured. But it would be a mistake to think that progressivism as such is responsible for this crisis, and that its defeat would solve the problem. The roots of the crisis go further back, and require a reform of attitudes to law and authority in every part of the Church.

[1] https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/uncle-ted-mccarrick-special-boy/

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