



## ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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**JASON BERRY**

**FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP**

SS. SIMON & JUDE

WESTLAND, MI

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### Introduction

**Bishop Thomas Gumbleton**

It is truly a great honor to introduce Jason Berry. He got on an airplane at 4 AM this morning to be with us. He has served 38 years as an investigative reporter and has authored nine books. We know him as writing about the Catholic Church and some of its problems.

He grew up in New Orleans and attended Georgetown University in Washington D.C. His better known books are:

- *Lead Us Not into Temptation*, on the clergy sex abuse crisis;
- *Vows of Silence*, abuse of power in the Papacy of John Paul II;
- *Render unto Rome: the Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church*, where the money goes.

From what we have been able to observe, we have not been able to hold people accountable to what's going on in our Church.

Jason has been a special friend to survivors of clerical sexual abuse. These victims want to be believed in their stories of clerical sexual abuse and in their sufferings. Jason has given credibility to these survivors. So we extend a warm welcome to Jason Berry.

### Financial Stewardship <sup>1/</sup>

**Jason Berry**

Thank you Bishop Gumbleton. Thank you Fr. Gerry Bechard.

My talk today will be based primarily on my latest book, *Render unto Rome: The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church*. Tom Kyle had sent me information on the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington. Unfortunately, I had to cut it short at the request of my publisher.

How strong is the culture of passivity in our Church. Most people go to church to listen to the gospel, not to listen to bi-polar presentations. Folks don't know where their money is going, and are concerned about it.

Peter's Pence is about the pope's philanthropy. For example, he helped rebuild a school in Haiti after the earthquake. 82 million dollars was raised last year. Research has revealed how that money was spent in Rome. Only 8.9 million dollars (11%) had been released. Peter's Pence has gone to plug the Vatican's debts.

By 1880 American money began flowing to Rome. Rome began investing in local real estate in Rome.

Canon law does not deal effectively with bishops who have financial problems. For example, Bishop Leonard Blair suppressed a parish in Kansas, Ohio. Some of the members of that parish are here today. Although these parishioners challenged their bishop and appealed to Rome and to civil courts, Ohio courts decided that Bishop Blair owned the property and had the right to close a parish. Today, all that remains is the bell tower in a field. Civil judges do not like to decide on church-state issues. Any decision, favorable or unfavorable, put their re-election at risk.

The arrogance of power is played out in so many ways. Canon law describes a parish as a juridic person. Parishes are closing at a rate of once per week nationally. Bishop Richard Lennon has closed 52 parishes in Cleveland. Future Church believes that most of these churches should have remained open. After Katrina Archbishop Alfred Hughes closed the African-American parish, St. Augustine, in New Orleans.

We learned that the archdiocese had cancelled flood insurance on a number of church properties just prior to the hurricane to save money.

What's happening here? From the bishop, "It's my way of the highway." There is a distance between the monarchical structure of the church and a collegial style advocated by Vatican II. The Church needs a different set of laws. Apostolic succession may be part of the problem. No bishop can be wrong - or at least not wrong enough to be removed. Cardinal Law of Boston literally spent the spigot dry. Boston Catholics donated \$4.5 million per year to the priests' pension fund; yet the money was not there. Bishop Richard Lennon, then auxiliary bishop in Boston, arranged to sell church property that would maximize return, although most of these parishes were viable parishes.

In 2003, Archbishop Sean O'Malley, OFM Cap, arrived as the archbishop in Boston. Cardinal Bernard Law at that time was living at a convent in Maryland. Archbishop O'Malley was formerly bishop of Palm Beach, FL, where he had succeeded a bishop who had been removed. Archbishop O'Malley walked into Bishop Lennon's plan to sell church property to pay the liability on clergy sexual abuse cases. Archbishop O'Malley was so distressed that he prayed for death to relieve him of this situation.

The case against Fr. Marciel Marciel Degollado, founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, lingered for 6 years during the papacy of John Paul II. Fr. Marciel had been a major fund raiser for John Paul II, who ran interference on the investigation. In fact, Fr. Marciel has been the most successful fundraiser in the history of the Church. Benedict XVI acted in 2004. Fr. Marciel was removed as head of the Legionnaires of Christ, and placed in a monastery for life, where he died a year later.

The Holy See is not a government of laws. It gives every bishop defacto immunity. The credibility of the papacy is on the line. The pope stands on a legal system that is archaic. Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) was a visionary. Every papal visit is an affair of state. The pope is a voice of human rights.

Hans Kung has referred to Pope Benedict XVI as the grand inquisitor - reference the grand inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Until we get a bonified set of laws, little change can be expected from the Vatican.

Large numbers of Catholics in Austria, as well as other places in Europe, are leaving the Church. In the United States the percentage of Catholics have decreased from 33% to 28%, even though the Hispanic population, which is primarily Catholic, continues to increase.

For the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., Detroit Catholics should ask for their money back! Use the system to apply pressure to Rome. This is our test. This is our time.

*Tom Kyle*

1/ This report is based on notes taken by Tom Kyle. Jason Berry had requested that his talk not be electronically recorded.