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## Can Pope Francis finish the job that Benedict began?

By Robert A. Gahl J.r., Published: May 7, 2013 at 4:24 pm

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In this photo provided by the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, left, is welcomed by Pope Francis as he returns at the Vatican from the pontifical summer residence of Castel Gandolfo, 35 km South-Est from Rome, Thursday, May 2, 2013. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI came home on Thursday to a new house and a new pope, as an unprecedented era begins of a retired pontiff living side-by-side with a reigning one inside the Vatican gardens. In background is archbishop George Gaenswein, prefect of the papal household. (AP Photo/Osservatore Romano, HO)

In October of 1999, at the end of a meeting of departmental chiefs in the Vatican, I confronted Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and challenged him. The meeting was meant to discuss available options for dealing with the already-burgeoning international crisis of sexual abuse. Everyone in that room aimed for justice, especially for the victims, but also for the accused. Ratzinger was leading the curial push to decisively deal with perpetrators who were still a threat because of some weak-minded administrators and their policy to move criminals first to treatment and then back into ministry.

I had been invited by the Congregation for Clergy to present an ethical analysis of the extrajudicial, administrative practices used by the church to prosecute cases of clerical sexual abuse. At that meeting, I highlighted the risks of violating the natural right to a fair trial. The cardinals expressed differences of opinion regarding their concern for the rights of the accused and the terrible wounds of the victims who had been abused by those whom they had held in sacred trust. Despite his gentleness, Ratzinger



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demonstrated deep determination to satisfy justice.

Ratzinger did not aim for a middle place between the competing interests of the victims and of the accused, but to ascertain the truth, reach a verdict, and impose a just penalty, all while doing everything possible to heal the victims and repair the damage done to the church and society. After noting my concern for judicial due process, he indicated his unshakeable commitment to do everything possible to root out abusive clergy, fully cognizant that he could be criticized by canon lawyers for eliminating traditional steps in ecclesiastical trials designed to protect the rights of the accused.

That moment in 1999 was an emergency. The problem was even worse than it appeared. First under John Paul, Ratzinger drafted new norms, extended statutes of limitations, and even offered dispensations from the retroactive statutes of limitations in the case of the most grievous crimes committed against minors.

Once elected pope, Benedict continued the reform. He revised the church's penal law and sharpened its teeth to make sure that no criminal could evade sanction. He created tribunals, met with victims and purified the ranks of clergy from those who might hurt the young. He held judicial trials and removed more than a 1,000 from the priesthood and several from the episcopacy. Towards the end of his papacy, in 2010, Benedict again

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reformed church law to empower a tribunal to hear cases brought against bishops and cardinals.

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Benedict is rightly known for uplifting men and women of good will by preaching that God is love and Jesus is divine Logos incarnate. Benedict also taught about the dark side of humanity. “Evil,” he once stated “draws its power from indecision and concern for what other people think.” He had experienced the malignancy of the Nazi regime and reconfirmed his commitment to sweep out the filth from the Bride of Christ.

Upon retirement, Benedict explained that he no longer enjoyed the needed vigor, of body and spirit, to govern the church. He stepped aside so that a younger man might continue the task and follow through with reform of church governance.

Now, the world observes the eloquent gestures in these first few weeks of Pope Francis, while wondering whether the new pope will continue Benedict’s reform. Francis has already shown the world the Christ-like characteristics that the cardinals, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had been seeking for the new pope.

In his third tweet, Pope Francis stated: “True power is service. The pope must serve all people, especially the poor, the weak, the vulnerable.” And when archbishop in Buenos Aires, Bergoglio commented on the responsibility of bishops regarding priests who have committed sexual abuse. “You must never look away” he said. “You cannot be in a

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position of power and use it to destroy the life of another person.” It would be a mistake, he added, to put the church’s reputation first, in a “corporate spirit ... to avoid damaging the image of the institution.”

After meeting for the first time with Archbishop Mueller, the head of the Vatican’s office responsible for prosecuting culpable clerics, whether priests, bishops, or even cardinals, Francis publicly confirmed his commitment to continue Benedict’s efforts to protect minors, assist victims of abuse, prosecute criminals according to due process, and to help bishops’ conferences around the world to implement the “necessary directives in this area that is so important for the church’s witness and credibility.”

Cardinals have confided that when deliberating in the Sistine Chapel, they were looking for a pope who could lead a reform of the Vatican while continuing Benedict’s policy of zero tolerance for sexual abuse. Benedict’s new laws specify how to satisfy justice and guarantee accountability within the church by bringing to trial even the highest ranking clerics accused of abuse of power, whether by sexual or financial crimes. In a mystical apparition, Jesus told St. Francis of Assisi to repair his church. All signs point to a Pope Francis ready to keep cleaning the house of God.

*Rev. Robert A. Gahl, Jr. is Associate Professor of Ethics at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.*

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**areyousaying** wrote:

5/9/2013 12:07 PM EDT

No problem if it's continuing Ratziner's protection of pervert priests.

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**one nation** wrote:

5/8/2013 7:13 AM EDT

Good luck but he better watch out what he eats and drinks. JP1 lasted 33 days.

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**Henry452** wrote:

5/8/2013 5:43 AM EDT

So, how come the bishop in New Jersey didn't get the memo? Until last week, an admitted child predator was still getting access to children who were away from home attending a retreat.

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**Gracías** wrote:

5/8/2013 1:00 AM EDT

I'd like to ask Rev. Gail if this written piece is pure fiction, a product of his imagination. Who, when, where, and how did you get the information that a thousand priests and bishops were removed and penalized because of the crimes they committed against the innocent victims??? Not even a few cases of such claim ever made it to the news. In fact, many victims were begging the Pope JP II to remove from priesthood the most criminal of them all and nothing happened. Why this fabrication now?

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**briannorkett** wrote:

5/7/2013 11:09 PM EDT

Liberals are obsessed with sex abuse in the Catholic church from 40 and 50 years ago in the same way that Republicans were concerned about perjury in a civil case in the impeachment proceedings of Bill Clinton.

It's hilarious.

Go here to learn the hidden agenda behind the liberal media's jihad of exaggeration, bias and misinformation about the Catholic church and ancient claims of sex abuse.

<http://www.themediareport.com/>

Stop the bias! Stop the lies! Tell the truth!

Speak truth to the power of Big Media!

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**areyousaying** responds:

5/9/2013 12:16 PM EDT

Well, well, well, the bloated, red-faced Bill Donohue again comes to the rescue of his pervert priests. This time, instead of calling the victims "gold-diggers" his vile Catholic league demonizes those who speak out as, oh my God! - liberals! The abuse is far from ancient (read the paper daily about New Jersey and other places).

Demonizing the protest as a "jihad of exaggeration" blah blah blah will not silence me or other victims like the Vatican did with its little-boy-sex workers they paid off to shut up and go away. I never wanted or accepted a single stinking semen and blood stained penny from this satanic perversion of Christ's name. Maybe those Mormon boys I grew up were right when they claimed this is "the Church of the Devil"

Stop the lies! Stop the abuse by pervert priests! Stop the cover ups and, Catholics, stop looking the other way. Speak truth to the power of the world's largest ring of pedophiles and their protectors like norkett a.k.a Bill Donohue.

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**amelia45** wrote:

5/7/2013 8:30 PM EDT

Rev Gahl's vision of what Ratzinger did is not the image that took hold in the Church. He failed to bring justice to victims, to assure they were treated with respect, dignity, and love. He failed to hold sex abusers accountable. And the reason he failed is because he did not hold bishops accountable for their poor handling of either one.

It seems, based on the latest stories of a fumbling bishop, that the bishops got his real message clear enough. Ratzinger acted as if they talked about women priests or optional clerical celibacy. As for the sex abuse scandal, as long as the bishop was not the sex abuser, the bishop was safe no matter what he did. I think the U.S. bishops, and perhaps those in Australia, did get Gahl's message of assuring due process for the priests - because they did not get the message about justice for the victims.

Maybe Francis will see that he must act to bring credibility back to the Church by holding bishops accountable.

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**Emmett Coyne** responds:

5/7/2013 10:57 PM EDT

I agree with you Amelia, "He (Ratzinger) did not hold bishops accountable..." Pedophiles are perhaps driven by uncontrolled impulses. Bishops willfully mislead priests and people and especially victims. Even St. Thomas Aquinas taught that willful acts are more heinous than impulsive actions.

Meanwhile, "the bugger bishop of Bruges" is still on the lam.

Bishops Finn, and now Meyers, among others, remain safely ensconced in their episcopal throne

Francis 1 is following B16 in perfect harmony. Unity, at all costs!

And author of article, Gahl, isn't he connected with Opus Dei which runs HCU?

Is "Gahl" synonymous with gall? Bit of gall here to let him vent his bias.

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**glorybe1929** wrote:

5/7/2013 6:09 PM EDT

Continue what Ratzinger started? What a question? The only thing Ratzie started was to continue the same agenda as all the other Popes before him. I'm sure the new pope Francis will do exactly the same. Only difference is a personality that is trying to be so very HUMBLE. Unlike the "his own cologne and Prada shoe wearing" undercover old pope.

"



**viewpnt3** responds:

5/7/2013 7:06 PM EDT

Don't think glorybe1929 has facts on his side.

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**normandyso** responds:

5/7/2013 9:51 PM EDT

Oh, yes he does. Get off the Kool-Aid.

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**one nation** responds:

5/8/2013 7:20 AM EDT

Ben16 was great at turning the clock back to dark age standard time. Being retired, he should get out of the pope's outfit as well.

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