

In the Philippines, Wolves Amidst the Sheep?

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*A CONVICTION OVER A SEX
ABUSE SCANDAL MORE THAN
20 YEARS AGO CONTINUES
TO HOUND AN AMERICAN
CATHOLIC PRIEST WHO WAS
ORDAINED IN AND
CONTINUES TO SERVE IN*

THE PHILIPPINES.

*[JOSEPH] SKELTON WAS
ORDAINED IN THE
PHILIPPINES, WITH BISHOP
LEOPOLDO TUMULAK
ORDAINING HIM WITHOUT
KNOWING ABOUT HIS
CONVICTION.*

Here's my reaction to the *sex abuse Catholic priest found in the Philippines*: **not surprised.**

I'm only surprised that our local media hasn't caught on to the *Filipino* priests who have been accused of sexual abuse within our borders.

Based on *this comprehensive (but almost outdated) 2004*

report by the Catholics for Free

Choice and Likhaan, *no* priest accused of sexual abuse in the Philippines seems to have been successfully prosecuted.

Most of them have overcome their cases in different ways: settled out of court, acquitted, or moved to other parishes by their superiors, or have cases pending but are quietly reinstated to pastoral duties.

After acquittal, settlement, or a wait of a year or so, the priests mentioned in the report have mostly been reintegrated into active ministry within the Catholic Church.

Here's a brief run-down of the priests mentioned in the report, and the results of a morning's Googling of their names. Assuming the search hits reflect the same people

mentioned in the Likhaan report (insert margin of error here), it's my *opinion* that the Catholic hierarchy's actions show a tendency to **minister to the wolves at the expense of the sheep.**

AGUSTIN CUENCA

According to the **CFFC/Likhaan Report**:

ON 1 AUGUST 1990, FR. AGUSTIN CUENCA, OFM, A PARISH PRIEST ASSIGNED TO THE OUR LADY OF THE ABANDONED CHURCH IN STA. ANA, MANILA, WAS ACCUSED OF SEXUALLY MOLESTING TWO OF HIS TEENAGED ACOLYTES. THE COMPLAINT

*ALLEGED THAT HIS
ACCUSERS, 15 AND 16
YEARS OLD, WERE ABUSED
SEXUALLY FOR A PERIOD OF
TWO YEARS STARTING IN
DECEMBER 1988 UNTIL JUNE
1990 BY CUENCA.*

A certain Agustin Cuenca OFM is attached priest at St. Anthony Padua Shrine in Sampaloc, Manila. As of 2006, Cuenca was the director of the Franciscan Missionary Union. Claretian Publications lists a Fr. Cuenca as the house bursar of St. Gregory the Great Friary in Quezon City. Here's a Flickr image of a Fr. Agustin Cuenca blessing a privately-owned icon of St. Anthony.

MACARIO APUYA

According to the CFFC/Likhaan Report:

*IN THE CITY OF DAGUPAN,
NORTH OF METRO MANILA,
FR. MACARIO APUYA, SVD
OF THE SAINT THERESE
PARISH, WAS ACCUSED OF
TWO CRIMINAL CHARGES,
ONE CHARGE OF RAPE AND
ONE OF CHILD ABUSE AS
DEFINED UNDER R. A. NO.
7610.... THE CASE HAD
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
SINCE IT WAS THE VERY
FIRST TIME THAT A PRIEST
WAS BEING PROSECUTED FOR*

PEDOPHILIA IN THE PHILIPPINES.

A priest with Apuya's name is seen here **celebrating the Jubilee Mass for the Divine Word Missionaries**. A Macario Apuya is currently serving in **Mary Consolatrix Convent in La Union** – if it's the same Apuya who was accused of raping underage girls, is it wise to have him running loose in a cloistered convent?

POLIENATO BERNABE

According to **the report's overview of reported cases of sexual abuse by priests**: “Florida officials issued a warrant for the arrest of Fr. Polienato Bernabe, 61, a native of Pangasinan, who had been charged with sexually abusing an 8-year-old girl more than two decades ago in Gulfport, Florida.” Bernabe took shelter in the Philippines and **died**

– avoiding trial to the end – in 2006.

ARWYN N. DIESTA

The overview cites that Fr. Diesta was the subject of a request from a US lawyer regarding an accusation that Diesta had abused him when he was a boy. Another report, issued by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, maintains that “Plaintiff reports that he was sexually abused by Fr. Diesta from approximately 1982-88.”

A certain Fr. Arwyn Diesta is still active in the Parish of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Sorsogon. Other Google search hits turn up a Fr. Arwyn Diesta who said a funeral mass in 2008. A Father Diesta is also mentioned as an English professor. A priest named Arwyn Diesta is seen here celebrating a Mass in Sorsogon in 2006 – the blog

entry shows a clear picture of Fr. Diesta.

APOLINARIO MEJORADA

The overview cites the case of Fr. Apolinario Mejorada, who was accused of sexually abusing altar boys in Cebu between 1995 and 1998. “About a week later, Mejorada’s superiors admitted he was involved in some ‘transgression’ and paid Php 120,000 pesos in settlement.” Where is Mejorada today? All we know is that a certain Apolinario Mejorada is **currently a parochial vicar somewhere in San Pedro, Laguna.**

The following priests were involved in cases that went public AFTER the CFFC/Likhaan report was issued.

JOSE BELCIÑA

In 2006, **Jose Belciña was charged with rape and child**

abuse – the rape charges were **later dropped for lack of evidence**, but the child abuse charge was allowed to stand. Belciña laid low for a while – to quote SunStar columnist **Bong Wenceslao**: “When asked by the authorities on the whereabouts of Fr. Jose Belciña, Msgr. Achilles Dakay answered: *I am not his custodian*. Reminds me of Cain’s answer when asked about the whereabouts of his brother Abel: *Am I my brother’s keeper?*”

As of 2008, Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal has **restored Belciña to pastoral duties** in Minglanilla, southern Cebu – a move that has **stirred up more controversy**.

BENEDICTO EJARES

In 2007, Fr. Benedicto Ejares was **accused of sexually harassing teenage girls under his charge** in a “Life in the

Spirit” seminar in Cebu. Despite orders not to publicly say Mass, **Ejares did so in a government building** in 2008. **Ejares has contested a ruling** finding probable cause in charging him with child abuse.