

A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church

MEMOIRS OF A CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP

Rembert G. Weakland, OSB

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.

© 2009 Rembert G. Weakland
All rights reserved

Published 2009 by
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
2140 Oak Industrial Drive N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505 /
P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.
www.eerdmans.com

Printed in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09 7 6 5 4 3 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Weakland, Rembert.
A pilgrim in a pilgrim church: memoirs of a Catholic archbishop /
Rembert G. Weakland.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8028-6382-9 (cloth: alk. paper)

1. Weakland, Rembert. 2. Bishops -- Wisconsin --
Milwaukee -- Biography. I. Title.

BX4705.W3815A3 2009

282.092 -- dc22

[B]

200901219

Excerpts from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* appearing in this volume are from the original text edited by A. C. Cawley, Everyman's Library (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).

Quotations from the modern English prose version are from THE CANTERBURY TALES by Geoffrey Chaucer, translated by David Wright, copyright © 1964 by David Wright. Used by permission of Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., and reprinted by permission of SLL/Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc. Copyright by Peters Fraser & Dunlop A/A/F/DJM Wright Trust.

*To the ecumenical and interfaith community in Milwaukee,
to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee,
but especially to its priests;
in gratitude.*

sociate pastors approximately every four years." I took these two explanations as an indirect way of informing me that Widera was not moved because of any recidivism. The chancellor also noted in the letter that Widera had been assigned to work with the Naim conference and served as spiritual moderator for all the Naim conferences of the diocese. The Naim conferences, named after the widow of Naim whose son Jesus had raised from the dead (Luke 7:11-17), had as their scope a pastoral ministry to widows, a relatively safe pastoral task for someone with Widera's inclinations. In the light of this letter, I signed the document of excommunication.

I was surprised to read in about 2006, some thirty years later, in the newspapers the claim that Archbishop Cousins had hidden Widera's problem from the bishop of Orange. Bishops in those days put very little in writing about problems of this sort so I was surprised that Cousins had talked to Bishop Johnson on the phone and written to the chancellor as much as he did. About such matters, a bishop would have been very discrete. Cousins seemed to have gone out of his way to relay the facts and raise a warning flag. Moreover, the case was no secret in Milwaukee; there had been a public trial with pictures in the local papers.

Since bishops or superiors of religious orders generally put little in writing, it was not unusual for the files of priests and religious to contain only the official documents of ordination and their assignments. As far back as the French Revolution, a siege mentality had invaded the Catholic Church in most of Europe. As the years passed, especially in those countries where the Catholic Church was no longer a dominant force, that secretive mentality grew stronger. Though it varied from nation to nation, there was always a fear of leaving evidence that could be used against the Church. As abbot primate, I had found that mentality in Germany where personnel files of monasteries and convents had been taken by the Nazis. Lurid parts were published as a way of closing the institutions. Among the Irish it was the fear of the English overlords, a fear they brought to the United States but where the enemy was controlling WASP leadership and the growing number of Nativists. This fear often extended to the press, which was seen as being in the hands of the Church's enemies. Some of the older bishops still exhibited this chronic Catholic paranoia, and the tendency toward secrecy was evident in the very first discussions of the sexual-abuse problem we bishops engaged in. This tendency was shared by the older generation of Catholic laity as well.

Finally, in describing the atmosphere before 1985, I would have to mention the lack of clarity about the supervisory role of the bishop with

regard to the personal lives of the priests in his diocese. During those years I struggled to understand in practice what that supervisory role meant in civil law and how it might differ from church law. Civil lawyers kept talking about *respondeat superior* as the way of expressing the bishop's role. Did that mean that the bishop was responsible for everything a priest did twenty-four hours a day? How could anyone logically be held to such a responsibility? When I arrived in Milwaukee, there were over 500 diocesan priests and over 500 priests belonging to the Jesuits, Capuchins, Salvatorians, Pallotines, Carmelites, and so on, each group having its own superior, not to mention the over 2,500 sisters belonging to numerous religious congregations of women. It was easy to say that the superiors of religious orders should be responsible for their own members, but that did not correspond to the common perception, especially if the religious were working in an archdiocesan apostolate. Nevertheless, I took the position that the religious superior should be the one to respond if the accused was a member of their order.

I wrote an article for the *Catholic Herald* (May 28, 1988) summing up my thoughts on what I had learned to that date about sexual abuse among the clergy. As I re-read it now, I see that it was honest in assessing the situation current then. So, e.g., I wrote that little had been done to help victims in the past but that the old attitudes had changed radically. The negative feelings toward psychology and psychiatry in society-at-large and in the Church in particular no longer existed. I admitted that I now believed that the deep-seated cases of pedophilia involving pre-pubescent children "do not seem curable and are rarely totally containable." I also saw the priestly status as a hindrance rather than a help for the pedophile and that the return to the lay state seemed the best course for the priest, society, and the Church, but I added that "it is not always easy to convince the person of this [return to the lay state] nor to obtain from Rome such a laicization if it is against the priest's will."

I reflected on the difficulty of detecting these tendencies, especially during seminary training. Although the profile of the pedophile was emerging more clearly, analyzing the causes and recognizing the signs had not produced convincing indicators. I then approached the cases of ephhebophilia, i.e., sexual abuse of post-pubescent victims. I wrote that "this [age] does not reduce the seriousness of the matter, but it does make a difference when one is looking for causes or studying social conditions and environments." This was followed by a paragraph expressing my concern about the lack of psychosexual development, a study in its infancy at