

by Scott P. Richert

Cui Bono?

*You cannot hope to bribe or twist / (thank God!) the British journalist.
But, seeing what the man will do / unbribed, there's no occasion to.*

—Humbert Wolfe

The June issue of *Chronicles* was literally on the press on May 7, when local radio talk-show host Chris Bowman announced that Bishop Thomas Doran of the diocese of Rockford, Illinois, whose February statement on the sex-abuse scandals in the Catholic Church I had praised in my June column, was about to hold a press conference. Considering the media coverage over the past six months, what the bishop revealed was not surprising. “I am here,” Bishop Doran said,

to respond to allegations that a priest in the diocese, Father Harlan Clapsaddle, was involved in acts of sexual misconduct with minors. I can confirm that such charges were made regarding incidents that occurred about 25 years ago.

I can also confirm that these charges were brought to the attention of the Diocesan Intervention Committee more than five years ago, in December 1996, and that the . . . Diocesan Intervention Committee investigated the charges, determined that they were credible and recommended immediate removal of the priest from his pastoral assignment. I approved that recommendation and he was removed on Jan. 8, 1997.

Bishop Doran then explained why the diocese chose to reveal these allegations at this time:

We do not normally discuss any personnel issues. However, in recent days reporters from two local news media approached the diocese with questions about specific allegations which they said came from Kevin Misslich, one of the victims, and his mother, Arlene Misslich. As long as the family wants to make the misconduct known, I see no reason not to acknowledge it.

Bishop Doran went on to note that “This is not a case of a priest doing wrong, then being assigned to another pastoral post, and now finally being removed from that post.”

In fact, Father Clapsaddle was removed promptly more than five years ago—as soon as we had probable cause to believe the charges were true—and he has never again been given a pastoral post that would give him access to children. . . .

In accord with our policy, Father Clapsaddle was removed immediately from his pastoral post. He then underwent evaluation and treatment for several months. In accord with diocesan policy, when he returned to the diocese, his faculties as a priest were severely restricted to assure that children would be protected, and he was not given a new pastoral assignment. Since his return to the diocese he has lived in that restricted situation and provided sacramental services to the elderly at Provena Cor Mariae [a diocesan retirement home] in a supervised setting.

For a time, he also performed administrative duties under the supervision of Catholic Charities. In that capacity, his activities were limited to the floor of the Seton Center that houses that agency's administrative offices. When on rare occasions his duties took him from the building, he never carried out his functions except in the company of a supervisor.

Because the “statute of limitations for both civil and criminal proceeding had long expired when the case was presented to the diocese more than five years ago,” the diocese, Bishop Doran claimed, respected the desire of the Misslich family for confidentiality “until this time, when it is clear from their recent contacts with reporters that they wish to make this



case public.” Finally, Bishop Doran noted, “I am convinced that the diocese acted responsibly in accord with our own policy.”

Bishop Doran's contention was echoed by Philip Jenkins, a professor of religious studies at Pennsylvania State University and the author of *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (as well as a contributing editor to *Chronicles*), who, at my request, examined the media coverage of the case and Bishop Doran's statement and concluded that

the diocese did exactly what was appropriate in the circumstances, treating the victims' complaints seriously, and responding with the needs of potential victims at the forefront of their concerns. . . . Reading the accounts of the case, I fail to see what more the diocese could have been expected to do.

One of the two local news organizations alluded to by Bishop Doran was the *Rockford Register Star*, a Gannett-owned newspaper that had interviewed the bishop the Thursday before his press conference. On the morning of May 8, the *Register Star* ran a 3,500-word story on the allegations. Starting with the headline, however, the newspaper abandoned any pretense at objectivity. Despite the fact that their own story revealed that the allegations of sexual abuse were confined to an approximately 20-month period between spring 1978 and November or December 1979, the editors chose the headline, “Tale of priest's abuse spans two decades.” The first three paragraphs of the article, which was written by Geri Nikolai and Edith C. Webster, set the tone:

For the past six months, American

Catholics have reeled from almost daily news reports about child abuse by Catholic priests and coverups by bishops. Here in the Rock River Valley, the reaction was a sigh and the sentiment: "Thank God it didn't happen here."

It did.

On April 8, exactly one month ago today, Kevin Misslich called the Rockford Register Star. "I was abused by a priest in Rockford," he said. "And I want people to know."

The Register Star congratulated itself, claiming that the diocese was "forced to tell its side of story because the Missliches talked to the Register Star," and implied that Bishop Doran, by not revealing the allegations in 1996, effectively covered up Father Clapsaddle's alleged misconduct.

While Misslich (now 38), whom the Register Star described as "an opera singer and voice teacher living in Hoboken, N.J.," claimed that Father Clapsaddle "assaulted" him "dozens of times," the Register Star admitted that he was "reluctant to lay out details." Of the two incidents that he did describe, one was nonsexual.

When the Misslich family finally reported the alleged abuse of Kevin and his two brothers to the diocese in 1996, at the tail end of the last round of sexual-abuse scandals, they rejected diocesan offers to pay for monitored therapy and demanded between \$110,000 and \$178,500 for each brother before settling for \$27,500 each, according to the Register Star. Misslich did not explain to the Register Star why he had waited 17 years to report the alleged abuse, and in three separate conversations with me in May and June, and one (which Misslich initiated) with Thomas Fleming, he refused to answer any questions on the record or to detail any incidents of abuse beyond the two he had described for the Register Star.

While questioning Bishop Doran's contention that the allegations of abuse were kept quiet at the request of the Missliches, Nikolai and Webster accepted Kevin Misslich's claim that the diocese "protected Clapsaddle from public scrutiny," even though the Missliches themselves stayed silent for almost six more years. Furthermore, they avoided raising uncomfortable questions about Kevin Misslich's story, including his admission that his parents repeatedly allowed Father Clapsaddle to take the

three boys, separately and together, on unsupervised trips to Wisconsin, New York City, Niagara Falls, and Washington, D.C. In fact, Kevin Misslich told the Register Star that he revealed the abuse to his parents in November or December 1979, on the day that Father Clapsaddle arrived to take Kevin's youngest brother, Chad (then a third grader), to Disney World. Rather than rescue his son from a possible predator, Kevin's father (according to the Register Star) "made a number of calls to Clapsaddle in Florida" over the course of the next "four or five days." When Father Clapsaddle and Chad returned, "Richard Misslich had a conversation with the priest in the yard of the family home," and, the Register Star reported, "the three brothers, to this day, have not seen [the priest] again." (Nikolai and Webster did not indicate whether either of the Misslich parents ever saw Father Clapsaddle after December 1979.)

Five-and-a-half years later, in 1985, Richard Misslich, who, Nikolai and Webster wrote, "was known as a strong family man, a friend who took good care of his home and yard and an active churchgoer," was murdered by two men, Victor Ganus and Jamie Rixie. "Testimony at the trial," the reporters wrote, "indicated that Richard Misslich had been lured to Rixie's apartment from a adult bookstore and was killed while he resisted an attempt to rob him." Nikolai and Webster, however, left out many significant details about the circumstances of Misslich's murder—details that were fully documented by the Register Star 16 years earlier, in the newspaper's coverage of the trial of Rixie and Ganus.

On June 27, 1986, the day that the murder trial began, the Rockford Register Star noted that

A jury of six women and six men will begin hearing testimony today in the murder trial of Jamie Rixie, 21, one of two men accused of robbing and killing a 49-year-old man during what authorities say was a homosexual encounter May 1, 1985.

During the first day's testimony, reported the Register Star on June 28, 1986,

Forensic pathologist Dr. William Rouse testified that Misslich bled to death from numerous cuts and stab wounds about the upper body and head and that the body also had

binding marks on the wrists and cord marks about the throat.

He also described bite marks which he said were "usually associated with an expression of some type of sexual activity," and said Misslich's blood alcohol level was 0.13. Illinois law recognizes 0.1 as intoxication.

When the trial resumed the next Monday, the Register Star reported on July 1, 1986, "Misslich's wife, Arlene, testified briefly . . . She identified a jacket she said her husband was wearing when he left their Dawson Avenue home at about 9:15 p.m. April 30 [1985]." She did not, however, challenge the prosecution's contention that her husband was killed during a homosexual encounter. Nor did Kevin Misslich (then 23), who was quoted in more than one Register Star article as a spokesman for his family. The Register Star continued:

James Capicotte, a bartender at Mr. C's tavern, 528 7th St., described Misslich as a regular customer who came to the bar once a week "like clockwork." He said Misslich left the bar at midnight April 30 after about two hours of "talking and mingling" with other customers. He said Misslich did not appear to be intoxicated.

Several witnesses on July 7 corroborated Capicotte's testimony, according to the Register Star's report on July 8, 1986:

Police detective Dan Foltz said bartender James Capicotte . . . told him Misslich danced with another man in Mr. C's Cocktail Corner bar the night he was killed and said the bartender told him Misslich went to a 7th Street adult bookstore "to occasionally make contacts." Capicotte denied making the remarks during testimony last week.

Todd Maybe, 22, who said Misslich was his supervisor at Cam-Car Textron, said he saw Misslich in Mr. C's, which he described as "a gay bar." He said he knew Misslich was married and had children, but, when asked by [Rixie defense attorney Daniel] Cain if he knows Misslich's "sexual preference," Maybe replied: "Male."

Sheldon Michael Walling, 20, former clerk in the adult bookstore,

said Misslich came into the store between 1 and 2 a.m. and that he gave him change for a \$20 bill, including \$5 in quarters.

He said Misslich, who had been coming into the store “once a week, once every two weeks” for several months, went into a section of the store with coin-operated movie machines.

Walling identified a photograph of [Rixie co-defendant Victor] Ganus and said he came into the store a few minutes after Misslich and that he observed them “talking and laughing” beside a rack of “bondage” magazines.

Walling described Ganus as “very butch and tough-acting.” He said Misslich and Ganus “left together,” and that “Richard just looked at me and raised his eyebrows.”

Walling at first refused to answer when asked if there was any conversation at that point.

“I plead the Fifth,” he said.

Told by [Circuit Judge David] Englund that he should answer the question, Walling said, “I looked back at him (Misslich) and said, “You ain’t got much.”

Finally, on July 9, 1986, the day after Jamie Rixie took the stand in his own defense, the *Register Star* reported that,

Earlier in the day Tuesday, a young man who said he was playing pinball in the back of a 7th Street adult bookstore the night Misslich was killed told the jury he saw Misslich leave the store with Ganus. He said he went outside a few seconds later and saw Misslich go to his car as Ganus crossed the street to an older car. Misslich had begun to pull away from the curb when Ganus came across the street and got into the passenger side of Misslich’s car.

The young man said Misslich and Ganus had shared a coin-operated movie booth inside the store and that he overheard [sic] part of their conversation. “I thought I heard cocaine mentioned,” he said.

During his testimony,

Rixie denied that he suggested “robbing a faggot” as prosecution

witnesses testified earlier. He said that the subject came up when Ganus boasted that when he needed money he would “go to a gay bar and roll a fag.”

The testimony at the murder trial, as reported by the *Rockford Register Star* itself 16 years ago, suggests that there was much more to Richard Misslich than Nikolai’s and Webster’s description of “a strong family man, a friend who took good care of his home and yard and an active churchgoer.” In fact, the testimony raises serious questions about whether Kevin Misslich was completely forthcoming when interviewed by the *Register Star*. Did Misslich inform Nikolai and Webster of the circumstances of his father’s death? If so, their decision (or their editors’ decision) to leave it out of their story indicates a willful bias on their part, because the circumstances of Richard Misslich’s death open up any number of alternative explanations of the family’s relationship with Father Clapsaddle. If, on the other hand, Misslich did not inform Nikolai and Webster of the circumstances of his father’s death, wouldn’t this omission call his truthfulness into question? (On the other hand, as one Rockford journalist I interviewed pointed out, the *Register Star* should have had questions about Kevin Misslich’s truthfulness from the first moment he contacted the newspaper, because, in doing so, he had violated his confidentiality agreement—a legal document—with the diocese. Did Nikolai and Webster ask Misslich whether, having broken a legal contract, he intended to return the \$27,500 he had received from the diocese?)

Did Nikolai and Webster question Misslich about the accounts of his father’s murder that were printed in their own newspaper? They had clearly looked back at those stories, because their description of the trial echoes the account the *Register Star* printed on October 17, 1986, the day after Victor Ganus was sentenced. (Both stories, for instance, claim that Misslich was “lured” from the adult bookstore.) If they did question him, why did they (or their editors) choose not to report the entire story?

One possible answer might be that they had the same experience I had when I tried to interview Kevin Misslich. When I asked him about the trial of his father’s murderers, Misslich became very angry and refused to answer questions on the record. Did Nikolai and Webster agree

to leave the details of his father’s murder out of the story in exchange for Kevin Misslich’s continuing cooperation? If so, why?

More broadly, did Nikolai and Webster question Kevin Misslich’s purpose in coming forward at this time? What does he hope to accomplish by doing so? He has stated that he wants to make sure that others in the Rockford diocese do not suffer his alleged fate, but his silence for the past six years—not to mention the 17 before that—might indicate other motives. Did Nikolai and Webster ask him whether he is dissatisfied with the amount of the settlement he received from the diocese? The *Register Star* reported that Misslich became angry after seeing “news stories . . . praising the Rockford diocesan policy on sexual abuse as a model for the nation,” yet Nikolai and Webster give no indication that they asked Misslich whether he has any particular political agenda or even whether he is still a practicing Catholic.

After reading all of the *Register Star*’s coverage of Kevin Misslich’s allegations against Father Clapsaddle and Bishop Doran, examining the transcripts of the Jamie Rixie and Victor Ganus murder trials, and reading all of the *Register Star*’s stories from 1985 and 1986 concerning those trials, the only thing I can say with any certainty is that something seems to have happened between at least one member of the Misslich family and Father Clapsaddle. If I were writing a fictionalized account of the events, I might very well choose to adopt Kevin Misslich’s version of the story, because it is the one most likely to sell in today’s climate. But I’m not writing a novel, and neither were Nikolai and Webster. By choosing to leave out the details of Richard Misslich’s death, they abandoned their journalistic objectivity and became participants in the story, denying the *Register Star*’s readers the opportunity to examine the facts for themselves and to make up their own minds. At best, “This illustrates the remarkably selective nature of press coverage when looking at these cases. Anything which doesn’t fit the simplistic image of the predatory priest is automatically filtered out,” as Philip Jenkins told me, after reviewing the *Register Star*’s coverage in 1986 and 2002. At worst, it indicates a willingness on the part of Nikolai, Webster, and the editors of the *Rockford Register Star* to subjugate the pursuit of truth to an anti-Catholic political agenda. <C>

Letter From London

by Derek Turner

A London Political Bestiary



From the West End, to the Square Mile, out into the most featureless South London suburbs, London is full of political resonances and the memories of old controversies. From all kinds of streets, roads, avenues, broadways, high streets, rises, hills, crescents, parks, mews, and terraces, native or adoptive Londoners have gone out into the world to make their country feared or famous.

The streets of Belgravia, Fitzrovia, Mayfair, Bayswater, Chelsea, South Kensington, and Notting Hill are littered with houses once inhabited by statesmen, generals, and thinkers who have changed this country and the world, from Thomas Carlyle's House in Cheyne Walk to the blue plaque marking Karl Marx's cramped and complicated residency in Soho. (The building is now an Italian restaurant!)

Nonconformist, mercantile, and relatively cosmopolitan London has often been at odds with the relatively tradition-minded agricultural hinterland. During the Civil War, London was solidly pro-Parliament, to the extent that the Royalists never seriously considered attacking it. (Their one halfhearted attempt, in 1642 at Turnham Green near Chiswick, was defeated very easily by some badly trained bands of London apprentices.) London is still at odds with the countryside—one sign of this appeared during the fox-hunting debate, when opinion polls invariably showed a very large majority of Londoners opposed to hunting. This may be partly out of pity for the mangy and skinny urban foxes that eke out a diseased and precarious living rooting in London's dustbins.

Londoners have occasionally fought one another with considerable enthusiasm: for religious reasons, as during the Gordon Riots dramatized in *Barnaby Rudge*; for political reasons, as happened over John Wilkes' battles to represent the restive electors of Middlesex; or for eth-

nic reasons, as at the so-called Battle of Cable Street in 1936, when East End Jews, seeking to halt Mosley's Blackshirts, fought the police with knuckledusters, razors, and paving slabs.

Most areas in London have a distinctive cultural and political aura of their own, although many of them share a certain degree of Whiggishness, brought about by Londoners' distance from the natural world. The connotations of "Hampstead," for instance, are familiar to all who take an interest in British politics. One of London's most beautiful and exclusive suburbs, Hampstead has become almost synonymous with "champagne socialism." The suburb has long been popularly thought to contain very wealthy people who, because of their angst about being wealthier than most other people, indulge in theoretical Marxism. Michael Wharton, the *Daily Telegraph* columnist who writes under the name "Peter Simple," uses a stereotypical Hampstead character named Mrs. Dutt-Pauker (who lives in a house called "Marxmount") in his column to make points about "liberal" values and the nastiness or stupidity of those who advocate harmful social policies for everybody else, while shielding themselves from any ill effects.

Before Hampstead came to symbolize what it does now, there was Clapham, where the powerful Clapham Sect, led by William Wilberforce, advocated utopian and often radical political goals (including, to their eternal credit, the abolition of the slave trade) that were often at odds with the aspirations of the proverbial "man on the Clapham Omnibus," an archetypal figure sometimes invoked, by those fond of clichés, to represent popular opinion.

Before the Clapham Sect was dreamt of, Low Church, Whiggish opinions were typical of the Square Mile and its northern outlying suburbs of Hoxton, Hackney, Shoreditch, Stoke Newington, and Stamford Hill. Stolid City burgesses and aldermen had little time for quasi-mystical "organic bonds," the divine right of kings, or patriotism—they were too interested in trade. (They might be described as the neoconservatives of their day.) They often disapproved of sex, gambling, acting, drinking, literature, and music as well. The City (London's

financial district) was often instrumental in changing policy by simply refusing to lend money for imperial adventures and by backing schemes to boost the prestige of business.

The new epicenter of what we now call "liberalism" is Islington, nicknamed "The Socialist Republic of Islington" in the 1970's because of its egalitarian insanities and now the home of the Blairs and many of their closest allies. Islington is a strange combination of government-owned housing (65 percent of residents are council tenants) jam-packed with recent immigrants, the dysfunctional, and those decent people who haven't quite made it to civilization, as well as some of the most desirable houses in London, which can change hands for millions of pounds.

Islington is now famous as the home of New Labour politics—vapid soundbites delivered by pager to a bloodless, sexless, raceless, classless elite that lives on mineral water and vegetarian quiche and holidays in Tuscany. Only 85 percent of Labour Party members own their own homes, but 100 percent take holidays in Chianti-shire! Hugo Gurdon's comment in the *Daily Telegraph* that "Mr. Blair is a man of hidden shallows" could—and should—be extended to cover almost all of the Islingtonian Labour Party.

All of London's evocative proper names are full of political subtexts, nuances, and dread significance (to the conservative-minded). There are three shorthand terms for inept, politically correct, and moderately corrupt local government, where Labour has been running a virtual one-party state for decades by uniting those who feel class resentments with those who hate Western civilization and white people, those who believe that men and women are the same, and those who delight in sexual deviancy. These three unhappy places are Lambeth, Hackney, and Southwark. The trio has junior siblings in Greenwich, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets, and Newham.

I remember looking at the unlvely Joan Ruddock, Labour MP for my inner-city constituency of Lewisham Deptford, on the night of the cataclysmic 1997 election. Surrounded by the usual inner-city Labour mafia—rough-looking Scots and Irish, shaven-headed men wearing AIDS ribbons, dizzy middle-