

Abuse and Reform: Review of DeVille, *Everything Hidden Shall Be Revealed*

Michael Plekon



Adam A. J. DeVille, *Everything Hidden Shall Be Revealed: Ridding the Church of Abuses of Sex and Power*. Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2019.

Adding new revelations of clergy sexual abuse to the chorus of horror already confronting the Roman Catholic Church is perhaps too easy. Every few weeks there are new stories, and the rage and frustration of the laity is by now considerable. Even the remarkably open and compassionate Pope Francis has not escaped criticism for his inability to establish effective oversight of priests and their bishops. But Adam DeVille, through his remarkable scholarship and studied psychoanalytic insight, manages to bring new light and hope to this bleak subject.

Adam DeVille is a remarkable scholar who has published a number of significant works, including an important study on primacy in the Eastern Church. He is also currently researching the theological meaning and implications of psychoanalytic theory and practice, a study which informs the present volume. He has written numerous theological essays and hosts the blog *Eastern Christian Books* (<http://easternchristianbooks.blogspot.com/>), which has to be the most wide-ranging presentation of new theological and church historical studies online. His blog features probing interviews of important authors, and gives readers incisive yet succinct assessments of these new contributions.

This attention to quality research is evident in *Everything Hidden Shall Be Revealed*, in which DeVille offers an incisive assessment of the Roman Church's current ecclesiastical mess.

He is not alone in taking aim at well-rooted church practices whose outcomes are clearly destructive. Most notably, Richard Sipe and Donald Cozzens have written on the dangers of clericalism and its culture, but DeVille's work probes deeper into the center of this malaise of ecclesiastical leadership and shows its direct relationship to a power monopoly. He brings to light the role of the episcopate and chanceries in this power imbalance and reveals the power operating at these levels to be the primary cause of the cover-ups, denials, and protection of abusers. He carefully examines how the unhealthy and unscriptural idolizing of the clergy and the illusion perpetuated by the institutional Church of its superior holiness run counter to the very tradition of the Church and contribute to abuse.

While DeVille's book focuses on dysfunction particular to Roman Catholicism—such as the centralization of authority in the pope and the Vatican bureaucracy, an invention of the modern era and a rupture with church tradition—his analysis of a dysfunctional clerical system and his suggestions for reform can be applied to hierarchical churches broadly, and to the Eastern Orthodox Church in particular. For no matter the church body that has mishandled abuse cases, the overreach of clerical power is revealed as the common ailment, along with the perceived need to “protect” the Church from the scandal and the legal action that would be the fallout of any

rigorous efforts at reform. Furthermore, DeVille's ideas are by no means original or contemporary fixes. The core of his remedy, a real model of synodality or conciliarity, is solidly traditional, indeed ancient. DeVille takes us through the application of this principle at the various levels of the Church, from the parish to the diocese and the national church—and aiming further still to the global communion of churches.

DeVille's analysis borrows clear inspiration from the renowned Moscow Council of 1917–18, prematurely ended by the Russian Revolution, which sought a return to the essentially communal or conciliar shape of the church at every level. Tragically, this council—the first in centuries in the East to gather not just bishops but monastic, clergy, and lay representatives as well—could not implement any of its reforming and renewing measures due to the Revolution. Some of the basics of a conciliar ecclesial structure had emerged in the Russian Orthodox Metropolia in the US under Metropolitan Tikhon (Bellavin), who would be elected patriarch at the Moscow Council. Other examples may be found in the OCA—the church that continued on from the Metropolia—and in the churches of Japan and Finland.

To begin this transformation, DeVille argues, parish councils should be implemented systematically. Likewise, at the diocesan level, there should be a regular assembly of the clergy, laity, and religious orders alongside the bishop, and at the national level, a council of clergy and laity should meet alongside the episcopal conference. This is not democracy nor a populist turn, but the practical implementation of the conciliar structures present in the local churches of the first few centuries, a point Nicholas Afanasiev brilliantly argues in *The Church of the Holy Spirit*. The laity are present here

not primarily as checks and balances on the bishop and the clergy, for conciliarity is not factional politics, but rather in an effort to include, at the very least, representatives of the whole people of God in governing the Church. Put another way, in contrast to the “active” work or “competence” to rule of the bishop alone, the conciliar way invites all to their work in the priesthood of the baptized. DeVille believes that such a synodal or conciliar approach would go far in addressing questions of oversight and sanctioning, but also in the formation of clergy and in their deployment throughout a diocese or national church. As mentioned above, there are historic examples of functioning conciliarity, seen in the Metropolia/OCA and in Finland, as well as in lesser-known dioceses here and there in both the East and the West. The Catholic Church in Germany at present has shown growth in this regard.

Other suggestions for renewal going forward, such as the opening of the priesthood and the episcopacy to non-celibates, would also be a clear return to church tradition. Those familiar with Eastern Christianity as well as those in the Reformed churches know that married clergy are not only the ancient pattern but viable ministers today and can speak to the advantages of a married episcopate. That there are ill-suited and unfaithful members of the clergy holds true for every church—it is a matter of human nature, not ecclesial legislation—but clearly small steps can be taken to establish a proper balance of power between the priests and bishops and the people. Bolstering the diaconate alongside lay leaders, deans, and pastoral mentors would help achieve such a balance.

Adam DeVille's book suggests a powerful approach to identifying the