

Penn State and the Catholic church

Maureen Fiedler | Jul. 13, 2012 NCR Today

The parallels are chilling. According to the report released Thursday by former FBI director Louis J. Freeh, top officials at Penn State, including the legendary football coach Joe Paterno, covered up ongoing sex abuse crimes of assistant coach Jerry Sandusky. Sandusky was, of course, recently tried and convicted for the sexual abuse of minors and is now in prison.

In fact, in today's *Washington Post*, columnist Sally Jenkins calls Joe Paterno a liar. His legacy is in tatters.

Why did these Penn State leaders do this? A look at their private communications reveals that they were seeking to protect both Penn State and its legendary football team. And they did this for 14 years.

Where have we heard this storyline before? It reminds us all of the Catholic church, of course, where bishops covered up sex abuse crimes for a similar reason: protecting the institution and -- in this case -- the sanctity of the priesthood. In neither institution did the welfare of the children involved seem to play any role.

Some of our bishops continue to downplay the sex abuse crisis in the church. Even Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, in the recent book about him by John Allen, seemed to think this was mostly a scandal about the priest abusers, not the bishops -- not those who did the cover-up.

These bishops might well read the reports of the scandal at Penn State and wonder whether they could withstand a similar investigation by someone like Louis J. Freeh.

And an even deeper question rises from both cases: Why did these men -- Penn State officials and bishops -- not think of the children and put them first? Time to pray over Jesus in the Gospel saying, "Let the little children come unto me." t

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