

Thoughts on the Church Sex Abuse Scandal

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These past couple of weeks have been horrible for the members of the Catholic Church in the United States and especially for our priests. The sex abuse scandal has again arisen its serpentine head. The revelation of abuse of a young boy, seminarians, and young priests by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, the former Archbishop of Newark, and Cardinal of Washington, DC, has saddened and upset so many of our people from New York all the way to the Pope in Rome.

The investigation by the Attorney General of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the ensuing 900 page report on six of the dioceses of that state, encompassing the past 70 years, revealed over 1000 children abused by 300 priests. This in a state where one out of every four residents is catholic. This is an abomination. This is abhorrent. Abuse of **any** person, man woman or child, is a violation of the law of the land, and mostly a violation of God's law.

Sexual abuse of minors is EVIL and DIABOLICAL. To me, and to most of us it is the most heinous of crimes. It is now almost a cliché to say that the sexual abuse scandal has been the worst crisis in the history of the American Catholic Church. The media coverage, subsequent disillusionment, and passion aroused by the scandal have no parallel.

One hesitates to approach the suffering of victims created by sexual molestation, especially by clergymen, as one would hesitate upon entering a surgical ward. We dare not touch the pain. In this atmosphere, especially when it includes cover-up by some Bishops, it is not surprising that victims are ineradicably angry. Some have lived with this deep seated anger for decades, being afraid or embarrassed to come forward living day to day with this oppressive burden. Their anger is understandable.

Like any sin, sexual abuse is like a stone thrown in the middle of a still pond. The waves that emanate reach every corner of the pond. Anger, like those waves affect all who are within reach.

As well as the victims, church members - the faithful people of God are also angry. Non-Catholics who hear of such things are angry, and believe me, the priests are angry.

I've spoken to a number of my confreres in recent days. All of us are embarrassed, filled with indignation, are demoralized, feel deep compassion for victims, sorrow for their suffering, and sometimes feel alone in an environment that has become hostile to us and the church-the people of God-to whom we have devoted our lives. Most of us have decided we will not wear our roman collars in public-collars that we wore at one time with pride. Why would we want to walk down the street wearing a collar and having people think or even say "I wonder if he is one?"

Yes, all of this anger is understandable. I get it. But I'm concerned that among its long-term damaging effects is the possibility that, if left to fester, this anger can become hatred. Holding onto hatred has been likened to taking a sip of poison everyday—not enough to kill, but more than enough to debilitate.

For some years now, we have seen anti-catholic rhetoric and imagery in the media, and the anti-catholicism of the academic world. We have seen the catholic church come to provide a grossly stereotyped public villain. Catholic opinions, doctrines and individual leaders are frequently the butt of hateful satire. Hatred is a disease.

The root of hatred is anger. When anger crystallizes in an impure form it is hatred. Hatred is habitual and toxic. Obviously, the actions of these ungodly priests-perpetrators have fanned the flames against the real meaning of what the church is and stands for. Their despicable actions have helped to push anger into real hatred.

The thing about hatred is that it will effect our home, our workplace, our families, our friends, our relationships, and even our health. If we are effected by this then we have to ask ourselves if we have contributed to the hatred by hating the hater.

When you encounter hate from anyone in your life, use those moments to remind yourself to turn to God. Your source is God. The source of hatred is being separated from God. Turn to your source when you are confronted with hatred and you'll be guided to send love. The angry person becomes disarmed to buy your response of pacifism-in other words of love and hate cannot live together.

Now, what do we-the faithful members of the church-do about this? I don't know. If I did, I would be on the first plane to Rome. I do have a few thoughts about it though. First of all, we must remember that our church is founded on faith in Jesus Christ. It is an institution that's made up of human beings; all of us together. The church does not belong to the Pope, the Bishops, or the priests. It is **our** church. We must not abandon her because of the vile actions of the few.

We must seek justice for the victims, and proper penalties for perpetrators. We must challenge our Bishops to exercise the mandate given to them to be good shepherds, who guide and protect the flocks entrusted to them. They must see that every parent and every child deserves a safe environment to learn and explore their faith. Places where teaching, worship, and ministry take place must provide a safe environment. There must be no compromise on this principle.

Sisters and brothers, we cannot undo the actions of the past, but must remain vigilant to ensure that not one child-not one person - be abused in any way shape or form. We must see to it that all catholic dioceses have integrated a comprehensive program of reporting abuse to civil authorities, compensate and counsel victims, and implement rigorous protocols and training for the clergy and all who work for the church.

In 2000 years this church of ours has seen more than its share of scandal. Somehow through the grace, guidance and power of God we have survived, flourished, and spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the world. Through the guidance of the holy spirit the church must change. We must in humility kneel before Jesus, and beg him to help us not sink into anger and hatred. We must pray for the victims, be steadfast in our faith, and put our trust in him. If we don't, the diabolical power of evil will have won. Brothers and sisters, we cannot-we must not allow this to happen. Good must triumph over evil, and together we will continue to be and become the people of God, the church, the true body of Christ here on this earth.

May God give us his peace.