



*Welcome to your first issue of*

# Resources

A SERVICE OF BOSTON COLLEGE'S CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY INITIATIVE

On behalf of the Church in the 21st Century initiative, we are sending you this inaugural issue of *C21 Resources Magazine*, which will reprint articles and presentations on the current crisis in the Catholic Church and the path to renewal.

*C21 Resources* will be published three times per year through 2004. To receive further issues of *C21 Resources* at no cost, please visit our Web site at [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) or complete the attached form.

the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY

# Resources

A SERVICE OF BOSTON COLLEGE

spring 2003



Gary Wayne Gilbert

## Why?

*The slippery slope that descends from an excessive urge to protect one's own*

BY ANDREW GREELEY

**H**illaire Belloc, an English Catholic writer from the first half of the last century, once remarked apropos of Catholic leadership that any organization whose leadership was guilty of such knavish imbecility must have the special protection of God. As we ride the turbulent waves of the latest reprise of the sexual abuse scandal, we must wonder why. Why did some of our leaders fall victim to the current wave of knavish imbecility?

Some "experts" appeal to celibate clerical culture as an explanation, with no evidence to support such an argument and no explanation why police, physicians and sometimes even academics similarly protect their own. So do many church leaders of other denominations, though not with so much dedicated imbecility.

Some gay-bashers blame the church for ordaining gay men in recent years. But most of the cases that have surfaced are of men who were ordained long before the alleged increase in gay ordinations.

The answer, I think, has nothing to do with celibacy or homosexuality and much to do with the propensity

## A Welcome to Our Readers

**E**ven in a Church with a dramatic history, the present crisis is by all measures a Catholic moment of unusual intensity. American Catholics in particular have had to face the harm caused to the Body of Christ by actions that ranged from negligence or bad judgment to malevolence and outright betrayal. It has been painful, but it has also elicited moving signs of faith.

How can, how should Catholics respond to the sexual misconduct scandal? We do not have one answer, but we do offer resources: the best analyses, reflections and commentaries on the crisis that have appeared over the last year in a wide range of publications. They are reprinted in

this first issue of *C21 Resources* to stimulate your own search for a response.

This magazine is one outcome of The Church in the 21st Century, Boston College's two-year initiative to aid the Church in recognizing, understanding and moving beyond the crisis. Inaugurated in September 2002 by University President William Leahy, S.J., the initiative seeks to illuminate three broad topics that have emerged in the crisis: the roles of laity, priests, and bishops in the Church; a contemporary understanding of sexuality in light of Catholic beliefs; and the challenges Catholics face in living, deepening and handing on the faith to future generations.

For those who cannot attend the

ongoing events on campus, for BC graduates and friends far from Boston, and for all who want to think more deeply about the issues, we offer the following 14 articles from across the spectrum of Catholic thought.

The first six articles are devoted to the overarching question of how and why the scandal took place and the cultures and structures in the Church that were responsible. Next come two very personal reflections. The last six articles consider proposals about changes needed in order to move ahead. Future issues of *C21 Resources* will explore in greater detail the main topics of The Church in the 21st Century.

*The Editors*

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*Subscriptions to C21 Resources are free of charge and may be obtained by e-mailing [resources@bc.edu](mailto:resources@bc.edu) or calling 617-552-1234.*



*For more information on the publications featured, see page 7.*

# Why

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of men to stand behind their own kind, especially when they perceive them to be under attack. Under such circumstances, loyalty inclines men to circle the wagons, deny the truth of the charges (however patent they may be to others) and demonize the attackers. A form of group-think takes over. They rally round to support those under assault.

Clerical culture is different from similar cultures in that the bishop is under pressure to exercise paternal care of the priest in trouble. The bishop finds himself inclined to the same denials and demonization as other priests: maybe the charges are not true, maybe the so-called victims brought it on themselves, maybe they're just interested in money, maybe the priest deserves another chance. The police have not brought charges; the doctors offer ambiguous advice; the lawyers think they can fend off a suit. The media thus far have left these events alone. The priest vigorously denies that he ever touched the alleged victim. Just one more chance, he asks.

Many bishops, perhaps a majority of them, even the most churlish, feel a compulsion to be kind to the priest in trouble. (There but for the grace of God.) So they beat up on the victims and their families and send the man off to an institution and then, hoping he's cured, send him back to a parish.

Should a trial materialize, the bishops—trapped between adversarial lawyers (“The victims and their families are the enemy”) and their own doubts about the guilt of the priest (“he still denies it”)—are willing (as was then-Bishop Edward Egan in Bridgeport) to argue through lawyers that priests do not work for the church but are independent contractors. Or they argue, as Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua did through his lawyers in Philadelphia, that the victims’ parents are legally responsible for not warning their child of the dangers.

This is the slippery slope that begins with loyalty to a fellow priest, doubt about guilt and paternalist duty to be kind, and ends either with reassignment or hardball litigation. Moreover, at every step of the way, the bishop’s advisers encourage him

to give the priest another chance or to fight back. The kind of men who are made bishops today find it difficult simply to dump a fellow priest, and, similarly, their advisers find it difficult to suggest doing so (though in Boston, Bishop John Michael D’Arcy did indeed give such advice).

This narrative might suggest some sympathy for the decisions many bishops made. But I am attempting to understand and explain, not to defend. The decisions made across the country are manifestations of knavish imbecility. Yet I can understand how men could have come to make them.

Mistakes were perhaps understandable before 1986, when at their

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meeting at St. John’s Abbey the bishops heard for the first time a systematic presentation about child abuse. They became less understandable after 1993, when the hierarchy put together a perfectly reasonable set of guidelines (which were systematically ignored) and when Cardinal Joseph Bernardin distributed copies of his policies in Chicago to every bishop in the country.

I remember when I was harassing the cardinal about the abuses in Chicago. “What should I do?” he asked.

“Get rid of them all,” I said.

“That’s exactly what we’re doing,” he said.

“And set up a review board on which the majority are not priests.”

He did that too, though I claim no credit for it.

Yet I reflect on how hard it must have been for Joseph Bernardin, the

kindest and gentlest of men, to remove more than 20 priests from active ministry. The Chicago system does not work perfectly; no system could. But it works better than anything that seems to have functioned for the last 10 years in the Northeast. As far as I am concerned, the statute of limitations on knavish imbecility ended in 1992. That bishops could reassign abusive priests after the early ’90s was, I’m sorry to have to say it, sinful.

There were three sins. First, they besmirched the office of bishop and seriously weakened its credibility. Second, they scandalized the Catholic laity, perhaps the worst scandal in the history of our republic.

But their gravest sin was to not consider the victims, not even to talk to the victims and their families, to blind themselves to the terrible wreckage that sexual abuse causes for human lives. Bishops worried about their priests; they did not worry about the victims. They did not seem to understand that at the same time they were trying to inhibit sexual satisfaction in the marital bed, they were facilitating sexual satisfaction for abusive priests.

When I argue that many of our leaders have sinned, I am not judging the state of their conscience. I do not have the gift of *scrutatio cordium*. I will leave it to God to judge their moral responsibility. I am merely saying that by cooperating with the sexual abuse of children and young boys they were objectively sinning—and it is hard to see how they can claim invincible ignorance. They were, in fact, according to the strict canons of the old moral theology, necessary cooperators in evil and objectively as responsible for the evil as those who actually did it.

Yet they still blame the media and the tort lawyers for their problems, as though *The Boston Globe* and money-hungry lawyers sent priests with twisted psyches back into the parishes where they could rape kids.

Cardinal Law argues bad records. In *The Wall Street Journal*, Philip K. Lawler, his one-time editor, blames the cardinal but links the cardinal’s mistakes to parish priests’ not enforcing the prohibition on birth control.

Gimme a break!

*Continued on next page*

## Why

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Denial continues, now no longer about the guilt of their priests but about their own sinfulness. Moreover, the denial persists not only among bishops but also among priests, who complain about how they are suffering because of the scandal. If the pathetic letters emerging from the office of the National Federation of Priests Councils are any indication of the sentiment of the ordinary priest, self-pity is more important than the consideration of their own personal responsibility for not reporting abuse about which they knew.

Reparation has not even begun. Until that happens, the re-establishment of even a semblance of hierarchical credibility cannot begin.

As the late Bishop William E. McManus argued back in the last turn of the abuse news cycle, the bishops must do public penance. They didn't then. If they do it now, it would have to be much more impressive than just a collective service in some cathedral. Those bishops who have become notorious and public sinners must admit their guilt and undertake personal penance.

Resign? I doubt that the Vatican, which does not seem to have a clue about the current crisis in the United States, would accept resignations. (Besides, better the devil you know than the devil you don't know.) It would be much better if the offending bishops would go off to a monastery for a long period of prayer, reflection and fasting. This kind of gesture might just possibly calm some of the stormy waves. They wouldn't necessarily have to don sackcloth and ashes, though there is something to be said for that ancient custom.

Will something like that happen? Again I say, gimme a break! Cardinals don't have to admit that they have sinned. Much less do they have to engage in public contrition.

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# Catholicism and Courage

*In interview, Weigel sees 'culture of dissent' as one cause of the crisis*

*Zenit, an international Catholic news agency, spoke with the theologian George Weigel, a senior fellow of Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center, at his home in Maryland. Weigel, 51, is the author; most recently, of The Courage to Be Catholic: Crisis, Reform, and the Future of the Church*

**Does it take courage to be a Catholic today?**

I chose the title *The Courage to Be Catholic* because that's the way genuine reform always works in the Church—through men and women with the conviction and the courage to be countercultural, to be genuinely, fully, joyfully Catholic. The Church has never been reformed by "Catholic Lite." Reform always means a deeper, more thorough appropriation of the truths that Christ bequeathed the Church—the truths that are its constitution, if you will. One of the things Catholics need to recover is a sense of the great adventure of orthodoxy. Christian orthodoxy is the most exciting proposal on offer in the world today. It's far, far more exciting than "Catholic Lite."

**"Catholic Lite" is an image that recurs through *The Courage to Be Catholic*. What does it mean?**

We can't understand the crisis of clergy sexual abuse and episcopal leadership failure outside the context of the past three and a half decades. During that time, a culture of dissent took root in the Church in the United States. And by "culture of dissent," I don't mean simply men and women who were confused, or who thought that the Church should express its teaching more clearly. By "culture of dissent" I mean men and women—including priests, women religious, bishops, theologians, catechists, Church bureaucrats, and activists—who believed that what the Church proposed as true was actually false. If you really think that—if you really believe that the highest teach-

ing authority of the Church is teaching falsehoods and is leading the Church into error—you're not in full communion with the Church. And that has consequences, including behavioral consequences.

**Are you suggesting that the "culture of dissent" is primarily responsible for the current crisis in the United States?**

The "culture of dissent" doesn't explain everything about the Catholic crisis of 2002. It's a very important part of the puzzle, though, because what people think has a lot to do with how they behave.

**Is it surprising that some men who learned to live lives of intellectual deception and deceit in the seminary—men who were told that they could take a pass on authoritative teaching—eventually led lives of behavioral deceit, becoming sexually abusive?**

It shouldn't have been surprising, given our sex-saturated culture. Is it a surprise that bishops who were unwilling to fix what was manifestly broken in seminaries and Catholic universities in the 1970s and 1980s—in part, because they were unwilling to confront the culture of dissent, often for fear of fracturing the unity of a local Church—also failed to come to grips with the scandal of clergy sexual abuse? It shouldn't have been. The U.S. Church has to learn to connect the dots, historically, if it's going to come to grips effectively with this crisis—and if the crisis is to become an opportunity for genuinely Catholic reform.

**How would you describe the crisis itself?**

There are three parts of the crisis. There is the crisis of clergy sexual abuse, of which the most prevalent form is the homosexual abuse of teenage boys and young men. There is the crisis of failed episcopal leadership. And, at the bottom of the bottom line, there is the crisis of discipleship. Sexually abusive priests

and timid or malfeasant bishops are, first and foremost, inadequately converted Christian disciples. That's why the crisis is a call to everyone in the Church to live lives of more radical discipleship. As Father Richard Neuhaus and others have pointed out for months, the primary answer to a crisis of infidelity is fidelity. Period.

***The Courage to Be Catholic* also describes what the crisis is not. Why did you do that?**

Because confusions about what the crisis is and isn't get in the way of genuinely Catholic reform. This is not a crisis of celibacy; it's a crisis of men failing to live the celibate vows they pledged to Christ and the Church. It's not a crisis caused by the Church's sexual ethic, which flatly condemns all forms of sexual abuse. It's not a crisis caused by "authoritarianism," because the Church isn't an authoritarian institution—it's a community formed by an authoritative tradition, which is something very different. And it's not a media-created crisis. Yes, the media have distorted things on occasion, and yes, there's been something of a feeding frenzy atmosphere; but a feeding frenzy needs something to feed on. It's a serious mistake not to realize that this is a crisis that Catholics created and that only Catholics can fix.

**How?**

The first step toward fixing what's broken is to recognize the spiritual roots of the crisis. Like every other crisis in 2,000 years of Catholic history, the current crisis is caused by an insufficiency of saints. That's a call to everyone to lead holier, more thoroughly Catholic lives. Whenever the Church is bottoming out, the response adequate to the crisis of the moment is always the same—everyone in the Church has to live the call to holiness more radically.

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# What Kind of Church Is This?

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*The sexual misconduct scandal highlights the Church's human and imperfect nature*

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By J. MICHAEL BYRON

**W**e have struggled this season with a number of deeply troubling issues related to the tragedies of sexual abuse of minors by priests in this country. The first wave of responses, rightly enough, has been to put a stop to systems and behavior patterns that pose immediate risks to potential victims. The next wave has devoted attention to fixing flawed structures and to matters of legal and moral justice. That so many of these initiatives have been forced upon the Catholic Church by concerned outside parties ought to be, and is, a source of significant disquiet for many of the baptized.

Among the painful lessons is the profound danger that comes when one separates theology from concrete life. This danger is posed not only to right thinking but, more important, to the well-being of innocent persons. In many academic discussions it has become so commonplace to separate ecclesiological theory from experience that it may seem incongruous to combine ecclesiology and sexual abuse in the same sentence. Yet the exigencies of real life have a way of intruding upon the seminar rooms and pulpits.

What kind of a church is it that perpetuates moral sickness and the violation of children but does not seem capable of recognizing it? What kind of ecclesiology is this that manifests itself in institutions and leadership patterns that are so obviously defective? What models of church are so disconnected from the lives of actual people that, left to themselves, they remain unmoved and untroubled by such “dangerous memories”? What follow are several insights for a chastened theology of church, correctives that have been thrust upon the collective Catholic consciousness during

the past few months.

1. The church is not Jesus Christ. This apparently obvious axiom in ecclesiology has received scant acknowledgment in pastoral praxis, in the documents that emanate from teaching authorities and in sermons preached on Sunday mornings. Several implications flow from this simple principle. One is that nothing is self-evidently God's will simply because some cleric, council or Roman dicastery has said so. While Jesus Christ can be afforded that kind of respect, the church is a more ambiguous reality. However intimately and beautifully interrelated are Jesus and church, they are not coterminous.

A related implication is that the reverence owed to the church, while real, is not the same as the deference due to Jesus Christ. That is because the quality of “holiness” attributable to each is not the same. The holiness of Jesus is such as to push aside all sin and darkness. The holiness of the church still allows for the possibility of harboring pedophiles. One who points out this fact in public is not thereby unfaithful

2. The church is the people of God. That this, one of the most fundamental images of Vatican II ecclesiology, labors so mightily in practice after two generations is a scandal of its own. All the charisms bestowed by Christ upon his community of disciples are enjoyed by virtue of baptism, albeit not in identical ways. The council was clear on this concept. This means that it is never the case that some of the baptized have great moral standing and others have none, even in deliberations over ecclesial identity and practice. When concerned relatives and friends point out to church leaders the possibility of serious sin in the clergy, it is not merely good organizational and communication strategy; it is good ecclesiology. It is taking co-responsibility seriously.

Likewise, the present warmed-over

conversations over mandatory clerical celibacy, homosexuality and the ordination of women are exchanges in which every member of the church has a legitimate standing. For that reason, the conversations must be grounded in properly theological principles. These questions cannot be decided on the basis of which person has greater coercive power, or who has access to power in the first place.

3. The church is servant to the world. Human welfare is never to be subordinated to the image, or even to the good order, of the church. This is merely to acknowledge that the church is always in the service of an end greater than itself, namely the kingdom of God. While these two are not utterly separable, the practical consequence of making this priority real is to change many of the relative values of pastoral praxis. Under the control of such a model, concern for public scandal or for a pastor's reputation is relativized in light of the physical and emotional harm inflicted upon young parishioners. Here Catholic orthodoxy is to be evaluated with greater appeal to the theological virtues than to the prescriptions of law and doctrine, let alone the rules of ecclesiastical decorum. Where was the kingdom in the chancery offices now embattled in lawsuits?

4. Church ministry is essentially relational. When trust is violated by priests who abuse, it disrupts an entire network of persons and groups. Ministry is not established by the conferring of title or status. Rather it is a summons from the body of Christ for the purpose of service within it. Hence it is little consolation to hear of the “defrocking” of abusive priests, as if this were an adequate or even appropriate response. While forced laicization, a juridical response, may be deemed necessary in certain cases, as an ecclesiological reality it is without coherence. There is no theology that can make sense of

the idea that a man once ordained may be laicized later because of moral misdeeds, however abhorrent. Thus there is a forced recourse to a technical distinction between the canonical priesthood and the sacramental priesthood.

But what kind of a priesthood exists apart from any concrete community or explicit communion with a bishop? Such a notion of ministry is a thoroughly spiritualized concept that cannot account for the relationships present (or now absent) in the parishes where Catholics gather. This kind of so-called sacramental priesthood permits the church to remedy concrete crises of ministry, but only at the expense of removing every facet of relationality from the definition of what ministry is. We ought not to be consoled easily by such a response to this concrete tragedy.

If a theology of ministry that we profess to be adequate cannot account for the church as it really is and cannot be of service to it at a time of crisis, might this point to the need for correction in our prevalent abstract theological projects?

5. The church is one and many. Recently the attorney for an alleged abuse victim proposed a civil lawsuit that threatened to name the Vatican as a codefendant. After all, reasoned the complaint, the church is one and universal. It would seem to follow that those in Rome stand in a direct line of moral and fiscal responsibility when harm is perpetrated by clergy. The proposal, however, was swiftly rebuked in at least one curial statement that reiterated that each Roman Catholic diocese is an integral church. Financial and legal affairs are to be negotiated at the level of the local church, said the statement.

That is not bad *communio ecclesiology*, but it is difficult to reconcile with the preponderance of teaching and church praxis during less fractious times. This is, after all, the same Curia that has asserted in magisterial documents the “ontological priority” of the universal church over the local churches. Such express *communio ecclesiology* will perhaps come as something of a surprise to readers of *Liturgicam Authenticam*, to the board members of I.C.E.L. and to the parishioners of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee.

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Among such constituencies, local integrity has seemed for a long time to count for little indeed in the actual life of the church.

6. The pope is head of the college of bishops, and is not distinct from it. Noteworthy in the media coverage of the scandals has been the clamor for Pope John Paul II to render a decisive and unambiguous statement regarding the crisis. This is not an instinct of the secular press alone. But why should Rome be the place from which direction for this North American crisis ought to come? It is no diminishment of the papacy as the center of ecclesial unity to question this instinct. In fact, it is at the heart of our ecclesiology to question it. Is it not telling that so many automatically turn to St. Peter's Square for guidance about almost any matter?

There are diocesan bishops in every place where sexual abuse scandals have occurred, and they have rendered, in response, numerous statements and directives. But these seem incidental in the Catholic imagination of most people. More firmly in place in the minds of more of the baptized is a pyramid-shaped church, in which the pope and Curia act as the arbiters of truth and discipline on every subject. In some quarters this instinct has been both systematically instilled and actively cultivated. The result is that local bishops are viewed as credible only to the extent that

they mimic the rhetoric from Rome. The bishops themselves seem painfully aware of this.

Why should one wait for the pope to pronounce on sexual exploitation when the U.S.C.C.B. and many other bishops have already come forward with their own statements? What is imagined to be lacking when a bishop denounces the exploitation of priestly power? When only one person speaks for "the church," an intolerable weight is loaded upon that single person, and the concrete churches are deprived of available moral leadership in a time of scandal.

7. The church and its ministers are contextually situated in history. It has become commonplace in contemporary ecclesiology to speak of the gift of culture and the imperative that the church sink roots in every particular context. Stated in more philosophical terms, it is increasingly recognized that there is no visible church that can be contemplated from a singular and objectively neutral cultural perspective. This means that ecclesiology must concern itself with the existential situations of the people in the pews, without reducing its concerns to those alone.

At the moment, the faithful in Boston, New York, Palm Beach and elsewhere are reeling from allegations of abused trust on the part of their bishops. There are real injuries, real angers, real sorrows and real victims.

The proper ecclesiological response is not to reiterate an abstract definition of what the bishop is and how he functions. In response to calls for Cardinal Bernard F. Law's resignation, it has been rightly noted in Boston that the diocesan bishop ought to be regarded as a father figure in a loving family. As an ideal notion this would be adequate, but ideal fathers do not behave in the manner alleged in actual court documents in Massachusetts. To pass over this dissonance threatens to turn any theology of ministry into mythology. Is there any way that our current theologies of the episcopate can account for a bishop capable of committing grievous sin against his own flock? If not, why not? Are the only options either to maintain an appearance of absolute moral impeccability or to remove the bishop from office?

8. The church is a sacrament of salvation. Another instinct of the Second Vatican Council was to propose an image of the church as an efficacious sign and instrument for mediating salvation to the world. Sacraments are physical, material, sensible realities that depend heavily for their mediating ability upon their coherence with the spiritual realities they signify. The eucharistic celebration, for example, must have a minimal resemblance to a human experience of dining; baptism must involve at least a few droplets of water that might sig-

nify an act of cleansing and life; and it has been often repeated that ordained priests must bear a certain physical resemblance to Jesus of Nazareth.

But what about sacramental ecclesiology? If the church is sacramental of salvation, then there is a corresponding requirement for some coherence between its concrete praxis and the values of God's reign. Sacraments cannot be brought into existence by fiat. They must either exist in some fragmentary but real forms or else they are only ideas. We rightly declare sacramentally invalid Eucharists without food, confirmations without oil and marriages without consent. But where are the safeguards to prevent the church as sacrament from becoming a myth? Under what conditions is it no longer valid to speak of a sacramental quality of the church? Is a church that protects criminal behavior, obfuscates truth and ignores victims at least suspect as a legitimate sacrament? Isn't even this enough to chasten our ecclesiology?

These insights do not exhaust the ecclesiological challenges imposed upon us by the scandals, but they do indicate that our theorizing about the nature of the church must be tethered to its concrete life. Eruptions of historical sin, mess and ambiguity threaten the integrity and credibility

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## Weigel

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Everyone. *The Courage to be Catholic* includes three chapters of recommendations on specific reforms: in vocation recruitment, in seminaries, in the priesthood, in the way bishops are chosen, in the exercise of the episcopal office, and in the way the Vatican gathers its information and relates to local Churches in crisis.

***The Courage to Be Catholic* has a chapter entitled "Why Bishops Failed." Many people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, have been asking: How could they let this happen? What's your answer?** The fact that so many people are

asking that question itself testifies to the central place that bishops have in the life of the Church. Contrary to the claims made by the advocates of "Catholic Lite," most Catholics aren't interested in bishops who mortgage even more of their authority to various committees and boards. Most Catholics want bishops who will effectively exercise the authority that is theirs, and do so in a way that challenges everyone in the Church to a holier way of life. I think the episcopal failures of recent decades have been similar to the failures of priests: It's fundamentally a failure in self-understanding. If a priest thinks of himself as simply another "minister," facilitating the "ministry" of others, he isn't going to think of himself as what the

Church teaches he is—an icon, a living representation of the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. And if he doesn't think of himself as an icon of Christ, he's going to be tempted to act in ways that contradict the commitment he's made to Christ and the Church.

**Yours is, finally, a hopeful book. Why?** I can think of three reasons. First, because "crisis," in the Bible, has two meanings: catastrophe, and opportunity—and the opportunity the current catastrophe offers us is the opportunity to complete the reforms of Vatican II as they've been authentically interpreted by the pontificate of John Paul II. The second reason I'm hopeful is because this crisis marks the last hurrah of the aging,

intellectually sterile champions of "Catholic Lite," who can't even describe accurately the crisis they helped create. And finally, I'm hopeful because that's what Christians are: men and women of hope, who know that God's purposes are being worked out in history, in what often strike us as strange ways. That's why I believe, with Dorothy Day, the truth of what Pope Pius XI meant when he said, "Let us thank God that he makes us live among the present problems; it is no longer permitted to anyone to be mediocre."

*Zenit is an international Catholic news agency headquartered in Rome.*

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# The Faith Will Survive

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*The institutional church, on the other hand, is in serious trouble: Here's why*

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BY JOAN CHITTISTER

**T**he question everywhere is the same these days: What, in the long run, will be the effect of the pedophilia scandal on the Catholic Church? Speculation ranges from predictions of total collapse to speculation about total reconfiguration. Given the long lessons of history, neither hypothesis is likely, perhaps, but we may have already been given a mirror into the future of change. Let me tell you what I've seen already.

It was 1996. I was in Dublin at the time writing a book. To do concentrated work I had gone away to live alone in a small townhouse on the canal. For a while, there were no distractions at all. But then the first pedophilia scandal erupted in Ireland. I found myself as immersed in the story as the rest of the country but, as an outside observer, more concerned about the overall effects of the situation than by the cast of characters. I began to understand that the Irish, too, were dealing with this situation differently than they had in the past.

The Irish had already dealt with the case of a bishop who had fathered a son years before, supported him financially all his life, but never acknowledged him. They had read themselves weary about the young pastor who dropped dead leaving a mistress housekeeper and their children who were now suing the diocese for his estate. They had watched the church battle the government over the legalization of contraception. The Irish, it seemed, were well battle-tested on sexual scandals.

Pedophilia, however, was a very different thing. Pedophilia galvanized the society in a way no clerical sexual issues had ever been able to do so in the past. Pedophile priests went on being priests, went from parish to parish, went on preying on children, went on reaping the harvest of status

and privilege, trust and authority that priesthood had managed to garner over centuries, and not a word said about it by the hierarchy, not a single man defrocked. Indeed, pedophilia went beyond individual criminality to the heart of the system. At pedophilia, the Irish drew a line.

RTE, Radio Television Erin, the national broadcasting company of Ireland, launched a national survey to determine the emotional response of a people almost 98-percent Catholic to a scandal that darkened their most sacred institution. Question number one, the announcer said, asked, "Has this scandal affected your faith?" I remember groaning out loud in the chair. "97 percent," the reporter announced, "say no." I snapped to full attention. "Impossible!" I thought. "I can't believe it. How could this not affect the faith of a country so completely identified with it on every level?!" Question number two, the announcer went on, asked, "Has this scandal affected your relationship with the church?" "97 percent," the reporter announced, "say yes." My head began to reel.

Given such an overwhelmingly unanimous response, the reporter began to interview passers-by on the street to determine the reasons behind the answers. "Jesus and the sacraments mean everything to me. There's nothing wrong with them," Irish after Irish asserted. But, in response to question two, the effect of this latest of clergy sexual problems on their relationship to the church itself, one man put it bluntly for them all. "We mean," he said, "that they're not going to tell us again what's right and what's wrong anymore. From now on, we'll be figuring those things out for ourselves." I sat back and watched the world change in front of my eyes. I saw a whole people distinguish a spiritual tradition from the institution that was its storehouse. I saw the moral authority of that same institution brought to a tragic low.

Now, years later, church attendance is down in Ireland, the most religious, least secular, country in Western Europe. The government no longer looks for a nod from the church before introducing new legislation. Court cases on clerical abuse abound. Seminaries are closed. The voice of the church on social issues is every day less impacting.

Today the Catholic Church in the United States, rocked by scandals of long-standing clerical pedophilia and its accompanying episcopal cover-ups, stands at the margins of a similar watershed. The question is whether or not a new set of rules about celibacy, another kind of process for dealing with complaints, a better way of communicating with victims, can possibly restore the trust in the church that every survey of American Catholics shows to have been eroded. The answer to that one, if the Irish situation is any kind of model for us at all, is that the question itself is worse than useless. The basic problem isn't how this particular and immediate issue was handled. It is why the problem could possibly be handled this way at all.

The question that must be asked is what in the clerical culture itself leads to this kind of debacle in the first place. Otherwise, whatever rules they apply to this problem won't mean a thing toward the resolution of the next one. And there will be a next one if the culture of the "Princes of the Church" (and everything that kind of systemic fealty implies) is permitted to continue in the modern world.

There are three dimensions of ecclesiastical medievalism that are still part and parcel of the church today. These were once effective and perhaps even necessary to the security of the state, but they're now long gone in the politics and processes of the rest of the world. The culture of silence, the culture of exclusion, and the culture of domination, all ele-

ments of a clerical world, lead to the very fiasco that brings good people—priests, bishops, and cardinals among them—to make choices geared more to saving the system than to saving the people. Though the church prides itself on the fact that it is not a democracy, it forgets at its peril that even monarchies are these days subject to both public scrutiny and legal accountability.

The culture of silence requires that the business and decisions, agendas and processes, struggles and conflicts of a closed system be hidden entirely from public view. The intention, some argue, is a good one: the people must be saved from scandal. Perhaps, but the scandal of silence can itself at times be far more damaging than the scandal of fallibility. The results can be disastrous. Silence is what enabled the system to move pedophile priests from place to place. Silence covers up. Silence hides problems in order to deny them. And it buys silence from others so that the rest of the society can never know that they are also in danger.

In the end silence makes it impossible for a system to face and acknowledge the problems that are destroying it—the difficulties of priesthood, the ruptures in theology from one era to the next, the discontent of the masses whose questions are ignored or dismissed or ridiculed or labeled heresy. It carries, in classic fashion, a fox under its toga that is eating it up from the inside out.

The culture of exclusion denies to a system the expertise it needs to resolve its difficulties. When a system defines itself outside of the rest of the human race, it reduces its resources at exactly the moments it may need them most. When the most-needed consultants are kept out of a conversation because a system has become a world unto itself, it

*Continued on next page*

can, at best, only hope to replicate its past self and old, tired ideas. With few new ideas coming into the system, with little in the way of fresh creativity to reenergize the system, with no inroads into other systems—all of which may be far more competent to deal with new questions than the system involved—the system dooms itself to stagnation. New questions go begging for new answers, become unappeasable in the face of old answers, and the system doesn't explode, it implodes.

The culture of domination runs the risk of both assuming a power it does not have and abusing the power it does have. It ties power up in a few people who use it to keep it. Since those who subscribe to a culture of domination live an insular existence in a society of self-defined elites, their power is seldom or ever tested.

A culture of domination puts drawbridges and moats around the minds of its own members. To think outside an acceptable orthodoxy disqualifies a person to contribute to it. The culture of domination creates the image of a special world with power so special it can never be ques-

tioned. It hoards one kind of power—appointed power—and so in the end diminishes the very power it seeks to protect by trying to exercise it in areas beyond either its experience or its competence. Failing to multiply power by sharing it openly with those who have earned another kind of power—achieved power—only threatens their own. As a result, those appointed to power are denied the support of those who have an even more convincing power of expertise or natural gift.

A culture of creeping infallibility, distributed in varying degrees throughout an infallible system that sees itself as the final, privileged word wherever it is and simply because it is, is almost bound to run roughshod over the powerlessness of others. Abuse of power becomes its mainstay, even at its healthiest levels. At its lowest levels—when it imposes itself on women, on children, on its heretics and outsiders in general—it flirts with the demonic. The power of the insights, experience, ideas, and persons of others are simply dismissed—for the image of the system, for the “integrity” of the system, for

the power of a system whose effectiveness rests largely on power alone.

When the culture in question is the church, then the institution and the faith, the system and the gospel, the theology of the Holy Spirit and the theology of the priesthood, separate like oil and water. The Irish have already figured that out. The faith will survive. The system as it is will not. If not felled by this problem, it will surely be struck down by the next one that will undoubtedly be spawned out of the same mentality.

There is no doubt that unless this church addresses the questions behind the present issue—the questions of silence, exclusion, and domination—the long-term effect of this situation, itself only a terrible symptom of a far more sinister sickness, will be that members of the American church, like the Irish, will begin to make a distinction between the faith they hold and the authorities they follow. In that case, it is clear that it will be the authorities who stand to lose.

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## Byron

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of the Christian community unless they are addressed in theology with honesty and courage. If the current sad season can serve to further this endeavor, then there is an opportunity for the darkness of sin to give way to newness and life.

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## Contributing Publications

**America**, the national Catholic weekly magazine, has been published since 1909 by Jesuits in the United States for thinking Catholics and those who want to know what Catholics are thinking. During 2002 it published numerous articles, news stories and editorials on the sexual abuse crisis. *America* is online at [www.americagaazine.org](http://www.americagaazine.org). Subscribe via the Web site or call 800-627-9533.

**Boston College Magazine** brings the work of a prominent university's theologians, historians, scientists, and men and women of letters to an educated lay audience. For the next two years, the magazine will offer a special section on The Church in the 21st Century—Boston College's academic response to recent Church scandals. For subscription information, visit [www.bc.edu/bcm](http://www.bc.edu/bcm).

Established in 1924, **Commonweal** is an independent journal of opinion edited by lay Catholics. It has a special interest in religion (Catholic and otherwise), politics (war and peace lately), and culture. We publish 22 issues a year. Along with articles on current events, *Commonweal* regularly reviews books, plays, films, and television. Our goal is to bring a distinctively Catholic perspective to bear on the issues of the day. Please give us a try. A trial subscription is only \$25. Call 888-495-6755, or visit [www.commonwealmagazine.org](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org).

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**First Things** is a conservative monthly journal of opinion founded and edited by Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran priest, prolific author and authority on religion and public life. The journal is published in New York by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, whose mission is to “advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society.” Editorial board members include Mary Ann Glendon, George Weigel and Michael Novak. Subscriptions may be ordered on its Web site, [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com).

At **Sojourners**, our motto is Christians committed to justice and peace. *Sojourners* is both a magazine and a faith-based organization to promote social change. Founded in 1971, it provides an alternative perspective on faith, politics, and culture through its magazine, Web site, and public events. Ecumenical and progressive, *Sojourners* lifts up the biblical connection between social justice and spiritual renewal. For more information, visit [www.sajo.net](http://www.sajo.net) or call 800-714-7474.

**The Christian Century** is a biweekly ecumenical journal of news and theological reflection. It reports on developments in the church and on the moral and religious issues of contemporary life. Each issue contains news, commentary, editorials, book and film reviews, and reflections on scripture. For subscriptions, call 800-208-4097.



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# Scandal Time

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*The penalty for past laxity and malfeasance is coming due*

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BY RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

**T**he timing, it seems, could not have been worse. In last month's issue I offered my considered and heartfelt defense of Father Maciel, founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, against unfounded charges of sexual abuse. I meant and I mean every word of what I said there. Just after the issue had gone to press, however, scandals involving sexual abuse by priests in Boston exploded, creating a level of public outrage and suspicion that may be unparalleled in recent history. The climate is not conducive to calm or careful thought about priests and sexual molestation. Outrage and suspicion readily lead to excess, but, with respect to developments in Boston, it is not easy to say how much outrage and suspicion is too much.

Professor Philip Jenkins of Penn State University has written extensively on sexual abuse by priests, also in these pages. He is an acute student of the ways in which the media, lawyers, and insurance companies—along with angry Catholics, both liberal and conservative—are practiced at exploiting scandal in the service of their several interests. Scholars point out that the incidence of abusing children or minors is no greater, and may be less, among priests than among Protestant clergy, teachers, social workers, and similar professions. But, it is noted, Catholic clergy are more attractive targets for lawsuits because the entire diocese or archdiocese can be sued. That is a legal liability of the Church's hierarchical structure. Moreover, the expressions of outrage by many in the media are attended by an ulterior agenda, namely, discrediting the Catholic teaching on human sexuality, about which they are genuinely outraged. These and other considerations can and should be taken into account, but the tragic fact remains that great wrongs have been done, and

there is no avoiding the conclusion that, in Boston and elsewhere, some bishops bear a heavy burden of responsibility.

Children have been hurt, solemn vows have been betrayed, and a false sense of compassion—joined to a protective clericalism—has apparently permitted some priests to do terrible things again and again. For some Catholics, this is a time that will test their faith in Christ and his Church, as distinct from their faith in the ho-

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*The result of priestly formation in an era of wink-and-nod permissiveness.*

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liness, or even competence, of some of the Church's leaders. Catholics used to be good at that sort of thing, pointing to figures such as Alexander VI (Pope from 1492 to 1503) whose thorough corruption—he gained the papacy by bribery and used it to benefit his illegitimate children—was thought to prove that the truth of the Church and the validity of her sacraments were not dependent upon the holiness of her leaders. In the fourth century, the Donatist heretics took the opposite position, and Catholics have been exuberant in their condemnation of Donatism. We all have a steep stake in the rightness of that condemnation. At the same time, the orthodoxy of anti-Donatism is not to be confused with moral indifference. All three synoptic gospels report the warning of Jesus about those who corrupt the innocence of children. "It would be better for him if a millstone were tied around his neck and he

were cast into the depths of the sea."

The current scandals constitute a painful moment of truth for bishops, heads of religious orders, and others responsible for the moral integrity of the Church's ministry. More often than not, the priests allegedly involved in these scandals are now in their sixties and seventies or even older. They received their formation and were ordained in the 1960s and 1970s when, in addition to false compassion and clerical protectiveness, there was in sectors of the Church a wink-and-a-nudge attitude toward what were viewed as sexual peccadilloes. Anyone who was around during those years, and had eyes to see, knows that was the case. Ecumenically, and especially among clergy involved in social activism, both Protestant and Catholic, there was frequent confusion and laxity with respect to sexual morality—heterosexual, homosexual, and unspecified. That is deplorable but should not surprise. In this way, too, the institutions of religion are too often conformed to the culture of which they are part.

## A NEW SITUATION NOW

Among Catholics, the situation is generally very different with today's seminarians and younger priests. It is not unusual to encounter priests who claim they were ordained in, say, the 1970s with the expectation that the celibacy requirement would be abandoned within a few years. Many of them have since left the active priesthood. For others, the "acceptance" of homosexuality and the rejection of every form of "homophobia" was clearly the approved attitude. Today, I think it fair to say that seminarians and younger priests know beyond doubt what is expected of them in terms of faithfulness to the Church's teaching. But the penalty for past laxity and malfeasance is now coming due, and has been coming due since the reality of sexual abuse by priests was brought to public attention more than

a decade ago. Of course the Church will survive, and more than survive, but I expect this storm is not going to pass any time soon. I expect we have not yet seen its full fury. I very much wish that I were more confident than I am that every bishop understands that there can now be no returning to business as usual. The word crisis is much overused, but this is a crisis.

Despite all the talk about the pervasive "nonjudgmentalism" in our culture, about some things judgments are much harsher today. In anything having to do with children, for instance, what some viewed as embarrassing misbehavior in the 1970s was, by the 1990s, viewed as a heinous crime. Psychological theory, law, and public attitudes have all changed dramatically. The very subject of homosexuality was, not so very long ago, pretty much in the closet. Like most people, bishops did not know, or did not want to know, about rude things that men did together, and sometimes did with little boys. Today's scandals notwithstanding, there was something to be said for such reticence and naiveté, even if the naiveté was sometimes feigned. When it comes to priestly adherence to the Church's teaching, zero tolerance must now be the order of the day. The enforcement of zero tolerance, in this connection and others, can lead to ridiculous extremes and can inhibit natural and healthy interactions, especially in working with young people, but that, too, is probably part of the price to be paid.

There was a similar sense of crisis following the first public revelations of sexual abuse by priests in the mid-eighties, but then the issue receded after CNN notoriously sensationalized charges against the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago in 1993 and the charges turned out to be false. That incident helped remind people that priests, too, are to be deemed innocent until proven guilty. In the current climate of outrage, we need to be reminded of that truth again. Unbridled outrage can too easily become hysteria. One recalls that during the same period, there was a blizzard of criminal charges and lawsuits over alleged abuses, including satanic rituals and other grotesqueries, perpetrated by people working in day care centers. Whole communities

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around the country were caught up in a frenzy of mutual recriminations, and many people went to jail, until the heroic and almost single-handed work of Dorothy Rabinowitz of *The Wall Street Journal* exposed the madness for what it was.

#### OTHER CASUALTIES

Among the potential casualties of the present scandal is severe damage to what has historically been called the “liberty of the Church” to govern her own affairs. Catholics have a distinct tradition of canon law that goes back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 and took lasting form with Gratian’s *Decretum* in the twelfth century. This history of ecclesiastical liberty is basic to the various exemptions and immunities in current law and practice that protect religious freedom not just for Catholics but for everyone. The right of religious institutions to govern themselves may be gravely eroded under pressure from lawyers, insurance companies, and the state. The ruthlessness of many in the legal profession should not be underestimated. As Peter Steinfeld writes in the *New York Times*, it has now been “discovered that lawyers for plaintiffs could play hardball, too, inflating charges and using the news media to play on public fears and prejudices in hopes of embarrassing the Church into settlements.” With respect to self-governance, “confidentiality” is now commonly translated as “secrecy” and “discretion” as “evasion.” The cultural revolution popularized the slogan that the personal is the political. So also, it now seems, the religious is the political, and the legal. All of life is to be lived on the front pages or in the courtroom, or at least under the threat of the front pages and the courtroom.

News reports claiming that a certain number of priests have been charged with abuse and that the claims were settled out of court must not be interpreted to mean that the priests are guilty. Some of them insisted and insist that they are innocent, but bishops were advised by lawyers and insurance companies that a legal defense against the charges would cost much more than settlement out of court, and could well end up in a guilty verdict entailing even greater financial liability. In some cases, settlements were agreed to with the guarantee that they would

remain forever confidential. In Boston, that guarantee has now been broken by court order. This can be seen as an ominous encroachment by the state on the Church’s right to self-governance. It can also be argued that the Church forfeited that right by failing to govern itself, and by surrendering episcopal governance to lawyers and insurance companies.

At least in some cases, there can be no question of the state’s legitimate interest. To cite the most notorious instance, that of the defrocked John Geoghan, he is already convicted of one criminal act, and is charged with many more. Sin is the business of the Church, and crime is the business of the state. There was once a time, centuries ago, when there were ecclesiastical courts to deal with clerics who committed sins that were also crimes. Although it had no standing in law, that way of handling things continued in a vestigial and informal way up to our day. If the cops suspected Father of criminal activity, it was reported to the bishop in the confidence that he would take care of it. No more.

Another potential casualty is an erosion of confidence in the possibility of repentance and amendment of life. Such confidence is dismissed as “naive” when it comes to priests being given another chance. But the belief in the power of the grace of God to transform lives is at the heart of Christian faith, and is overwhelmingly supported by Scripture and the experience of innumerable Christians. Belief in the gift of grace, however, is perfectly consistent with knowing that the gift is not always effectively received. When a priest repents after being caught dipping into the collection plate, there is forgiveness. There is even forgiveness, if he is repentant, after he has done it several times, but there are also secure measures for denying him access to the collection plate. Children and the integrity of sacred vows are immeasurably more valuable than the collection plate. It is now evident that it is much easier to keep violators away from collection plates than to keep them away from children.

*Rev. John Neuhaus is the editor of First Things.*

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# Farewell to “the Club”

*Is the residue of a repressive clerical culture the heart of our problems?*

BY MICHAEL L. PAPESH

“Welcome to the club!” The bishop in a Midwestern diocese offered these words of greeting as he exchanged the sign of peace with each new priest during the ordination ceremony. The year was 1965. The story was told among a group of newly ordained priests, who struck me as both embarrassed and tickled by it. As a 14-year-old seminarian at the time, I was alerted, in the hearing, to the clerical culture. Back when seminaries and rectories were packed, the clerical culture was, for some of us, a factor in the enormous appeal of ordained ministry. It is time, I think, to bid farewell to “the club.”

The local rectory was the residence of the cathedral clergy. It boasted commodious living quarters, a cook and housekeeper, fine linen and silver on the dining room table (a footstool was stored underneath it for the bishop) and a consistently first-class menu. I saw French cuffs, dressing for dinner, a smoking jacket for the pastor and ceremonial trappings of silk and fine embroidery. Priests were welcomed freely into all manner of homes, favored with cut rates on meals and goods, offered trips and cars. To my young eyes these were striking signs of respect, security and achievement, far beyond what I could imagine in any other way of life.

The relational structures were even more attractive. Priests both young and old participated in a large web of apparently congenial and respectful relationships, living in groups of two and three in rectories, gathering for dinner parties after confirmations and Forty Hours devotions, touring within the diocese and traveling throughout other dioceses visiting, vacationing and playing tennis or golf together. They remained jocular even when they swapped occasional horror stories about this or that pastor or bishop. I could hear in the stories that the

bishop, remote though he seemed, not only shared this life with his priests; he participated in more of the same nationally and internationally with other prelates.

I also met the underside of clerical culture in a college seminary. Living in a rectory on weekends, I watched helplessly as a good priest drank too much on Saturday nights. I listened to bawdy stories, was once shown pornography (he said he had confiscated it) and saw him become erratic in carrying out his duties. Fellow seminarians who also witnessed these things with me winked at the behavior. I winked, too. After all, he was a good priest. But our winking took us in deeper. We heard stories about other priests; we winked. When a friend was propositioned by a priest one evening, my friend winked and we winked. Even when, after being plied with alcohol, I was sexually assaulted, I winked. My seminarian friends winked. The priests with whom I shared the story, though they were aghast and urged me to approach the bishop, still, essentially, winked. Before I was 19, I learned that when it came to sexual matters, the clerical culture winked.

Why did we wink? Our affective bonds, the connecting tissue of the clerical culture, affirmed by what we understood to be the Gospel call, were the primary reason. We lived, worked, prayed and played together. We enjoyed the same privileges and friends; with all our talents, faults and foibles, we knew and accepted one another. Wishing to be loyal and compassionate to friends, understanding only too well the human condition, seeking to protect people, their reputations and their good work, we winked. At some level, I suppose, we sought, too, to protect the institution we loved and served, but that was not the heart of our behavior.

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# Papesh

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Because of all the anguish we are experiencing in these days—with priests and bishops accused of irresponsible sexual and administrative behavior—we seek a cause, a culprit. Though the media may suggest so, and people may think so, neither celibacy nor the all-male priesthood is in itself to blame. The culprit is, rather, the clerical culture that has developed as a primary professional context for at least Latin rite diocesan priests and bishops here in the United States. And we priests and bishops are powerless to change it.

Males in our American culture have a notoriously difficult time discerning their emotions, understanding them, sharing them and appropriately directing them. This dull truism is most especially on the mark with respect to sexual feelings. I have spent nearly 19 years as a priest ministering in parish and seminary settings, doing chancery volunteer work directed toward priests, sharing serious and reflective conversation with fellow priests on a wide array of matters and being blessed by a wonderfully intimate experience with a few of my brother priests in a support group. But I find that today—no less than in the past—the all-male clerical culture still winks. And of course it winks. Many of us do not have the self-awareness, understanding, articulation and sometimes the courage to face straightforwardly the complex questions that surround male sexuality, adult human growth and development, or even the spiritual disciplines required for deepening growth in chastity. As one anxious friend said comically, “Please share on the level at which you think I would be comfortable.”

Sexuality is an integral concern for every human person and a conflict-filled concern for all people in Western cultures. And in a celibate clerical culture, sexuality is an especially hot-button issue. The clerical culture’s way of handling sexuality is to intellectualize and evade. It is a matter for classroom teaching, homily and retreat conference exhortation and private spiritual direction. Open discussion about sexual curiosity, orientation, experience, joy, fear and anxiety is rare, and certainly a gamble. If a priest speaks about these things in public, he has to be prepared to face

the consequences for his relationships with peers and superiors. With relatively rare exceptions, the natural male temptation to posture is typical of priests in groups small and large.

The all-male, celibate clerical culture attends in a particularly careful way to the formation of its members. Seminary celibacy formation, ongoing priestly formation and retreat exhortations, therefore, are the points at which the distortions about sexuality within clerical culture are most tellingly and tragically evident. Wherever one might place himself along the sexual spectrum, the clerical culture—even with the best of intentions—tends to repress the exploration of male sexuality and stunt adult growth and development.

Our formation processes, for instance, have long presumed a hetero-

and exhortation gives to priests with a homosexual orientation is even more distancing and evasive. The homosexuals among us are told by the institution that their orientation is intrinsically disordered. Also, some fellow priests accept American society’s bias that admission of homosexuality means that a person is sexually active. The identification of homosexuality with pedophilia and ephebophilia is common. Some dare publicly to admit to a homosexual orientation, but all know that this is the kiss of death to any possibility of a miter or other significant leadership. The most courageous bishops say privately to an individual man, “As long as you are under good spiritual direction and make no public statements, your orientation is fine with me.”

But many bishops fail to manage

those in formation for many years and, these days, some of our younger men, think celibacy requires that sexuality itself be ignored or denied. Some priests are nervous about sexual thoughts or feelings or seem to have so repressed them that they probably have none they are truly aware of. Some hole up in their rooms in the name of the spiritual life or promulgate pieties and rigidities about how others ought to live their sexual lives, when the real issue is that they themselves seem to be neither self-aware nor self-understanding nor whole.

Others focus their ministry on lovely young girls or associate with handsome young men, evidently oblivious to what these behavior patterns reveal about them. As one shrewd observer quipped, “Love may be blind, but not the neighbors.” A very few among those who repress their sexuality are positively dangerous to themselves, others and the church because of what they see in others but do not and will not face in themselves.

Many healthy priests exercise their ministry nobly and faithfully. Yet the terrible reluctance of the clerical culture as a whole to engage matters of sexuality forthrightly and constructively is a grave impediment to ministry. It is intensified by Catholic moral teaching, fear and anxiety, undergirded by concerns for institutional preservation and self-protection. Consequently, realistic, wholesome and candid discussions of sexuality are silenced. Healthy, balanced formation of ordained ministers is hobbled. Sexuality, for many priests, becomes privatized, solemnized and darkened. Public and private accountability is thwarted. Many live in confusion and anguish about sexuality. And we wink.

The demise of privilege, once part of clerical culture, is probably a good thing. The passing of priestly fraternity for many presbyteries across the country is more painful. However grounded one might be in the spiritual life and centered in intimate personal relationships, rambling alone around a 13-room house in the middle of an alfalfa or asphalt field invites an eccentric existence. The risk of falling into melancholy and dejection is ever-present for many presbyters and bishops, especially in smaller parishes and rural dioceses. The passing of many ele-

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*The way for our clerical culture to begin the transformation it needs is for the church to ponder our theology of ministry, as well as make a radical critique of the cultural elements that surround it.*

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sexual orientation among priests. While the majority of us certainly are heterosexual, this assumption functions as an institutionally and personally insulating safe haven. The heterosexuals among us feel free to speak about some of their struggles in a reserved, socially acceptable and superficial way. They tend to remain silent about deeper, more complicated sexual struggles, however, because, though it is affirmed, even heterosexuality is discussed superficially. Though heterosexual priests have to tolerate some discussion about homosexuality, they are uncomfortable with it, because they generally share American cultural biases, fail to understand it and feel ill at ease with the picture of priesthood that such discussions paint. The bias toward heterosexuality is so great that I have heard priests remark of a sexual offender, “Well, at least he’s straight.”

The nod that priestly formation

even that; some are hostile. Consequently, most homosexual priests feel the need to closet their orientation. They fear public admission may not only short-circuit leadership possibilities, but also serve to ostracize them from other priests and compromise the effectiveness of their ministry among Catholics, who may remain squeamish about a homosexual priest.

Bishops, fellow priests and American culture all fail to understand, much less articulate, the particularly grave difficulties many among us face because of homosexual orientation. The homosexual priest spends enormous energy maintaining balance and integrity under massive institutional and societal pressures, not to mention the personal sense of shame and the feeling of being misunderstood with which many struggle.

As if all this were not enough, some among us have chosen a thoroughgoing sexual repression. Some priests,

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ments of clerical culture, coupled with a lack of forthright, discerning and free discussion about male sexuality, adult development and the relationship between spirituality and sexuality, has been and remains a danger for the church. Yet clerical culture allows for nothing else.

Our current crisis is fundamentally a spiritual one. Yes, we need to grow in the virtue of chastity. We also need to improve recruitment and admissions procedures; to restructure seminary and ongoing formation, retreats and professional support; to include more women and men in church governance; to rethink where and how priests live, their compensation and retirement; to fashion dioceses and deaneries to provide priests with vibrant contexts for growth in relationships with ordained and nonordained. We need our leadership to administer our ecclesial life with crystal-clear transparency, reshape it with rock-solid purpose of amendment and pledge us ironclad assurance that the innocent among us are always and everywhere secure. All of these things deserve focused, applied energy. But there is one thing more.

It is time to consider the possibility that the residue of a repressive clerical culture is near the heart of our problems. Moreover, because we ordained are powerless to do anything about it, the most constructive, fruitful way for our clerical culture to begin the thoroughgoing transformation it needs, and that our age and circumstances demand, is for the church to ponder deeply our theology of ministry, as well as make a radical critique of the cultural elements of the many disciplinary notes that surround it and, in our time, hinder its effectiveness. As weak as it may seem in some respects, clerical culture is bigger than us priests and bishops. It still has hegemony. It still winks. It causes the whole church scandal and pain. The time has come to bid farewell to “the club.”

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# The Present Scandal: A Personal View

*“When questions were raised about the alleged incident, they were met with a constant refrain: ‘We must not discuss this subject’”*

BY ANONYMOUS

**I**t began one Sunday in September when we noticed an unfamiliar priest celebrating Mass. The monsignor, who introduced himself as the director of priest personnel for the diocese, had bad news. A family in the parish had filed a lawsuit against our pastor, charging inappropriate behavior toward their teenage sons, and against the diocese for negligence. The monsignor hastened to note that no criminal charges were pending: “This is purely a suit about money damages.” Lawyers for the diocese had concluded that the charges were utterly without foundation, he said. In the meantime, said the monsignor, our pastor had the full support of the diocese, and he would continue at his post while the legal process unfolded. He lamented the injury to a priest’s good name and urged us not to allow baseless rumors to divide the parish.

The family’s case centered on charges that the priest, on separate occasions, had massaged their young sons in an unmistakably erotic manner. In one case, during an overnight trip to his remote vacation cabin, in the presence of other boys, the priest had instructed one of their sons to remove his shirt and lie on the floor, while he straddled him and massaged his back with oil. The family had brought their suit after discovering, contrary to initial denials from the diocese, that this priest had done the same thing to many boys over the years. The leadership team of the parish—deacons, associate priests and youth minister—had repeatedly warned the pastor against his habit of taking young boys on unsupervised trips to his cabin, or overnights in the rectory, or to motels on trips to

amusement parks. As one of them said, “He was a regular Pied Piper.”

To most of the parish all of this was completely unknown, and many were confused and shaken by the monsignor’s disclosure. The pastor was popular. Under his leadership the parish was thriving. Many parish-

*The pastor leaned over to my son and whispered, “Next time you come alone, and we’ll leave Mom behind.”*

ioners chose to ignore the unseemly controversy. Others loudly questioned the motives of anyone who sought to “undermine” their pastor. This attitude was of course encouraged by the monsignor’s insistence that the charges had no foundation, that they were, in effect, stimulated by greed, and that our duty as Catholics was simply to rise above the rumors and pray for healing.

Parish leaders seemed genuinely anguished, but their main effort was directed to avoiding public airing of the issue. When questions were raised before the parish council or in other groups, they were met with a constant refrain: “We must not discuss this subject.” Meanwhile the pastor was at

Mass each Sunday, hugging parishioners and thanking them for their continued support. The parish limped on, clouded by fears and concerns that we were not allowed to acknowledge.

Quite unwillingly, my own family found itself drawn into the affair. As guests at the pastor’s cabin, soon after we had joined the parish, my wife and eight-year-old son had witnessed behavior consistent with the allegations in the lawsuit: the discovery in plain sight of a book on “The Art of Sensual Massage”; the sight of our pastor massaging a 12-year-old boy clad in a bathing suit—an expression of dreamy concentration on his face. Though disturbed, we had not reported these observations. Why? Perhaps we convinced ourselves of what we wanted to believe—that surely this could not be as bad as it seemed; that we did not want to tarnish a priest’s reputation on the basis of an isolated incident. Now, however, since the monsignor’s disclosure at church, we regretted our silence.

But surely the monsignor would be interested in our story. Surely he would be sorry for having declared, before conducting any wider investigation, that the suit was without foundation. Surely he would also regret the article in the diocesan newspaper stating that no other allegations of this nature had ever been made. If only the monsignor knew the whole story.

So we called and wrote the monsignor several times. Within a matter of days, after talking with other parishioners, we compiled a long chronological account documenting incidents of improper behavior by the pastor going back 25 years. This account included the story of the

*Continued on page 12*

## “We must not discuss this”

*Continued from page 11*

brother of a close friend in the parish, who said that on an overnight camping trip, the pastor had crawled into his tent in the middle of the night and tried to pull down his pajama bottoms. The child had screamed and fought him off. Now, 25 years later, the memory still burned. He had never again attended church.

The monsignor was sorry to hear our news. Very sorry. “Oh dear, oh dear, this is serious,” he said. It “pained” him more than he could say to have to hear these things. But it did not take long before we discovered that much of this was already known to him. An associate priest in the parish had earlier submitted his own account of improprieties in the rectory and had begged the diocese to investigate. The monsignor himself had been involved in resolving a previous situation, after another 13-year-old boy said the pastor had gotten him drunk in his cabin and then straddled him and massaged him with oil.

As months passed, it appeared that nothing was going to change in our parish. The pastor remained in charge, celebrating Mass each Sunday—though we could no longer bring ourselves to see him there. Publicly he took the position, “on the advice of counsel,” that he could not comment on the allegations and was thus, sadly, powerless to defend himself. To parishioners who approached him with their concerns and questions he denied everything.

To priests in neighboring parishes the pastor provided his own version of the facts, which they willingly circulated: It never happened. There was nothing sexual about it. It was all misunderstood. These are very troubled boys. Their parents are jealous of me. The 11-year-old boy with the pajama bottoms? To the boy’s brother the pastor said he had no recollection of this incident. But to a priest friend he recalled the incident clearly: we had to get up early to catch a train. The boy wouldn’t wake up, and then he struggled when I tried to get him dressed.

Again and again from priests in the area, including two monsignors supposedly monitoring the case, I heard various versions of the same impulse: to minimize the problem, to shift the issue to the sad injury to a priest’s reputation. “He may have been foolish, but he hasn’t broken any laws.” “Those boys look like strapping fellows; it’s hard for me to believe that they suffered any real harm.” “He has this thing about massage—he’s a very touchy-feely person.” “Sure, he doesn’t walk on water; but we are all broken, we are all sinners....”

Again and again I found it necessary to point out to these priests that the pastor’s particular form of brokenness took the form of victimizing the most innocent and defenseless members of his flock. The pattern of these stories suggested a compulsive erotic attraction to young boys, which he was unable or unwilling to curb. He used his parishioners’ trust in him as a priest and as a family friend in order to gain access to their male children and to take them on unsupervised overnight trips, where he acted out his attraction and abused their trust. After Mass on the Sunday following the visit of my wife and son to his cabin, the pastor leaned over to my son and whispered, “Next time you come alone, and we’ll leave Mom behind.”

Again and again I found it necessary to answer the claim that nobody was hurt by the pastor’s behavior. The fact that he had intended no harm was irrelevant. There are certain adults a child has every right to trust. One of these is surely a priest. Who could assess the consequences when such trust was betrayed? Who could doubt the shame and confusion planted in the minds of the children he touched? Who could calculate the damage that such behavior did to the whole body of Christ and to the reputation of many innocent priests?

Perhaps I was naïve; perhaps it reflected my residual faith in the priesthood. But what offended me most was not whatever deviant weakness caused our pastor’s actions, but that when confronted he could accept no responsibility—that he lied, and that he used his brother priests to circulate his lies.

Diocesan officials did nothing with

*Continued on next page*

# Healing Forgiveness

*The Spirit still moves  
in our church today*

BY ANONYMOUS

I am a happily married Roman Catholic woman. Attendance at Mass and time spent in meditation are my daily sustenance. I am a eucharistic minister in our parish and have been a sponsor in our adult initiation program. Our prayer group meets regularly, and I receive spiritual direction once a month. I make regular retreats and have been privileged to walk through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. I share what I have with those who have less; I give work to the immigrants, comfort the widowed, visit the lonely and counsel the addicted. I am respected by my colleagues at the well-known university where I teach.

I am also a woman who as a child in the sixth grade was sexually abused by her parish priest. I share my story in the hope that my experience of healing and forgiveness may help the many people who are suffering as a consequence of sexual abuse by some members of the Catholic clergy.

As a child, I grew up loving the Roman Catholic Church—the smell of candles burning, the wafting of incense up to the rafters, the peaceful, quiet churches where I felt God’s presence and the kindness of many of the church’s priests and sisters. I played the organ in our own church and coordinated the altar boys’ training in our small town long before the thought of female altar servers was in anyone’s mind. In a childlike way, I thought Jesus must be just like our parish priest—smiling, kind, loving, warm and forgiving. That association made my recovery particularly challenging.

The abuse began when I was 11 years old. My feelings about Father X were conflicted for many years, and it was not until I was in my late 20s that I began to acknowledge the abuse. I have had extensive, in-depth

therapy and have also been recovering from active alcoholism, anorexia and bulimia for more than 18 years.

I cannot tell you how long I lived with feelings of rage, or how long I suffered from horrible feelings of betrayal by the church, Father X and, by association, Jesus. I don’t know how long I prayed for this man and for the gift of forgiveness and healing. I was blessed with a very good therapist, who helped me uncover my memories and put words to the feelings I was experiencing—quite an arduous journey. As I began to “grow up” in therapy and obtained my master’s degree in counseling, I came to understand how Father X had never developed psychosexually. He entered the seminary when he was 13 years old; perhaps he never dated. He did not mature into a psychologically healthy adult male, capable of having chaste relationships with adult men and women that might have met his very human needs for companionship, love and friendship. I began to develop some compassion for Father X.

While in therapy, and for quite some time after I terminated therapy, I stopped attending Mass, did not receive the sacraments and was so angry that I wanted to take a hammer to that mammoth concrete edifice, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. As I began to see my imperfections, acknowledge my defects of character, accept my creaturehood, and as I began to mature, I was able to take the church and Father X off the pedestal on which I had placed them. A wise Jesuit director told me during my first eight-day retreat that “the church is as sinful as her people.”

Eight years ago I was asked to share my story of recovery with others who were trying to recover from

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# The Spirit

*Continued from page 12*

alcoholism. While I had spoken in this type of setting many times, I never until then mentioned publicly that a priest had sexually abused me. I was talking extemporaneously about the gifts one receives by living a 12-step program; specifically I was addressing the eighth step, which deals with forgiveness. I told the following story:

In 1990 I went to visit Father X. During our visit, he was restless and dominated the conversation, such that I was unable to bring up the topic of the abuse. I felt angry and frustrated, and after arriving home, I called him on the phone. I didn't really know what I was going to say. I just asked to say the right thing. I told him that I was in therapy, and I was trying to come to terms with the abuse. I told him that I had forgiven him for what he had done. He said, "I have been praying that you would." I had nothing more to say. I

felt grateful that there was closure and that I could finally let go of him. Through all the years of therapy, tears, prayer and meditation, I had been given the gift of forgiveness for him, and now I received compassion for myself.

process of forgiving has been the most difficult experience I have had in my 46 years of living. But it has been the journey for which I am most grateful.

After I finished telling my story, a man approached me with his wide-

power of Jesus' love with others.

Recovery from sexual abuse is a circuitous path that takes a lifetime. The wounds I have as a result of the abuse are still there, but they are not open wounds any longer. They have been turning into scars for many years now, and one day at a time, I am being healed.

The healing allows me to be compassionate. For the past six months, my heart has been broken and tears have run down my cheeks each time I read the morning paper or listened to radio commentators describe the suffering of yet another victim of sexual abuse by a priest. I have been filled with anger once again, after I learned about the errors made by some bishops because of denial, ignorance and misjudgment. And then I go and sit with the Lord, participate in the Mass and find myself praying silently and aloud for the victims, the survivors, the perpetrators and the enablers. And I am comforted and filled with hope for our church. When I look back on the times along my journey when I felt overwhelming pain, desolation and feelings of hopelessness, I am reminded that it was then that the Spirit was working quietly, unbeknownst to me, to bring about healing and forgiveness. And so is the Spirit moving our church today. Silently and creatively, I believe that the Spirit is working in the hearts and minds of lay men and women, the clergy and bishops. Some bishops and clergy are suffering in solidarity with us, as we struggle to be courageous, compassionate and committed to the call of the Second Vatican Council.

I believe that God's gracious gift of forgiveness is given to all who earnestly seek it, so that we can extend that forgiveness to those who do us harm—physically, emotionally and spiritually. In the midst of the pain and the suffering, we are invited to love one another as Jesus loves us, to forgive and to beg for forgiveness, to let go of the rage, to be healers and to be healed, to be reconciled with one another—to bring God's transforming love to our church and to the world.

*The author lives in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area. As is the practice in many 12-step programs, the author's name is not disclosed.*

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*I slowly began to seek the God who had never abandoned me. The God who loves me so much, carried me when I could not walk.*

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I had to get to the point where I wanted to be free more than I wanted to be angry. I didn't want to live my life in an ongoing rage. The only way I knew to be free of the anger and the rage was through forgiveness. This was not easy. In fact, the

brimmed hat pulled down to shield his eyes, and his coat collar pulled up around his neck. He extended his hand, and as I shook it, he said, "I am Shawn [not his real name], and I am a Roman Catholic priest. On behalf of the Catholic Church, I want to apologize to you." I shivered as a chill ran through my body, and tears filled my eyes. For the first time, I felt someone in the church acknowledged the wrong that had been done to me as a child, felt genuine compassion for me and was courageous enough to "take on the sins of others" with his sincere apology. After being away from the sacraments for many years, and being unable to pray, except to say, "Please keep me sober and healthy" in the morning and "Thank you" at night, I began to hunger for God again.

I slowly began to seek the God who had never abandoned me. The God, who loves me so much, carried me when I could not walk. When I cursed God, and doubted that God even existed, God put people in my life who listened to me and loved me back to health. This past Easter was the first time in 14 years that I could say that Jesus and I are intimate friends again.

In his own way, Father X acknowledged that he had harmed me, and he was deeply sorry. By recognizing and accepting his own frailties as a human being, Father Shawn was able to reach out to me graciously and generously and offer reconciliation. Over the years, I have been blessed to know many priests who, from their life of prayer, share the transforming

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## "We must not discuss this"

*Continued from page 12*

the accumulating body of evidence. What seemed increasingly clear was that their "hands were tied" by the pending lawsuit. Any evidence supporting the pastor's guilt could reflect on the diocese's own culpability. So they spread the church's mantle of authority around this priest and his secrets and lies, hoping that if only a knowing few were scandalized or alienated from the church this would be an acceptable price. Surely the parish, and the victims, would recover in time.

It is the same logic, repeated over many years and in many dioceses around the country, that has led today to a crisis, and a scandal, of unprecedented proportions.

Five years have passed since that Sunday in September. The priest finished out the remaining two years of his term as pastor. The diocese placed him, after an extended trip abroad, in another parish—though only on an "interim basis." The lawsuit has dragged on in

Dickensian fashion. One of the depositions, by a decorated police officer, stated that 30 years ago, when he was an 11-year-old altar boy, the priest regularly massaged him in the rectory. On the last of these occasions the priest had placed his hand inside the boy's underpants while moving the boy's hand over his own crotch, in a state of arousal.

The monsignor never returned to address our former parish. He went on to become chancellor of the diocese!

My wife and I continue to think of ourselves as Catholics. But we have not belonged to another parish since then.

*The author is a Catholic writer who wishes to remain anonymous and who, at the time of the events reported here, provided full documentation to the appropriate authorities.*

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# What We Can Do

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## *The goals and purposes of Boston College's two-year effort to learn from the crisis*

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BY REV. WILLIAM P. LEAHY, S.J.

All of us know how devastating sexual misconduct by priests and bishops has been to victims and their families, the Catholic community, and wider society. So many have been left confused and angry, feeling betrayed, and asking serious questions about the Church and their relationship with the hierarchy. In response to the scandal and to the wounds it has caused, especially in the Catholic community, I announced in mid-May that Boston College would undertake a special academic initiative during the next several years. I did so for three reasons.

First, the current situation calls for healing, and healing requires not only work of the heart but also work of the mind. As a Catholic university, Boston College has a special responsibility to help the Catholic community and wider society better understand Catholic perspectives on critical societal problems, and also to assist the Catholic Church in appreciating and responding to contemporary issues. Doing so is part of our mission.

Second, BC has scholarly and pastoral resources that can assist lay men and women, priests, and bishops in engaging the complex issues facing them and help them learn from one another. Third, Boston College can be a meeting place, an intellectual and religious resource that can assist in the revitalization of the Church and individual members of the Catholic community.

The Church in the 21st Century program is intended for the Boston College community, BC alumni and friends, the Catholic community of Boston and beyond, and for all people, Catholic and non-Catholic, who are concerned about the present crisis in the Catholic Church.

Our initiative will focus on three

broad issues: 1) the roles and relationships of lay men and women, priests, and bishops and how to enhance them; 2) sexuality in Catholic teaching and in contemporary culture; and 3) the challenge of living, deepening, and handing on the Catholic faith to succeeding generations. A calendar of events scheduled or in planning stages will be on the Church in the 21st Century Web site. This calendar gives information about the types of programs offered

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*The challenge  
for us  
is to renew  
our vision,  
a vision built  
on trust and  
accountability.*

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and topics that we will discuss in the future.

Obviously, Boston College alone cannot resolve all the hurts and challenges facing the Catholic community today. Nor does it seek to supplant bishops or others in the Church who must eventually respond to pressing issues. Our initiative intends to be respectful of the Church and its teachings and tradition, strive for balance and fairness in its programs, and promote healing and understanding in the Catholic Church.

I realize that at times our initiative may generate disagreement and controversy. Faithful Catholics hold different opinions about many important matters, and it may well be at times that views and positions will become

controversial or disputed. Should that happen, we need to remind ourselves that Boston College, as a university, is committed to open discussion and to the objective consideration of the wide variety of opinions that can be reasonably argued.

Our approach is based on the conviction that the essence of a university is the search for truth, and that, in the end, the truth will prevail. At Boston College, this search for truth is enriched by the acknowledgment and exploration of spiritual and religious truths, influenced by our Jesuit, Catholic educational and religious traditions. Stated simply, we seek to link faith and culture, especially the Catholic Church and American society.

Finally, I want to say a word about the goals of our Church in the 21st Century initiative. First, it seeks to engage issues and topics critical to the healing and vitality of Catholics in the United States in the aftermath of the sexual abuse crisis. All should contribute to that task, but it is especially urgent that younger Catholics, so often enthusiastic, generous, and interested in volunteer service and the spiritual life, be enlisted in the renewal of the Church. So much of the future of Catholicism is in their hands. But younger Catholics need the inspiration and encouragement of older Catholics who know, appreciate, and practice their Catholic faith.

Our second goal is to help Catholics become more informed about core teachings and traditions of Catholicism and clearer about what they believe and reasons for their beliefs. This educational and religious effort should enable them to live up to the demands and responsibilities of their faith more authentically and effectively.

Third, our initiative seeks to help revitalize the Catholic community, to move from scandal and crisis to renewal and greater hope. Offending priests and bishops betrayed their

commitment to the Church and to Catholics who trusted them. Church leaders made serious errors in the way they dealt with victims, their families, and abusers. Trust between lay men and women and the hierarchy has been severely eroded in recent months, and many priests who have served faithfully all their lives, especially those in parishes, feel beleaguered and discouraged. Trust must be restored and accountability ensured.

Part of our initiative will focus on the reinvigoration of parish life, for example, by striving to develop model structures and practices that are built on trust and accountability, and that encourage and support the talents and responsibilities of laity, priests, and bishops. So many lay men and women want to use their gifts to help the Church, and we need them to do so, just as we need priests and bishops to live up to their responsibilities and commitments.

The challenge for us is to renew our vision, a vision built on trust and accountability. And one nurtured by faith, knowledge, and conversation—faith in God as revealed in Scripture and human experience; knowledge of basic Catholic teaching, beliefs, and tradition; and conversation with people of both similar and different perspectives.

I know that these goals and other needed steps will not be realized without a commitment to dialogue, a willingness to seek forgiveness and healing, prayer and study, and leadership from laity and clergy. But I also know that during the past 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has adapted and changed to meet a variety of challenges. So as we strive to heal and to think and act anew, we must recall that God does not leave us orphans and that the Spirit is moving among us always.

*Rev. William P. Leahy, S.J., is the president of Boston College.*

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# Can We Tell The Truth?

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*The Church faces a crisis: how it orders itself and understands its authority*

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BY MARGARET O'BRIEN  
STEINFELS

**W**e have had good reason this year, which has produced the greatest crisis in the history of the U.S. Catholic Church, to remember a man who faced the clerical sexual abuse crisis over a decade ago, both institutionally in Chicago and personally in enduring a false accusation. The great lesson from Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's ordeal, in his life and in his dying, is clear: Tell the truth.

As we reflect on the sexual abuse crisis, the biggest challenge we face is exactly that: telling the truth. Though it may seem that we have had all too much "truth," we do not yet have the whole truth. We must take the time to understand not only the what of sexual abuse, but also how this tragedy happened and why it happened. Only then can we move forward with integrity and with the hope of a remedy. We must pursue a form of what Vaclav Havel, now president of the Czech Republic, called "living in truth" in his 1978 essay, "The Power of the Powerless."

"Living within the truth," he wrote, "is an attempt to gain control over one's own sense of responsibility." Although he was writing of Soviet domination in the 1970s and 1980s, his words call us to a sense of our own responsibility as members of the Catholic Church. Uncovering the truth of the matter requires searching for how and why this crisis happened. Instead of anxiously dismissing this crisis, instead of simply moving on, we need to practice a patient attention to the facts and the events so that we can inform ourselves, understand what has happened, and, above all, judiciously consider what needs to be done. Not every remedy deserves our support. Not every remedy has yet presented itself.

The current situation could be described as paralyzing. The church is paralyzed. And the Gospel passage I have most often thought of over the last several months is that of the paralytic in Mark's Gospel. The paralytic's friends brought him for healing. His friends carried him up to the roof of the house where Jesus was staying, because it was so crowded outside. The paralytic's friends stripped the covering from over the place where Jesus was sitting. Then, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Jesus, seeing his faith, said, Your sins are forgiven. For the time being, each of us must carry our paralyzed church with such faith until we find some authentic and effective way through the mess we are in.

In all of this scandal, a great deal has been made of clerical culture. Does such a generalization help explain why and how? What if we narrowed the arena to chancery culture—the culture of ambitious priests who work together and who may live in the bishop's household? These men run the local church. Is not this chancery culture (at least in large archdioceses such as Boston) akin to a system of lord and vassals, in which the vassal pledges fealty and the lord pledges protection and promotion? The vassal does the lord's bidding, protecting him from vexing and difficult problems, like a Paul Shanley.

There is rich treasure here for social analysis: perhaps an anthropologist could describe that chancery culture with greater precision. It does bear out my point that finding the truth, the why and the how are both difficult and painful. In reflecting on this, I could not but think of Havel's phrase, "living a lie," a condition, as he sees it, so subtle, and so unconscious that those who live a lie may not fully grasp the ordinary subterfuge in which they carry on their daily life. Havel writes, "Individuals need not believe all these mystifications [he is speaking of the Soviet system and

Communist ideology], but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, are the system."

What is to be done? To what should we be paying attention? There are three frameworks through which I have been thinking about this.

1. At heart, we are facing an ecclesiological crisis, that is, a crisis about the church itself, how it orders itself, and how it understands office and authority—a crisis that has been growing for at least the last two decades. This crisis did not begin last January in Boston, but the sexual abuse crisis manifests this larger crisis. It concerns not only episcopal authority, or lack thereof, episcopal power and its possible abuse, not only church governance, but also and more fundamentally a crisis about the church itself. How do we understand ourselves as the church?

Forty years ago, Vatican II offered a renewed idea about ourselves as a church, as a Christian community. The liturgical changes were an expression and a promise of the communion of saints. *Gaudium et spes* said the church traveled the same path as all humankind; the church was "a leaven." *Lumen gentium* described the church as the people of God. This means collaboration and collegiality, the practical mechanisms for acting as a Christian community. Vatican II is frequently described as the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, who back in 1962 fully anticipated the effect of the council's teachings, especially *Gaudium et spes*, on the church itself? The warrants that the council launched on the "world"—warrants for human solidarity, dignity, and responsibility for the human condition, and most im-

portant in the current crisis, responsibility for political and organizational behavior—these warrants have come home to roost in the church, most obviously as a response to the sexual abuse crisis.

All of this was embedded in the council fathers' sense of history and historical consciousness; the church's mission was to read the signs of the times. That admonition is strangely absent now from our reflection and action in the church. The church is part of history. But how? In reading the signs of the times, doesn't the church have to face up to the contradictions and the contrary pulls in the circumstances of its life today, especially the structures and decisions that have fostered this crisis? The council reconfigured the understanding of how the church was to be in this world. The last 40 years have been a struggle to live that understanding in our practice. It is a struggle between the church as a perfect society and the church as a pilgrim people. As time has passed and we have come to critical forks in the road, the church itself (and I mean all of us) has not always taken the right turn. We are falling short in implementing and embodying this new understanding of the church, above all, in reconfiguring our relationships as lay people, as clergy, as bishops within the framework of a hierarchical church. Let me be clear about that: I do think hierarchical organizations work. I even think they are necessary, but not if they are all head and no body. Maybe I should also say, all mouth and little brain. Though the liturgy reminds us that the laity is a part of the communion of saints, the current Vatican ecclesiology seems to see most lay people as a bunch of knaves and ne'er-do-wells—a rowdy people (doubtfully) of God. Not to be trusted. And bishops, too often, have been appointed only because they are cautious, careful, and concerned above

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# Truth?

*Continued from page 15*

all with pleasing their “Holy Father.” Thus our current situation.

We have been told often in recent months that the real crisis in the Catholic Church is a crisis of faith. And the answer to that crisis of faith is obedience and submission, or as some intone it mantra-like: fidelity, fidelity, fidelity. This echoes Vatican statements and actions that over the last two decades have focused on a doctrinal crisis that is always threatening to pollute the church, or to tear it apart. This distracts attention from a deeper, or, at least, another crisis. In fact, sometimes it contributes to the ecclesiological crisis of disordered relationships among and between bishops, priests, and laity, and the relationship of all of us, but especially the American bishops, to the Vatican. Not only that, Dallas showed how profoundly disordered the relationships among the bishops themselves have become. Preceding Dallas, and from January on, there was little effort among the bishops to respond nationally to the evolving scandal. At Dallas, they were under tremendous pressure to act in concert, when, in fact, it is only some bishops who had disgraced their office. Those men should have been called to account by their fellow bishops. Rather than examine the failures of some of their fellow bishops, many otherwise responsible bishops (whether out of deference or a misguided sense of solidarity or fear of making matters worse) chose to risk the reputations and ministries of their priests rather than confront their fellow bishops. Who could have guessed that this is where we’d be 40 years after Vatican II?

2. Because this crisis comes from the top, it cannot be resolved in the customary way, from the top down or with pronouncements from on high. Yet such is the state of the church that we are admonished with: Who are you—the ordinary Christian faithful—to suggest any remedies? More to the point, what mechanisms are available for us to offer remedies? When there are no internal mechanisms, where do people turn to voice their anguish and their complaints? To the media, to TV dramas, to Oprah Winfrey! Each of us—and all of us—needs to take some responsibility for being what Gaudium et spes said we were, a leaven. “The

church is at once a visible organization and a spiritual community that travels the same journey as all humankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.” We are leaven in the church as much as in society.

3. The usual fault lines (or maybe I should say the usual fault persons) are jousting for position in responding to this crisis. Still I do not think these particular knights-errant are able to remedy the ecclesiological crisis and reorder the disordered relationships. George Weigel doesn’t have the answers; neither does James Carroll nor Garry Wills. All of them have written recently on the scandal, and no surprise, each of them has found the answer in the very agendas he has been pressing over the last two decades. Each may be correct in portions of his

but the coverage often enough has inaccurate headlines, sound bites, or information. We see in this coverage a terrible confluence of media animosity toward the church and inadequate communications by the bishops. Yet, when looking to the mote in the eye of the media, some church officials ought to look to the beam in their own.

And then, here are some things we should or could do, some things to think about:

Look again at the usual and ordinary mechanisms now on the books for church governance, mechanisms like parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils, presbyteral councils, finance councils, many of which have been coopted by bishops or pastors, have fallen into disuse, or ceased to be effective. Above all, the bishops’ conference, the U.S.C.C.B., has got to be recognized once again as a critical and

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*We should remind ourselves that the Catholic Church is and always has been the most diverse communion on the face of the earth.*

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analysis, but none has the answer. I don’t have the answers. We don’t yet know the answers, because we don’t yet have the truth, or at least we have not yet fully told the truth. What can we do?

Let me conclude in suggesting that in the interim, there are some things we probably should not do, and some things we should try to do.

We should not press our usual agendas: on the one side, obedience and submissiveness, overhauling the seminaries, banning homosexuals from the priesthood; on the other side, allowing married priests and the ordination of women.

We should not scapegoat homosexual priests or bishops, though we must come to a fuller and deeper understanding about the role that homosexuality plays in a church that requires celibacy, and what role, if any, it has played in the sexual abuse scandal.

We should not believe everything we read in the papers or hear on TV. The media did not cause this scandal,

vital force in the life of the U.S. Catholic Church. The erosion of its influence over the last decade—partly under the influence of the Vatican, partly under the influence of some American prelates, and partly under the influence of persistent and false accusations by conservatives—has created an enormous gap between the Vatican and the local church. A church that values mediating institutions is now without a national voice or bridging capacity. If more of us paid attention to these organizational structures as authentic governing mechanisms and genuinely worked on them for the good of the church, and not our own hobbyhorses, perhaps they could be revived and serve their purpose of helping to bring good order to the governance of the church.

Though it is hard to see at the moment, we should not forget that some great good may come of this. Not only will sexual abuse of children be at the forefront of our attention in the church, it could also be in other insti-

tutions; sexual abuse as well as physical and psychological abuse; not only in this country, but elsewhere. We know that the prostitution of children is a grave problem often connected with tourism in some countries. Could raising the church’s consciousness about sexual abuse extend the compassion of others to these children?

The church has been wounded, badly wounded; in this condition that requires examination and repair, bishops, priests, and lay people will have to scrutinize their own attitudes and behaviors in order to remedy the indifference we all display at times toward the well-being of the whole church.

One can never underestimate the importance of prayer; of course, we can overestimate it too. In any case, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen recently urged us all to pray for the work of the spirit. And then he said: “We need a miracle. Expect one.” Would it be the miracle of uncovering and telling the truth?

Can we tell the truth? Can we know the truth? Perhaps. Think of Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. She was not immediately forthcoming about herself, lingering over the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, discussing well water and living water, buckets and such. Yet when Jesus speaks the truth of her condition, “You are right to say, you have no husband. You have had five and the man you now have is not your husband. You spoke the truth there,” she immediately recognizes his power and his compassion: “I see you are a prophet, sir.” Then she returns to her village to announce the good news.

The Catholic Church is caught up in an ecclesiological, political, and sociological crisis: the truth and full consequences of that are obscured both by reams of media coverage and by the silence, bad memories, and perhaps bad consciences of church officials. If we are to know the truth, we must all stop living a lie.

*Margaret O’Brien Steinfelds is the former editor of Commonweal. This article is adapted from the 2002 Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Lecture that she gave last fall at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.*

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# The Aftermath

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*The people are catching on that they are the Church*

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BY THOMAS P. SWEETSER

In the first century, Peter had a dream in Joppa, a strange dream that encouraged him to eat prohibited food that was common and unclean. This was not kosher. Then he heard a knock at the door. A group of gentiles, sent by Cornelius, asked him to come with them to Caesarea. He agreed, mystified by the invitation. When Peter got there, he was forced to admit that his vision was far too narrow. Jesus had commanded him to preach to the people, but not just to the Jewish people. Here he was, standing in the home of a gentile, probably for the first time. Acts quotes Peter as saying, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

To his amazement, and that of the Jews who had come with him, the Holy Spirit fell on the non-Jews just as it had on them. Peter had no choice. “He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48). The young Christian movement was never the same after that. It broke out in all directions and knew no bounds. The gates were thrown open and it could no longer be contained within Judaism.

The same phenomenon is happening in the church today. Those in authority might consider the present upheaval to be a bad dream. In many ways it is, especially for those who are survivors of clergy sexual abuse. It is also a knock at the door, an invitation to change the way the church operates. Ordinary and common people are experiencing a new vision of church, one that challenges a small cadre of decision-makers unaccountable for their actions.

As has happened in many parts of the country, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee held “listening sessions” for

those who wanted to be heard. The one I attended was in a parish hall packed with faith-filled Catholics who were also angry, concerned and very vocal. They were knocking at the door of the hierarchical structure demanding accountability and reform. There was a united voice of both traditional and progressive persuasions that demanded redress for wrongs and cover-ups. Their voices also called for a leadership that would include both married and single people, male and female. The church is undergoing a shift in awareness and vision not unlike that experienced by Peter, the first pope. It can no longer be contained within limited boundaries and narrow ways of acting.

## IMPLICATIONS

The first consequence of the current shift in Catholic consciousness is the laity’s suspicion of its ordained leadership. The images of the clergy on pedestals are toppling. Those who stood on them are now tainted with suspicion. No longer is trust given freely to those in authority, especially on the diocesan level. Confidence that they are making good choices and have the best interests of the people in mind has worn thin.

Another consequence is that new structures of review and accountability are being put into place. Broad-based committees of lay men and women are reviewing past and present cases of sexual abuse and are making recommendations to those in charge. They are given authority and credibility, power and prestige—a new phenomenon for governance in the church.

Greater sharing of information and decision-making is yet another effect of this new climate in the church. Some parishes have had a history of collaborative style for some time. But now parishioners are demanding more collaboration at all levels of church authority. The more successful pastoral councils have op-

erated as joint efforts of leaders and pastor together. Pastors give authority to the councils to participate in the decision-making of the parish. This may serve well as a model for change in church structures as a whole.

It will take some doing to win back the trust and confidence of the people. Converting a parish to a more consultative and inclusive style of governance must be genuine and not merely rhetorical. The days in which people accepted the word of a bishop or pastor without question are over. Perhaps this is the most profound consequence of a shift in attitudes. The laity want change, and they want to participate in what those changes will be.

## NEW WAYS OF OPERATING

People keep saying, “They just don’t get it,” about the way church authorities have handled sexual abuse issues. To regain the trust and confidence of the laity, diocesan structures will have to become more open and accountable, with built-in checks and balances. Advisory councils will not be enough. The same thing must happen on the diocesan level as on the parish level, where pastors share authority with staffs, pastoral councils and commissions. In those dioceses where shared decision-making structures are already in place, these must become more visible. At the present moment, the image of the church as a sensitive and caring institution is tarnished. People see it as self-serving, controlling and unassailable. One way to improve the image is for qualified people to become co-leaders with the bishop, people who function not behind the scenes but up front and visible for all to see. This requires a shift from one person being in charge to shared leadership. If it is true that the bishop is the one ultimately in charge, then he has it within his power to change the system and culture of the diocese to one of shared authority and mutual accountability.

A new way of operating is de-

manded on the parish level as well. The pastor was not ordained to be an administrator. His charism is spiritual leadership. The pastor could give over the details of running a parish to others who are trained and have enough expertise to direct the complexities of parish life. The parish’s operation could be restructured so there are checks and balances on all levels, where pastors and staffs are accountable to lay leaders and vice versa. A new tradition of accountability and creative planning has to be established. What is interesting about the present ferment is that most of it is directed toward the bishops rather than the pastors. Why? Could it be because there are more occasions for open sharing and participative decision-making on the parish level?

A new way of acting is demanded of the church as a whole. Peter had his awareness greatly expanded when he entered Cornelius’s home. The same is needed today. The view, for instance, that the church can be run only by an all male, celibate clergy is no longer credible. People demand change, because they think, a more inclusive priesthood will provide a larger pool of candidates and a more balanced priestly ministry. Regrettably, this change will probably have to come from an ecumenical council, a gathering similar to the Second Vatican Council.

Before jumping into a worldwide conclave, however, regional gatherings should prepare the ground. This is already happening in the listening sessions being held in many dioceses. A groundswell is beginning. It will not be denied. Local councils for the church in Chicago or Boston or Atlanta could lead to an American council, which in turn would contribute to an agenda for a worldwide ecumenical council. Change is in the air; the Spirit is falling on all who hear the word (Acts 10:44). Unfortunate as the recent tragic events have been, the people are catching on that they are the church. It is to be hoped that church authorities will “get it” as well and respond appropriately.

*Thomas P. Sweetser, S.J., is director of the Parish Evaluation Project, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

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# Considerations for a Church in Crisis

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*The Church must confront deeper questions: global problems in sexuality, episcopal collegiality and “finding a new way of exercising the primacy”*

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BY JOHN R. QUINN

In terms of its harm and far-reaching effects, the present crisis in the church must be compared with the Reformation and the French Revolution. It is this conviction that brings to my mind the forthright declaration of the Second Vatican Council, “Our era needs wisdom more than past ages.... The future of the world is in peril unless wiser men and women are forthcoming” (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World,” No. 15). Cardinal Yves Congar long ago pointed out that a major reason why well-intentioned reform movements prior to the Council of Trent failed was that they did not ask the deeper questions. They were content to try to put things back where they were. The church must address the deeper questions. A superficial response will not do.

## AN AMERICAN PROBLEM?

According to some media reports, high-level figures in the Roman Curia consider the present crisis an American problem. In actual fact, there is a worldwide problem of sexual failures on the part of priests: the reported abuse of nuns in Africa, for example, and concubinage in Latin America. Canada has had major problems, as well as England, Ireland and Scotland. France, Poland, Germany and Austria have figured prominently in the news. In other words, it would be calling darkness light to maintain that sexual problems exist only in the United States. The problem is manifold in nature; it is worldwide, and it must be dealt with comprehensively. While it would be rhapsodic to think that the abolition of celibacy is the solution, the church must open itself to considering all possible solutions; and this includes the possibility of a married clergy. Some believe that the

answer lies in greater discipline, even a return to past policies of seminary training. This overlooks the fact that the majority of offenders were trained in that kind of seminary. A narrow perspective cannot respond to the grave crisis we now experience. It would be a march of folly if the deeper questions were not dealt with comprehensively. And it would be a distortion not to see this problem in the perspective of that great body of priests all over the world who are serving Christ and his people humbly and effectively and who are deeply touched by this crisis.

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*Our response has to be the start of a whole new way of thinking.*

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## A NATIONAL POLICY

A problem of such magnitude as sexual abuse calls for a nationally binding policy and a more effective structure of episcopal leadership. Objections are raised to such a policy on the grounds that the individual bishop, responsible only to the pope, is independent. But this is not the whole story. From earliest times bishops formed area or regional groups called councils or synods. In an unusual conflict they might appeal to the bishop of Rome, as in fact they did. But ordinarily problems were dealt with by the bishops at the regional level. There was a sense that to some degree the bishops were accountable to one another. Certainly during the first millennium there was no idea that a bishop was responsible only to the pope. For the common good and for the sake of children as

well as for the sake of the church’s pastoral mission, a binding national policy is a necessity.

## A STRONGER BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE

The effect of the continuing diminishment of episcopal conferences is painfully evident in this present grave crisis, which has been raging with increasing intensity since January. Yet the bishops as a conference will not be able to deal with it until mid-June. Episcopal conferences are a critical factor for the church’s ability to function in the modern world. The preface of the Code of Canon Law (1983) declares that the principle of subsidiarity underlies the code’s treatment of the episcopal office. The national conference was widely listened to and respected when it produced the two landmark pastoral letters on peace and on the economy.

Restrictions placed on the conference since that time would probably prevent letters of that caliber from being written today. If the church is to lead and to respond to crises such as the one we now experience, conferences must be strengthened, not weakened. While the work of the cardinals who met recently in Rome has undoubted merit, the calling of the cardinals is a statement that the episcopal conference as such holds a secondary role. It is the cardinals who are devising a response to the crisis and, presumably, the conference at its June meeting will endorse and adopt what the cardinals have determined. Restrictions placed on the conference, together with emphasis on the cardinals as in some sense superior to the conference, serve only to weaken the conciliar institution of episcopal conferences.

## LAY INVOLVEMENT

There is need for strong lay involvement if a successful path is to be found through the crisis. It is therefore necessary that the bishops con-

vene a distinguished body of lay men and women and charge them to assess the present situation and set down some ordered plan for addressing it. This cannot be a ploy simply to extricate the bishops from the miasma of the present crisis. It has to be the beginning of a whole new way of thinking and acting. It should be a statement by the bishops of their determination to implement fully the longstanding conciliar and papal teaching about the rights and role of the laity in the church, including the stated right to public opinion in the church. In addition to such a committee, and fully in keeping with Catholic doctrine on the role of the laity, would be an invitation to lay Catholics to take part in the official discussion of sexual abuse during the June meeting of the bishops.

## LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM RESPONSES

This moment calls for two responses. The short-term response: calling together a distinguished body of lay men and women and enacting a nationally binding policy for dealing with sexual abuse. A long-term response: addressing the deeper questions, such as the worldwide problems in the area of sexuality, the meaningful implementation of episcopal collegiality and the largely ignored question raised by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on church unity, “That They May Be One”(1995), about “finding a new way of exercising the primacy.”

Clearly the church has arrived at a very critical moment in her history. Clearly too, the future of the church is in peril “unless wiser men and women are forthcoming.”

*Most Rev. John R. Quinn is the retired archbishop of San Francisco, California.*

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# The Laity and the Scandal: What Next?

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*A new and serious role for Catholic laity is now the only way forward out of the crisis*

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*Writing to Archbishop (later Cardinal) James Gibbons of Baltimore in February 1882, Bishop Richard Gilmour of Cleveland made a blunt argument for holding the assembly of the American bishops that history knows as the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. “The clergy need to be strengthened and protected against the people and the people also against the irresponsible ways of the clergy and the Bishop against both,” he explained.*

BY RUSSELL SHAW

**T**he Third Plenary Council took place in 1884. Looking back over the years since then, a cynic might say that the clergy and the bishop had gotten pretty much what Gilmour thought they needed. As for the people, they’re still waiting to see how things turn out.

But now they also face a vexing quandary. As the clergy sex abuse scandal has made clear, there is a desperate need for an orderly transition to a more participatory mode of ecclesial decision-making in which laypeople play a greatly expanded role in many areas of the Church’s life, including finances, personnel, and social policy. But thanks to the bishops—and to the progressive theologians and clericist advisers who often guide their thinking on such matters—any movement along these lines is likely to be in just the wrong direction. In a worst-case scenario not unlike the sex abuse scandal itself, it could be another case of inviting wolves to tend the sheep.

Two incidents in Dallas last June at the time of the American bishops’ panicky, media-driven meeting on sex abuse illustrate this problem’s dual nature. First, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops tapped two progressives—Margaret Steinfels of *Commonweal* and

Scott Appleby of Notre Dame—to speak for the Catholic laity to the assembled hierarchy. In response, the incorrigible Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, remarked on EWTN, “I have better things to do with my time and money than to listen to Margaret Steinfels.” Second, when conservative Catholics attempted to schedule a panel discussion of the bishops’ meeting at a parish in a nearby diocese, the chancery let it be known that the gathering wouldn’t be welcome on church property. Catholics United for the Faith

ops last summer to hold a plenary council for the Church in the United States. The council would focus on the spiritual renewal of bishops and priests and their doctrinal fidelity, especially where moral doctrine about sex is concerned. Should the rest of the bishops buy this idea—hardly a sure thing—it will be imperative that preparations for the council (the first since Baltimore in 1884) not fall into the hands of the same Church bureaucrats and academics who have called the shots for years, and that lay participants not be drawn from

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*There is a need for an orderly transition to a more participatory mode of ecclesial decision-making in which lay people play a greatly expanded role.*

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moved the session to another diocese, where it took place in the auditorium of an independent Catholic school before a standing-room-only crowd of concerned, understandably angry laypeople.

Taken together, these incidents reflect two unpleasant facts relevant to the future of lay involvement in Church decision-making. One is that the clericalized bureaucracy controlling the administrative machinery of the Church seems to be partial—perhaps without even noticing it—to progressives and dissenters. The other is that these unself-consciously arrogant officeholders often give orthodox Catholics the back of their hand.

Both points will need to be kept firmly in mind if anything comes of the proposal floated by eight bish-

the ranks of the progressives favored by these folks.

Reflecting on dispiriting matters like these, conservative Catholics may be tempted simply to walk away from the whole mess, concentrate on their own spirituality, and leave it to the bishops and the bureaucrats to cope with the disaster. Although this is not an acceptable option for those who truly love the Church, it would be hard to blame anyone for so reacting, in view of the rebuffs delivered over the years by the kind of bishops George Sim Johnston describes as “mildly ‘pastoral’ men who...chose not to see what was happening on their watch” (“Can the Bishops Heal the American Church?” June 2002).

And yet...more lay participation in decision-making is urgently needed.

It is needed, for one thing, as an antidote to clericalism. As I remarked a decade ago in my book *To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain*, while clericalism is hardly the Church’s only problem, it causes many and is a factor in many more. The truth of that has been on display in the sex abuse scandal, which saw otherwise sane bishops reassigning notorious repeat offenders and hushing up their crimes as the culture of clericalism had taught them to do.

But lay participation also is right and proper in itself. Among other things, progress in this area might rehabilitate the vision of shared responsibility in the Church that flourished briefly after Vatican Council II before being betrayed by the irresponsible actions of zealots and enthusiasts on the left.

True, the primary setting for lay participation in the mission of the Church is the secular world. Vatican II says laypeople have the “special vocation” of making the Church “present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth” (*Lumen Gentium*). This is the lay apostolate. But the council also reminds bishops and priests that “the laity too have parts of their own to play” in ecclesial affairs. “For this reason,” it says, “they will work as brothers with the laity in the Church and for the Church” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). Shared responsibility in decision-making is an expression of this.

So why has there been so very little sharing for so long?

## THE ROOTS OF CLERICALISM

Historically, the sources of clerical resistance to lay participation go back very far—all the way back to the struggle in the Middle Ages over

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# Scandal

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the abuse called lay investiture (lay lords naming pastors and bishops—and sometimes even popes) and to the strong emphasis rightly placed by the 16th-century Council of Trent on shoring up the clergy, a necessary project whose unintended result was greatly to increase the clericalization of the Church.

In the United States, special historical factors also are at work, above all lay trusteeism. Catholics of the generation of Cardinal Gibbons and Bishop Gilmour knew the perils of trusteeism all too well, and much of their Church polity was shaped in reaction to it. Trusteeism's ghost still haunts the Church in America. This crisis of nearly two centuries ago helps explain many of the peculiarities that persist in lay-clergy relations today.

Lay trusteeism had complex causes. These included conflict between immigrant ethnic groups, especially the Irish and the French, misapplication of the ideology of republicanism to the Church, the influence exerted on Catholics by the model of Protestant congregationalism, the demagoguery of rebellious and unstable priests, and the quick tempers of hotheaded laymen spoiling for a fight. By the 1820s trusteeism had become a serious problem in such places as New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Charleston.

The basis of the trustee system was lay ownership of parishes, an arrangement developed in response to American civil law. With lay ownership came the assertion of the trustees' right to veto pastoral assignments by the bishop and to recruit priests of their own choice. Supporters of the system argued for a lay-clergy balance of powers not unlike the separation of powers under the American system of government. In time, trusteeism also fanned the fires of the movement for a national church. Philadelphia trustees went so far as to send a delegation to Rome to negotiate a concordat with the pope.

Bishops responded in two quite different ways. One was to try to find an appropriate participatory role for the laity. The other was to stamp out trusteeism. "I will suffer

no man in my diocese I cannot control," declared Archbishop John ("Dagger John") Hughes of New York. In due course, the second approach prevailed.

Meeting for the first time in council to legislate for the Church, the American bishops in 1829 moved to eliminate lay participation wherever they could and to shift the titles to Church property to bishops as rapidly as possible. The policy was enforced by denying parishes pastoral services and in some cases placing them under interdict if they refused to acknowledge the bishop's right to appoint and transfer parish priests. Says historian David O'Brien, "While affirming republican values of self-government and

eral as vice president, three clergy chosen by the clergy at an annual convention, and six laypeople chosen by a house of lay delegates at the convention. That is what England did. His constitution also provided that parish members elect vestrymen responsible for the temporal affairs of their parishes (the pastor was president of the vestry and had veto power, though not over contracts); that parishioners elect delegates to the annual conventions of the Church in Charleston; and that the diocesan convention "dispose of the general fund of the Church in the way that it may deem most advantageous" and oversee the administration of the diocese and its institutions.

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*Progress in lay participation  
might revive the vision of shared  
responsibility that flourished after Vatican II—  
before it was betrayed by zealots and  
enthusiasts on the left.*

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individual responsibility in public life, [the bishops] all but totally rejected those principles in organizing the church's internal affairs."

One notable exception to the new pattern of absolute episcopal control was the Diocese of Charleston, which then covered not only South Carolina but North Carolina and Georgia as well. When Bishop John England arrived there in 1820, he found a hotbed of lay trusteeism. The Irish-born prelate sought to meet the challenge by a policy of reasonable accommodation rather than suppression. The result was England's famous constitution for the diocese.

By today's standards perhaps even more than by the standards of the time, the Charleston constitution was a remarkable document. Imagine the astonishment there would be today if a bishop vested ownership of church property in the general trustees of the diocese—himself as president, the vicar gen-

Laypeople had no authority over Church doctrine, the sacraments, and clerical affairs. But even so the constitution did add this important proviso: "In those cases where the Convention has no authority to act, should either house feel itself called upon by any peculiar circumstances to submit advice, or to present a request to the Bishop, he will bestow upon the same the best consideration at the earliest opportunity; and as far as his conscientious obligations will permit, and the welfare of the Church will allow, and the honor and glory of Almighty God in his judgment require, he will endeavor to follow such advice or to agree to such request."

Twenty-eight conventions took place in the Diocese of Charleston from November 1823 to November 1840. Not surprisingly, the bishops' council of 1829 did not adopt Charleston's constitution as a model for other dioceses, but it did let it remain in place. The Vat-

ican said it had no problems with what was going on in Charleston. That is how things stood until England's death in 1842, when the constitution became a dead letter. Yet the episode stands as one of the most remarkable in American Catholic history, and its potential as a precedent for the future is worth considering.

But a precedent of a different sort also must be taken into account—the ill-fated Call to Action Conference of 1976. Unlike England's carefully planned and executed project in the 1820s, Call to Action (a name since adopted by an overtly dissident group) is a case study of how shared responsibility shouldn't work.

To mark the U.S. bicentennial, the bishops hit on the idea of a high-profile conference on the present and future direction of the Church in American society. The plan was the brainchild of a committee headed by the influential John Cardinal Dearden of Detroit, founding president of the U.S. bishops' conference after Vatican II. Cardinal Dearden, an advocate of shared responsibility and of a National Pastoral Council to embody it, apparently was frustrated by a go-slow directive from the Vatican in the early 1970s. It seems that he saw Call to Action as, at least in part, a backdoor way of bringing a prototype National Pastoral Council to the American Church.

If so, the idea backfired—badly. Call to Action, held in Detroit in October of the bicentennial year, brought together 1,300 delegates, a majority of them on the payroll of the Church. Given their head, these people rammed through a laundry list of resolutions that not only declared broadly acceptable views on things like world hunger and peace but took controversial stands on hot-button issues like birth control, homosexuality, and women in the Church. The bishops, reacting like men who had looked into the abyss, created a window-dressing "implementation" committee and then quietly shelved most of the Call to Action agenda.

This farcical episode put shared responsibility on ice for at least the next quarter-century. One lesson of

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the sex abuse crisis may be that it is time to resuscitate the idea. But there is no certainty that will happen, and there would be reason for alarm if it came about in the wrong way. Already, there are signs that it could.

In announcing the membership of the National Review Board formed to keep an eye on the bishops as they begin to implement their new, seriously flawed sex abuse policies, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Illinois, president of the bishops' conference, said the hierarchy wanted "the forthright advice of the laity to help resolve the crisis." No doubt that is true. But several other facts about the new arrangement bear mentioning. One is that the national board and its diocesan and provincial counterparts have a mandate in an area where badly burned bishops are happy to let laypeople take the heat for a change. Another is that loose-cannon remarks by the board's chairman, Frank Keating, raise questions about the future directions of the body he heads. And a third is that many laypeople are way beyond wanting only to give the hierarchy advice. They want a share in the decision-making for a Church they consider to be as much theirs as the bishops'.

#### DECISION-MAKING ABOUT WHAT?

Finances, for one thing. Recent disclosures—an archbishop's payment of \$450,000 in Church funds to a former boyfriend, the hushing-up by the last two bishops of Palm Beach, Florida (both of whom resigned in the face of sex abuse allegations) of an unrelated \$400,000 embezzlement, and on and on—underline the fact that despite a lot of talk about stewardship and accountability, some clerics still look on the Church's money as if it were pretty much their own. Diocesan and parish finance councils are a step in the right direction but only a step. Shared lay-clergy control comes next, accompanied by total public candor about where money comes from and where it goes.

Personnel is another area where changes are overdue. This doesn't mean returning to lay investiture or lay trusteeism. It means letting the laity of a parish that needs a new pastor speak directly to their bishop about parish conditions and the

qualifications of priests in the current clergy pool. It means giving lay representatives, through a structure and a process that don't now exist, a role in preparing the terna—the list of three candidates for the bishopric in an open diocese that the papal nuncio sends to Rome.

The Church's social and political policies are a third area where the laity should have a voice—and, very likely, a decisive one. The sex abuse scandal has accelerated the decline, already under way for years, in the bishops' ability to advance the Church's political agenda. The time when politicians trembled at the wrath of a powerful prelate like Francis Cardinal Spellman passed long ago. Moreover, since Vatican II,

the current proliferation of "lay ministries" shows that laypeople already are playing a large and growing role in the Church. And in a sense, they are; but it is very much on clericalist terms.

There is another obstacle, though many don't like to talk about it because doing so is politically incorrect. It is the lack of relevant preparation—education and formation in the faith—so apparent among the mass of laypeople. It is often said that American Catholics are the best-educated body of laity in the history of the Church. But although that may be true in sociological terms, in ecclesial terms it is highly questionable. As a result of the catechetical collapse of the last

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*Another obstacle is the lack of relevant preparation—education and formation in the faith—so apparent among the mass of laypeople.*

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recognition has grown that bishops and priests should teach social doctrine, not act as policy advocates. Advocacy is the job of the laity, addressing political and social issues according to the dictates of consciences formed by the doctrine of the Church. Transitional steps should begin immediately to shift responsibility in this area from clergy to laity, in anticipation of the day when laypeople—representing, no doubt, a legitimate diversity of Catholic views—will speak for the Church on issues of social and political policy.

Daunting obstacles face a program like the one just outlined. It will be objected that it is "Protestant" and "congregationalist," that it mistakenly applies democratic thinking to the Church. But this is not so. The underlying ecclesial vision here is the *communio* model of Vatican II. This model is an adaptation of the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ in which hierarchical and charismatic dimensions both exist. The clericalist culture also can be expected to argue that

four decades, huge numbers of adult Catholics today probably know less about the faith than their parents and grandparents did.

A while back, I shared some thoughts about clericalism and lay participation with a sympathetic archbishop. He replied in part: "If your suggestions were carried out with the help of lay Catholics like yourself, it would be good. But I'm afraid they would be carried out by people ignorant of their own Catholic identity or actively antagonistic to the traditions of the faith."

That is not a fanciful concern. Today's activist lay groups are generally of the Call to Action variety—agents of organized dissent. Voice of the Faithful, which sprang up in Boston in the wake of the sex abuse scandal and aspires to national status, says it wants to be a broad-based lay coalition. But its first convention last July was a platform for voices from the left like an organizer for the European-based We Are Church movement and the framer of a proposed Church "con-

stitution" that provides for impeaching the pope.

But even though conservative Catholics have good reason to be leery of coalitions, they cannot afford simply to sit back and watch matters unfold. The sex abuse scandal has been a watershed event. Whether conservatives feel comfortable with the idea or not, a new role for the Catholic laity is now visible on the far side of the great divide. If orthodox Catholics fail to help shape this new lay role, they will have only themselves to blame when it turns out badly.

As part of this, there is an urgent need to begin forming a corps of reliable Catholic laypeople prepared for responsibility in the Church—the board and council members and ecclesiastical civil servants of the future. The infrastructure for this work of formation already exists in academic institutions, organizations, formation movements, media, and publishing houses of an orthodox persuasion. Now the elements must be harnessed with this end in view.

Another important step will be to draw up realistic criteria for identifying laypeople who might be called to such roles. An ongoing critique, respectful but firm, must be mounted against the woolly-headed inclusivism of leaders who smile on dissent and are more concerned with preserving a false facade of ecclesial unity than protecting the Church against continued subversion from within. Laypeople should participate in decision-making in the Church, but not just any laypeople will do. Faithful adherence to Catholic doctrine as taught by the magisterium is the indispensable minimum pastors should expect and require. Unfortunately, if the past is a guide to the future, it is far from certain that they will.

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# Tomorrow's Catholics

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## *Three visions of crisis and reform*

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BY CHRISTOPHER J. RUDDY

*Toward a New Catholic Church:  
The Promise of Reform.*

By James Carroll. Mariner Books,  
130 pp., \$8.95 paperback.

*The Courage to Be Catholic:  
Crisis, Reform, and the Future  
of the Church.*

By George Weigel. Basic Books,  
246 pp., \$22.00.

*Why I Am a Catholic.*

By Garry Wills. Houghton Mifflin,  
390 pp., \$26.00.

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Though William Faulkner did not have the Catholic sexual-abuse crisis in mind when he wrote these words, they do throw light on the conflicting responses to the scandals of the past year. While most commentators agree that there really are two scandals—clerical sexual abuse itself and the subsequent episcopal dereliction—they differ on their diagnoses of both the causes and the appropriate remedies. Some attribute the crisis in part to a centuries-old repressive sexual ethic, while others indict the church’s ambiguous and permissive moral teaching of recent decades. Some hold that numerous bishops have failed because of their complicity in corrupt ecclesial structures, while others believe that these leaders lacked the courage to teach unpopular truths and to govern their own dioceses.

Such divergent responses to the crisis are unintelligible unless one sees them as part of the deeper issue of what might be called American Catholicism’s “culture wars.” Over the past 40 years, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Catholic Church in the U.S. has become increasingly divided over liturgy, theology, catechesis, ministry, sexuality and a host of other issues. If, as priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley argues, such polarization has little affect on the average Catholic, it

does profoundly afflict ministerial, theological and cultural elites within the church. It has become impossible not to pigeonhole leaders and thinkers: Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles is a “progressive”; Cardinal Francis George of Chicago a “traditionalist”; Notre Dame theologian Richard McBrien a “liberal”; *First Things* editor Richard John Neuhaus a “conservative.” The polarization is so deep that when, in 1996, the late Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernardin founded the Catholic Common Ground Initiative as a means of addressing division in the church, he was criticized by some liberal Catholics who thought that the project was not radical enough and by some of his brother cardinals who believed that it jeopardized the essential truths of the faith.

James Carroll, George Weigel and Garry Wills all agree that the sexual-abuse crisis is symptomatic of a deeper cultural war in Catholicism, but they differ—often diametrically—on what is at stake. Carroll, a novelist and former priest who won a National Book Award for his memoir *An American Requiem*, offers the slimmest tome of the three. A lightly edited version of the concluding section of his 2001 book *Constantine’s Sword*, it calls for a Vatican III which will bring about “full democratic reform.” This reform will enable Catholicism to reject anti-Semitism, triumphalist and exclusivist conceptions of Christ and the church, and puritanical notions of sexuality.

Garry Wills, a Pulitzer Prize winner for Lincoln at Gettysburg and the author of *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*, focuses on the charism of the Petrine ministry of church unity and the papacy’s frequent self-aggrandizement throughout the centuries. George Weigel, best known for *Witness to Hope*, his massive and massively successful biography of Pope John Paul II, is the only one of the three whose book specifically responds to the sexual-abuse crisis. He argues that Catholicism needs a renewal of

holiness, and that only the saints formed by such a renewal can reform the priesthood, the episcopate and the entire church through their courageous embrace of the fullness of Catholic truth and tradition.

For each writer, the past is very much present in American Catholicism in the form of three decisive years: the 1965 conclusion of Vatican II; the 1968 release of *Humanae Vitae* Pope Paul VI’s encyclical banning artificial contraception; and the 1978 election of Pope John Paul II.

Vatican II is the decisive event of modern Catholicism. Convoked by Pope John XXIII, the council engaged in a twofold movement of renaissance (a return to the often-neglected sources of the Christian tradition) and *aggiornamento* (an updating of the church’s life and doctrine in response to the times). In both its 16 documents and its overall experience of communion and collegiality, the council effected the first comprehensive reform of Catholicism since the 16th-century Council of Trent. Nearly 40 years after the close of Vatican II, significant differences remain in how the achievements of the council are interpreted and in its reception in the life of the church. How one views the council is therefore a Rorschach test for one’s understanding of the church and its reform.

Devoting several chapters to Vatican II and its aftermath, Wills locates the council’s fundamental achievement in its conception of the church as the “people of God” in which the laity and hierarchy are equal in their baptismal dignity. The council also led to a renewal of the liturgy, an affirmation of religious freedom and the primacy of conscience, a rejection of church-state unions, an openness to the truth of other religions (especially Judaism) and a renewed sense that the church’s teaching authority resides in all of the faithful, not exclusively in the hierarchy.

More broadly, Wills sees the “spir-

it” of Vatican II in the church’s rejection of the “mystique of changelessness” and in its consequent “opening of the windows” to the world; Catholicism must look outward, not inward. The church, according to Pope John’s opening address to the council, ought to serve the world with the “medicine of mercy,” rather than condemn it with the “medicine of severity.”

Carroll largely agrees with Wills on the concrete achievements of the council—especially its affirmation of the equal dignity of the entire people of God and its view of Judaism—but goes still further in interpreting its “spirit.” Above all, the council addressed the gaps in life and thought that had developed between a largely medieval, defensive Catholicism and the modern world. It ended the church’s self-destructive revolt against modernity and declared a truce not simply with the world, but also within itself. Second, the council rejected the “imperial autocracy” that had reached its doctrinal apex in Vatican I’s 1870 definition of papal infallibility and its organizational apex in the “bureaucratized misanthropy” of modern Catholicism. Because Vatican II’s work was incomplete, a Vatican III is needed. But Vatican II nonetheless opened the door for a future affirmation of the radical equality of all people in the church.

If Carroll sees Vatican II as a move toward the “holiness of democracy,” Weigel sees it as proclaiming the “democracy of holiness.” Whereas Carroll and Wills focus on the ecclesial aspects of the council’s labors, Weigel emphasizes its evangelical and anthropological dimensions. Vatican II, in his view, inaugurated a two-way dialogue in which Catholicism not only listened to the world’s hopes and anxieties but also proposed to the world a Christian humanism: the “passionate love of God for all humanity, made visible in . . . Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,” that same Christ who fully and uniquely reveals to humanity its incomparable dignity and high calling. Accordingly, while the council made decisive advances in such areas as liturgy and religious freedom, its primary achievement was renewing the church’s mission to proclaim to all humanity the good news that Christ is the source of true free-

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dom and life. Too many Catholics, mostly liberals but also some conservatives, have failed to grasp this evangelical core, Weigel argues.

If all three writers agree on the decisive importance—if not the meaning—of Vatican II, so too with the events of 1968, a revolutionary, traumatic year for the church and the world. The assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and the sexual revolution seemed to mark the disintegration of Western society.

That year also signaled the end of the Vatican II honeymoon in Catholicism. The theological and ecclesial fault lines that had begun to surface within the conciliar majority toward the end of the council now appeared in full view. Several of the council's most influential and progressive theologians—most prominently Henri de Lubac and Joseph Ratzinger—challenged appeals to the “spirit” of Vatican II that seemed far removed from the documents and the intentions of the council. Much of what passed as conciliar-inspired church reform, they argued, was a betrayal of the church's identity.

More visibly, the release of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* rocked the American church, leading to unprecedented public dissent. In upholding the prohibition against artificial methods of birth control, the encyclical dashed the hopes of many believers for a change in church teaching.

Disappointment was inevitable, but its magnitude was astonishing. Hundreds of Catholic theologians signed a public statement that questioned the teaching. Financial contributions and church attendance dropped precipitously. Wounded by the outcry, Pope Paul never wrote another encyclical. The American church entered into an acrimony that still lingers.

Carroll experienced the conflict both personally and institutionally. Marred by the “ideology of papal absolutism,” *Humanae Vitae* was for him part of Pope Paul's effort to “turn back the tide” of church reform begun by Vatican II. Ordained to the priesthood only a few months after the encyclical's release, Carroll could not in good conscience accept the growing disjunction between the church's official teaching and the lived reality of many Catholics, he states. He resigned the priesthood in 1973 and married soon thereafter.

Wills's comments on *Humanae Vitae* lack Carroll's autobiographical bent but far exceed him in scorn. In *Papal Sin*, Wills described the encyclical as “the most crippling, puzzling blow to organized Catholicism in our time” and the “most disastrous papal document of this century”; the text and its drafting exemplified Catholicism's hierarchical subterfuge and intellectual dishonesty. *Why I Am a Catholic* presents the encyclical as the “great break” between most Catholics and the Vatican, for it opened the way for “qualified and loyal theologians” to dissent from church teaching and emboldened the laity to follow their consciences. No longer would Catholics, “on entering church, have to check our brains at the door” or “suspend our common sense or honesty” when faced with “silly” teaching. If not always able to

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### *Too many Catholics fail to see the evangelical core of Vatican II*

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cite Vatican II's documents “chapter and verse,” these newly empowered faithful nonetheless seek to be faithful to the “spirit of the council” – that “opening of windows” fundamental to *aggiornamento*.

Vatican II indeed opened the windows to the world, Weigel agrees, but just at the moment when modernity “barrel[ed] into a dark tunnel full of poisonous fumes.” The sexual revolution, a suspicion of institutions and authority, and intellectual nihilism combined in a corrosive mix. When coupled with a postconciliar euphoria in which people forgot that Vatican II intended a two-way dialogue between church and world, the result was ecclesial chaos.

This chaos erupted, according to Weigel, with the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. Faced with the public dissent of 19 Washington priests, Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle disciplined them, even removing some from active ministry. They appealed to Rome, and in 1971 the Vatican allowed them to return to ministry without an explicit rejection of their dissent. Pope

Paul VI feared that a crackdown on the priests might lead to schism. While not budging on the truth of the encyclical, he decided to tolerate dissent for the sake of ecclesial unity.

This “Truce of 1968,” as Weigel calls it, affected three groups. Theologians and priests learned that their dissent from magisterial teaching would bring few negative consequences. Bishops learned that their efforts to control dissent would receive little support from Rome. Some bishops even felt free themselves to dissent—however implicitly—from church teaching. Finally, the laity, observing the conduct of these first two groups, began to think that everything was up for grabs.

Often with an appeal to an amorphous “spirit of Vatican II,” priests, bishops and laity alike contributed to a “culture of dissent.” The sexual-abuse crisis—grounded in heterodox sexual morality and unchecked by cowed bishops—began to develop slowly but surely. What Weigel calls “Catholic Lite”—a softening of orthodoxy under the guise of reform—began its ascendancy, and led to the malaise and indecision of the 1970s.

The election of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla to the papacy was a revolution for the church and the world. The first non-Italian pope in 455 years, John Paul II has become a figure of world-historical importance, having played a pivotal role in the fall of communism. Within Catholicism he is universally admired for his personal holiness and his service of the gospel. Among modern popes, he is rivaled only by John XXIII in terms of popular affection.

Yet Catholic elites are deeply divided over his still-unfinished legacy. Some see in him courage in the face of a corrupt, brutal modernity; others see intransigence and incomprehension. Some see a crabbed sexual moralist; others see a herald of true sexual fulfillment. Some find authoritative leadership; others find authoritarianism. At the root of these stark differences is a central question: Does John Paul's pontificate represent renewal or restoration? That is, is it the flowering of Vatican II's hopeful vision or a return to the defensive triumphalism of the preconciliar era? Weigel does not hesitate to state that the present pope may someday be known as “John Paul the Great,” particularly for his unstinting defense of human digni-

ty in the face of political and cultural barbarisms. He emphasizes that the heart of John Paul's pontificate is his evangelism and Christian humanism. More a poet and preacher than a bureaucrat, John Paul has, in Weigel's words, one central theme: in Christ, “you are greater than you imagine, and greater than the late modern world has let you imagine.” Far from trying to repeal Vatican II, as many of his critics hold, John Paul has instead affirmed the council's key insights into Christ and humanity.

Carroll and Wills acknowledge John Paul's intellectual, spiritual and social gifts; “charismatic,” he is full of “charm” and “energy.” They also note his courageous support for the Solidarity movement in communist Poland, and Carroll makes special mention of his rapprochement with Judaism. But such praise seems grudging, even backhanded, in light of their severe criticism. Calling John Paul a “reactionary,” Carroll condemns what he sees as the pope's program of “medieval restoration” and its attempted repeal of Vatican

Wills offers a lengthier indictment. John Paul is apocalyptic, obsessed with martyrdom and with the Virgin Mary, and, worst of all, self-important: “The pope himself seems to think the whole church depends on him – on his being saved by the Virgin of Fatima, on his living into the new millennium, on his visiting every Marian shrine, on his Stakhanovite canonizing, on his redefinitions of every truth, on his creating a like-minded episcopate. . . . This one-man rescue operation is a staggering assignment,” he writes. If Wills is critical of John Paul, he is contemptuous of Cardinal Ratzinger, John Paul's chief aide and head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Wills charges Ratzinger with reversing Vatican II's teachings (and his own earlier writings) on episcopal collegiality, the church as the “people of God,” the liturgy, intellectual freedom and ecumenism. Together John Paul and Ratzinger have mounted a “coup” to repeal virtually all of the major advances of the council. This coup has failed, Wills writes, for the Catholic people have rejected it. They have instead shown their love for John Paul by not abandoning him in his errant ways; they support him precisely through their loyal opposition and

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# Catholics

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their faithfulness to Vatican II. Neither “monstrous” nor “misguided,” John Paul has been a “well-meaning” failure.

If this is Catholicism’s recent past, then what of its present and future? What is one to make of Carroll’s, Weigel’s and Wills’s calls for church reform? How well do they address problems raised by the sexual-abuse crisis, as well as by the polarization of the Catholic culture wars?

Carroll’s call for Vatican III is thoroughly flawed. The reformed Catholicism he envisions has little connection to the church and to the conception of Christ as they have existed across the centuries. His opening chapter “What Is to Be Done?”—the only substantively new part of his book—ranges from religious fundamentalism to Middle Eastern politics to the sexual-abuse crisis, yet it mentions Jesus Christ only once. Here and throughout the book Carroll gives us neither the Christ of scripture and the creeds nor the church that fostered them.

Carroll’s vision of church reform, then, lacks a Christic center. His effort to address the Jewish-Christian division, for instance, reduces the split to a tragic historical misunderstanding and blurs the theological differences between the two faiths. In the same vein, his desire to affirm the value of religious pluralism is based on an agnosticism about divine revelation, and leads to an evisceration of belief in Christ’s unique salvific role, especially in relation to the cross: “It is impossible to reconcile this Christology, these cosmic claims for the accomplishment of Jesus Christ as the one source of salvation, with authentic respect for Judaism and every other spiritual neighbor,” he writes.

Carroll’s preference for Jesus as Revealer rather than as Savior turns Jesus into a mere moral exemplar—the same fatal move liberal Protestantism made at the turn of the 20th century. Toward a New Catholic Church is a dying gasp from a branch of liberal Catholicism that has never really left the 1960s and that grows grayer by the year. It is, in Weigel’s phrase, “Catholicism Lite,” and the reform it promises leads to dissolution, not to the fruition of Vatican II.

Wills’s work is more intelligent and substantial than Carroll’s, and he writes from a deep faith; he notes, not without pride, that he prays the Rosary daily and recites the Lord’s Prayer in Greek. His chapter on the apostle Peter’s importance for early Christianity is an incisive, eloquent defense of Catholicism’s inclusivity against the exclusivity of Gnosticism and other heresies. He also makes, at the end of his lengthy account of the papacy’s failings, an appealing, if brief, case for reform within—not apart from—the church: “I prefer the company of Ignatius of Loyola to that of Luther, or Charles Borromeo to Calvin, Philip Neri to Melancthon,” he writes. Wills’s argument is nonetheless marred by serious errors of fact and interpretation. Boston College theologian Francis Sullivan, for one, has exposed Wills’s manipulative, dishonest summary of Cardinal Ratzinger’s views on ecumenism and interreligious relations. It is a cruel irony that an author so self-consciously devoted to truth-telling in the church is sometimes himself so free with the truth. Moreover, how can Wills’s unrelenting critique nourish those—especially the young—who haven’t yet eaten the solid food of trust and generosity (as he himself fruitfully did in his youth)? His concluding handful of pages on the positive achievements of the papacy may well seem hollow after having previously sited hundreds of shortcomings.

In *True and False Reform in the Church* (a seminal 1950 work disappointingly never mentioned in any of the books under review), the Catholic theologian Yves Congar argued that the first condition for genuine church reform was charity—*caritas*, that selfless, unsentimental love that wills only the good of the other. Wills often makes little effort to understand the legitimate—even if misguided or wrong-headed—concerns of his opponents, preferring to ascribe to them the worst of motives. Such utter lack of charity for those with whom he disagrees—especially Ratzinger—cannot build up the church he professes to love.

## WEIGEL, FOR HIS PART

Weigel, for his part, makes a valid—if unnuanced—point about the failure of the Catholic “Lite Brigade” to reproduce itself in subsequent generations. Even if younger Catholics are far from unanimous in their support

of Weigel’s positions, they nonetheless are not consumed by the theological and ecclesial power-struggles that have afflicted the American church for the past 40 years.

Weigel fails, though, to prove his central thesis: that there is a link between the “Truce of 1968” and the clerical sexual-abuse crisis. One can admit that a “culture of dissent”—or a “school of resentment,” as it has also been described—does exist, and that the “adventure of orthodoxy” is needed always. However, he refuses even to acknowledge that the widespread rejection of *Humanae Vitae*’s teaching on artificial contraception—the supposed origin of the “culture of dissent”—may have been grounded in something other than systematic dissent or cultural dissolution. By failing to admit that many of those who rejected such teaching did so with integrity, he reduces a complex situation to a simplistic calculus of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Furthermore, the two most notorious pedophiles, Boston priests John Geoghan and Paul Shanley, trained at the same pre-Vatican II seminary and began their abuse before 1968, and many of the bishops at the center of the scandals—Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston and Cardinal Edward Egan of New York come to mind—are not known for doctrinal or disciplinary laxity. Cardinal Law, in fact, first proposed the creation of 1992’s Catechism of the Catholic Church. At the eye of the storm, then, no “culture of dissent” exists, and Weigel’s claims on that score are tendentious at best.

The present crisis in American Catholicism, I judge, is less one of dissent or duplicity than of distance. Notre Dame theologian John Cavadi- ni has written that the only way to explain many bishops’ inattention to the victims of sexual abuse and to their families, short of ascribing active malice, is by understanding the distance fostered by clericalism. Such distance, he contends, means the church has “no sense that these are our children,” but rather sees them as “your children, those of the laity, whose duty is to listen and submit.” Bishops failed, then, not primarily by acquiescing to sexual perversity but by privileging their institutions and reputations over their people. This failure to communicate, to sympathize with another’s plight, to assume the good intentions of their people

and treat them as equals, is precisely the problem of polarization.

Thus, while Weigel rightly stresses holiness as the key to ecclesial and episcopal renewal (a point made half a century earlier by Congar), his conception of holiness may exacerbate that polarization. All genuine reform must be grounded in reconversion to Christ, and Weigel’s call to deeper holiness is passionate, and has nothing of the saccharine or the sentimental. He offers a heroic vision of the Christian life that is much needed in a time of despair and mediocrity. This heroic holiness, though, is also largely invulnerable. Although Weigel justly criticizes the abuses committed under the distorted influence of Henri Nouwen’s “wounded healer” model of ministry—and offers qualified support for the model itself—he nonetheless leaves little room for the vulnerable leadership needed at this time.

A fuller conception of holiness than Weigel’s is needed—one that integrates heroism and vulnerability in Christian life and ministry. The English Dominican exegete Timothy Radcliffe has written that whereas Old Testament understandings of holiness stress ritual purity and separation, the Epistle to the Hebrews reveals Christ as the high priest and mediator who is holy precisely in embracing fully the brokenness and sinfulness of humanity. He reaches out to those marginalized, dispirited, angry, stigmatized. He reconciles through the blood of his cross and of the Eucharist. In this sense, the Catholic church needs leaders—clerical and lay—who have the courage to be not only countercultural but also woundable (the meaning of vulnerable).

Cardinal Law, for one, appeared—publicly, at least—to be aloof from the complaints and warnings of victim-survivors and their intimates, as well as from the concerns of laity and clergy in his archdiocese. Leadership, in a Christian sense, is decisive and authoritative only to the degree that it hears and bears the pain of the people and refuses to hide behind church and civil law. In a word, it must reflect the holiness of Christ.

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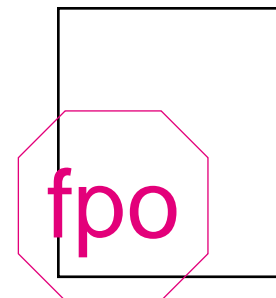
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