

REFLECTIONS ON THE ABUSE CRISIS
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Dozens of Catholic agencies and organizations must wrestle, once again, with a new round of sexual abuse revelations by some members of the clergy and some bishops who, rather than putting victims first, sought to cover up the crimes of deeply troubled priests, reassigned them and created a mounting number of innocent victims, each precious and loved in God's eyes.

For these organizations, Catholic Climate Covenant among them, our reliance on the moral authority of the bishops to carry out our work has taken a significant hit. We all wonder what this will mean, especially as we appeal to our supporters to help us continue vital, life-saving work. We rely on parishioners and students, pastors and principals, administrators and the bishops themselves to lift up and support our efforts. From settling refugees to providing food, clothing and shelter; and from advocating against the death penalty and for prison reform, to caring for God's good gift of our Common Home: each of these organizations has been rocked by this latest round of revelations.

Against this dreadful backdrop, I offer some reflections here in the hope that those who believe in the mission of these organizations, including Catholic Climate Covenant, will see beyond these latest revelations and remain committed to the missions they support. This work is life-affirming and life-saving.

The Victims

First and foremost, we must remember the victims. Remember those whose lives were damaged by their abusers. Too many have ended their lives to escape the mental and physical torment they endured. Others suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other serious and debilitating challenges not of their own making. We must pray unceasingly for their healing and walk with them on their journey to wholeness whenever possible and appropriate.

We must also remember that the men who perpetrated these crimes are also in need of our prayers. This is difficult, to be sure, but their actions did not arise out of a vacuum. They, too, are wounded and sick (victims of mental illness, perhaps from abusive families, or ill-formed during their process of becoming priests) or they would not have even considered perpetrating such unspeakable abuse suffered by innocent victims.

Finally, we should also accompany the many good men who, simply because they wear a Roman collar, are caught up in the sins of their brother priests. They deserve our love and support.

The Church is More Than Bishops

Second, we must remember that the Church is more than the sum of its parts and more than the actions of its all-too-human members. Let us recall that:

- Women religious communities have formed the backbone of Catholic healthcare, education and ministry to the lost and forgotten in the U.S. from the country's earliest days. Those institutions and the saints they produced continue today.
- One in six U.S. hospital patients is in a Catholic hospital bed.
- There are over 6,500 Catholic elementary and secondary schools and nearly 250 colleges and universities shaping millions of students and the future of our nation and our world.
- Together, diocesan Catholic Charities agencies form the largest direct service network in the country.
- Catholic Relief Services serves in 100 countries providing disaster relief, helping to settle migrants and refugees, and providing concrete tools for economic development in the poorest corners of the globe.
- Parishes are centers of compassion in many of the poorest places in the country offering food, rent money, furniture, and spiritual comfort to the lost, lonely and forgotten.

The Church is Also the Laity

Thirdly, let the laity remember that we, too, have a role to play in the transformation of our society. We must take Sunday's nourishment of the Eucharist and the fellowship of our parish community to the world on Monday—and every other day of the week. It is not enough to simply be formed in community; it is a demand of our faith to witness Christ's love for us and for the world to our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

The role of the laity is clearly spelled out in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Second Vatican Council. These words are both a challenge to us today and a possible framework as the Church, locally and globally, discerns how best to rein in the clericalism that seems to be a key factor of our current predicament:

- 1) *The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it. Sacred Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was at the very beginning of the Church...Our own times require of the laity no less zeal: in fact, modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified...*
- 2) *In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. [Emphasis added]*

Our Church is the Body of Christ. It must include and empower the gifts of the laity as well as those of the bishops, priests, and religious brothers and sisters. Through our baptism, we are each anointed as *priest, prophet and ruler* and should act like it. At the same time, we must

recognize that there is a life-long discipline of spiritual practice and a spiritual depth we must undergo to be any good at these roles.

Moving forward, I pray that each of you will continue to not only hold priests and bishops accountable for their specific roles as pastors, teachers and leaders, but to take up the challenge of evangelization and become witnesses of Christ's love to the places where you have the most influence. There is much to be done and our roles as co-creators with God is a demand of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Finally, I leave you with a prayer from the Jesuit philosopher, paleontologist and geologist, Teilhard de Chardin:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way
to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through

some stages of instability—

and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;

your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,

let them shape themselves,

without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances

acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit

gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.