

Catholic Church Under Fire – A Response

A recent Letter to the Editor in the West Island Chronicle struck me as typical of the kind of discourse we find in the media today – at the pen tips of some journalists or those of disgruntled, disappointed, or confused members of the Church or of citizens at large. This particular letter seemed to me to be a caricature of misinformation. This is not an attempt to interpret the intentions of the author, nor the author's dispositions towards the Church, but simply a response to the printed words and to numerous other letters and voices which this letter in a way represents.

The only way to respond in truth to such a document or argument is to take it one point at a time; since several points have been raised. As a whole, the issues have not been clearly stated, nor apparently researched very well. The conclusions are erroneous, or the facts are inaccurate, or the impressions are misleading. With members writing like this in public about their own Church, we have no further need of enemies – we can just stand by and watch our destruction at our own hands. In this document, I don't see much honor for the Lord's name, or much reverence for the Church, or respect for the human beings that make up the Church in their various roles, or understanding of how God's truth and mercy come down to meet us in our wretched, sinful, human condition. For each of the following points mentioned in the letter, I would ask the author the following questions.

- 1. What is your source for this information – direct? – The original document, accurate accounts of the original event or words, an eye witness account, etc. Or is your source indirect – second or third hand, anecdotal, hearsay, fragmentary, merely opinion, some conjecture, or other unreliable material?*
- 2. Who or what is the guarantor of the validity of this source and the data you have obtained from it?*
- 3. Is your statement fact, or a conclusion you are drawing? Is your conclusion a logical and true consequence of the actual situation?*
- 4. On what authority do you rest your questions, accusations, or insinuations?*

In order to convey to the author something of the impact the letter had on me, I will adopt a similar attitude and tone in my personal observations, remarks, queries, and conclusions as are found in the letter. At the very end, I will resume my normal posture in a pastoral response.

- 1. “In the 40s, Catholics were led to believe that we were the chosen people – it was commonly taught that Catholics died and went to Heaven, Protestants went to Purgatory and the Jews were in deep trouble under the Nazi regime.”*

I will not dispute your claim inasmuch as you meant to say, “It has been my personal experience in the 40s that a few/some/all of my teachers – who were nuns and/or lay people and/or priests and/or brothers – taught or declared that....” This statement is a gross generalization. How can you speak for the entire Catholic Church throughout the world in some 150+ countries at the time? How can you make such a statement, designed to expose the Church's teaching authority as incompetent or even maliciously conspiring to mislead, and not put it in the actual historical context of how the world was at the time?

Have you forgotten, or do you simply ignore the fact, that the world at the time – in the West, in the Orient, in Oceania, in Africa, and in the Americas, was a closed society? There was in all these populations much credence given to the observance of law and the respect of lawful authority – that's

why so many German people found it difficult to dissent against the Nazi regime once it was in power as the legitimately elected government. In that closed society, most if not all Christian denominations, as well as religious leaders of the Jewish faith, and those of other great religions, all taught that their religious tradition was the way to salvation and that ALL THOSE FOLLOWING ANY OTHER WAY were in danger of damnation, if not already damned. So don't think for a moment that the Catholic Church stood out. To declare such a thing is to manifest gross ignorance of recent historical reality, for which there is ample record.

- 2. "In those days, children born out of wedlock were put in the care of the Church in Catholic orphanages. Sadly, as exposed by the news media in later years, many of these children were sexually abused by the clergy and became known as the Duplessis orphans. At the recent World Youth Conference in Toronto, the Duplessis orphans requested an audience with the Pope in the hope that they would obtain an apology for these despicable acts. This was denied and to this day they are seeking financial compensation from the Catholic Church for wrongs done to them which have scarred them for life."*

Before blasting the entire social institution network of the Church in the past, it would be a bit more just to acknowledge at least in passing that, at the time, there were no public sector institutions started or funded by government or any other such body. From the time of the colony, the only social service agencies were private in origin, usually sponsored or supported by one of the mainline churches, generally funded by wealthy benefactors as well as by the general population through fundraising campaigns in the 20th century and, before that, by donations made by the governing bodies or leaders of both churches and businesses.

World War I and World War II caused social and moral upheaval when they put so many of our young people suddenly before the real possibility of dying within days, weeks or months. Sexual activity was not yet seen as a recreational activity, which we owe to Hugh Hefner and company since the 1960s. Still, the high emotions stimulated by the war machine and the lack of chaperone sorts of supervision youth had been accustomed to having were complementary factors causing in them a moral crisis, which revealed that they lacked the personal discipline needed to refrain from sexual activity. Their ignorance of their own fertility and its mechanisms further reduced their motivation to be cautious and chaste, and combined with the sexual revolution fueled by the dramatic arts since the turn of the 1900s, this put these young people under considerable pressure to explore and exploit opportunities for intimate relations with members of the opposite sex.

Most families finding themselves with an unexpected child outside of marriage found ways to keep the pregnancy secret and then took in the babies that resulted and cared for the single mothers. Other families, unable or unwilling to face the shame associated with having a family member contravening the very strong social taboos against having sexual relations outside of marriage, took the only other option available to them: they sent the baby away to the local orphanage. Until then, these institutions took in true orphans – children of parents killed by accident, fire, or disease, such as the Influenza Epidemic of 1919-1920. They were ill equipped to handle the sudden demand made on them, and there was nowhere else to put these unwanted children. At least the society of the time still had conscience enough to consider killing these infants unacceptable – it was not an option.

So, what was the Church – in its various institutions – really responsible for? Today, Church leaders acknowledge that these institutions were part of a society that "rescued" people from the natural consequences of their own behavior. The staff workers were part of a society and culture that

generally viewed discipline and corporal punishment as the normal way to rear and form children towards adulthood. What would have been merely firm or even harsh punishment at the time, we in our sophisticated arrogance can now choose to look back and call cruel or even unjust. We can and do pass judgment on the past based on moral and scientific standards with which we have now become familiar over the past 40 or 50 years, but which simply did not exist, or not in the same degree, at the time. If we were to use the same judgment on ourselves, I honestly think that none of us would do very well, nor would our own parents and grandparents.

As for the “Duplessis Orphans”, your statements are grossly inaccurate and seem to be a composite of other cases that have been reported in the media over the past 20 years. I will admit that I have not personally researched this case, but I believe my anecdotal sources of information may be closer to the action than yours, and can say that very few – if any – of these people reported sexual abuse at the hands of clergy. The vast majority – if not all – of them reported the abuse of being classified as mentally retarded, when in actual fact they were simply not wanted and were given up for emergency care until such time as they might be adopted or old enough to leave and live on their own. This would undoubtedly have been the wish of the single parents giving them up.

Due to their classification as mentally retarded, they were never adopted, and in some cases, their status was not reviewed; so that they ended up becoming institutionalized into as late as their 50s. There is no denying that this was a great injustice. However, this harm was not done intentionally or maliciously. It was the result of a very imperfect institution in a very imperfect society. In its haste to nationalize social institutions, the government of the “Quiet Revolution” did not always accomplish a neat and competent takeover of both the institution and the people in its care. The kind of expertise, which is now standard practice in these institutions, was only developed in the 70s and 80s; so we cannot fault staff workers in the 40s for not employing them.

Moreover, the original motive of the directors of the institutions in labeling the infants mentally retarded was that this was the only way their statutes would allow them to take in the infants, in the case of orphanages or chronic care facilities mandated to take in only the mentally retarded. In this process, the provincial government was a fully aware and willing participant. These, to the best of my information, are the facts.

Given the nature of the legal profession as it is currently practiced, it is understandable for Church authorities to refuse to make any public statements that could then be used by the lawyers of the plaintiffs as proof of guilt. Lawyers can be quite aggressive in attempting to make use of any and all opportunities to incriminate those against whom they are making claims; so as to use every refusal to cooperate and interpret it as guilt. In actual fact, it would have been unconscionable for Pope John Paul II to allow himself to be used by such parties with self-serving interests to sidetrack his single purpose in coming to Canada: to meet with the youth of the world in Jesus’ Name, and to draw them to meet each other and share their faith.

It is unfortunate that we must be tormented by hordes of fuzzy-thinking but well-meaning citizens who have little sense of proper boundaries, of thorough investigation before drawing hasty conclusions, or of respect for the integrity of the people involved – until proven otherwise – and are most eager to be tools in the hands of those who shamelessly exploit such situations for their own benefit. Legal actions today often bear no sense of just proportion – not only for the wrong suffered – but also for the net value of the institution which may have served the population well in 99% of its staff. Interested parties will not hesitate to drive to bankruptcy any institution – no matter how much it

may have contributed to our society for generations, even centuries – in order to achieve maximum gain for the plaintiffs.

It is so easy to throw rocks at the Catholic Church. Because of its long history and enormous quantity of members and leaders, it is so easy to find incidents of human frailty and wrongdoing. I am personally shocked to see how many people are far from St. Paul's words he addressed to the Corinthians when he wrote, "Love withstands anger and forgets offenses. It does not take delight in wrong, but rejoices with the truth. Love excuses everything, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." I understand and forgive any who act, write, or speak out of ignorance, but too often, I detect malicious delight in some who exploit the media to attack the Church without true and accurate information.

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that there are those who, having a legitimate claim, may themselves or at the prompting of their legal counsel, amplify their claims in order to get all of the attention they desire, to intimidate, or to foresee the possibility of giving some ground later in order to come to a desirable monetary settlement. If some consider it fair to attack the Church on all fronts, it's only fair to suggest that members of the legal profession are not exempt from possible temptation at times to act from motives of pecuniary gain more than from the pure motive of a desire to establish truth and justice.

- 3. "After having spoken to many Catholic and Protestants, the general consensus is that these members of the clergy should be held accountable for their actions and not shelter under the protection of the Catholic Church."*

I am delighted to be able to agree with you that among all Christians – indeed among people professing the major faiths and practicing the major religions – there actually is some consensus on the rightness and need of society to have all perpetrators of various kinds of abuse to take responsibility for their action and do whatever is appropriate in the way of apology and restitution, where that is possible. There is even some consensus that justice is not complete until the perpetrators of abuse actually come to understand and regret the harm they have done and beyond that come to some degree of genuine reform, without diminishing their responsibility to endure the proper and appropriate punishment.

However, I object to your insinuation that the Catholic Church is an irresponsible safe haven for abusers and criminals. Again, you manifest a gross ignorance of history. Back in the days of the closed society with very strong taboos and sanctions for the punishment of any infractions against the common moral values, it was considered irresponsible to allow cases of misbehavior to get out into the public domain, for fear that exposure of the young and innocent to these realities might excite those susceptible to have insufficient restraint against temptation to actually seek out and commit such misbehavior themselves. This is not an unfounded fear. We sadly witness in our own day that the proliferation of images seems undeniably a factor in the multiplication of moral misbehavior and crimes. The more others are seen to do it, the more any restraints against joining in seem to erode. This factor exacerbates the already weakened state of moral discipline in the family, which seems increasingly under siege in a society where too many adults cling to their adolescent "freedoms" and tend to neglect the diligence needed to properly rear their children.

It turns out then that the prime motive in keeping abuse hidden was the common good, and not fear of retribution or of loss of honor or position on the part of people in authority; although – human nature being what it is – it is reasonable to think that such fear was also a factor in such cases. Again,

we can – from the arrogance of our current sophistication – draw unreasonably harsh conclusions and make unfair and anachronistic judgments against those keeping such policies.

4. “It is a certainty that were they the ordinary man in the street, legal action would have been taken against them long ago.”

Once again, such a statement seems steeped in ignorance of the historical record. It is an established fact that the vast majority of cases of abuse take place, proportionately, in the major “pool of the population” – i.e. in the family, and at the hands of familiar and even the closest relatives: fathers, uncles, stepfathers, mothers’ boyfriends, and – less frequently – at the hands of the women in similar relationships. The truth, then, is that the ordinary man in the street has been and continues to be more likely to get away with acts of abuse. These may surface in the course of therapy later on in the life of the child now grown to adulthood, but very rarely will such adults publicly accuse and sue their abusers.

People recognized as workers of the Church are more likely to be sued because the institution is seen as rich, which is itself a misconception. Consider, for example, what would be the worth in dollars of the combined property of everyone in your office, or extended family. After all, is not any church the collective property of hundreds of families, and is not the property of Church institutions at “the top” – at the level of bishops and the pope – simply the property of a broad base of people. The truth is that there is lots of property value, but little real cash. Moreover, the Church is not known for paying high salaries. Just about any business is richer.

It is also recognized by many that one good side effect of the breaking of cases of abuse into the light of public attention is that this has helped shatter some of the taboos commonly held by the entire population and, in effect, given everyone permission to talk about it and report it. Reporting, however, is not always without other abuses: outright lying and false accusation, the errors of inaccurate recall, the difficulty of establishing the truth with an adult reporting an incident that occurred in childhood – a time of life when it is particularly difficult to separate elements of truth from embellishments originating in the imagination. It is simply unjust and immoral to take at their word anyone who comes forward with accusations, without obtaining corroborating evidence.

5. “This scandal has undermined confidence in the Catholic Church. Is it not time to hold the church accountable for the actions of their clergy?”

This is a very telling question, and it very nicely illustrates a point made above about the pointedness and tone of these statements, as being the kind of material one would expect from an enemy. Please note your use of “their clergy” and not “our clergy”. The author here obviously dissociates the self from the Church. The Church is they, not us. This is an echo of Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the older brother – in speaking to their father – refers to his younger sibling as “this son of yours”, thereby renouncing his relationship with his own brother. If everyone adopted this perspective, there would no longer be a church at all? Does anyone not remember that Jesus went about willing to accept any who would come and follow Him, be associated with Him, and run the risk of suffering the same trouble and accusations He would himself suffer? To quote an American saying, “If you’re not a part of the solution; then you are a part of the problem.”

This brings us to the truth that it is not really such scandals that undermine the public confidence in the Church. First of all, any believer considering oneself a member of the Church and part of the people Jesus continues to bring together for his kind purposes in the unfolding of his

Father's plan for the salvation of every human person, weeps at the news of each new case of reported abuse. If it is true, then it is a shame and a scandal; the victims must be helped, and the perpetrators brought to justice, and if possible, to conversion and reform – notwithstanding the need for them to suffer the appropriate punishment. If it is a false accusation, then it is still a shame and a scandal; only this time, the victim is the one being accused, the Church herself, and the good reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ himself and the value of the work He is himself trying to do in and through his Church. Either way, there is no cause for rejoicing.

The issue of confidence in the Church is not an issue for a true believer, who will only weep and then roll up the sleeves in order to help in any way possible. Confidence is rather an issue for the outsider, the unbeliever, the agnostic, the atheist, the inactive Catholic, or the member who has personal issues with anyone in authority, the one who is most irritated with the doctrine of papal infallibility because of a personal need to pontificate and establish the supremacy of their own opinions, or the one who is in the throes of anger arising from having suffered abuse or from having been disappointed in personally held expectations of "the Church".

Is it not our common challenge in life to one day pass on to the next stage of maturation, to come of age, to reach adulthood, by making the conscious choice to leave the sidelines and the security of the "critic's corner" to join the parade (as Fr. John Walsh once wrote in his book The Church On Parade.)? That's what Jesus did, and He calls all who would be disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him. Well, we all know where He ended up, and remember that He said, "The servant is not greater than the master, so if they have treated me like this, do not expect better treatment."

6. *"Is it not time to look at allowing priests to marry, which would doubtless reduce the incidence of sexual abuse?"*

For my response to this statement, which once again is steeped in ignorance of the facts as they are, I will quote from an article entitled "10 Myths about Priestly Pedophilia" taken from Crisis Magazine, with a reference to the internet at the following address:

http://www.catholic.net/hot_topics/template_channel.phtml?channel_id=8

This hyperlink may not work, and you may have to type in the home page on your browser.

7. *"The celibate state of priests leads to pedophilia.*

*Celibacy bears no causal relation to any type of deviant sexual addiction including pedophilia. In fact, married men are just as likely as celibate priests to sexually abuse children (Jenkins, Priests and Pedophilia). In the general population, the majority of abusers are regressed heterosexual men who sexually abuse girls. Women are also found to be among those sexual abusers. While it's difficult to obtain accurate statistics on childhood sexual abuse, the characteristic patterns of repeat child sex offenders have been well described. The profiles of child molesters never include normal adults who become erotically attracted to children as a result of abstinence (Fred Berlin, "Compulsive Sexual Behaviors" in *Addiction and Compulsion Behaviors* [Boston: NCBC, 1998]; Patrick J. Carnes, "Sexual Compulsion: Challenge for Church Leaders" in *Addiction and Compulsion*; Dale O'Leary, "Homosexuality and Abuse").*

8. *Married clergy would make pedophilia and other forms of sexual misconduct go away.*

Some people -- including a few vocal dissenting Catholics -- are exploiting this crisis to draw attention to their own agendas. Some are demanding a married Catholic clergy in response to the scandal, as if marriage would make men stop hurting children. This flies in the face of the aforementioned statistic that married men are just as likely to abuse children as celibate priests (Jenkins, *Pedophilia and Priests*).

Since neither being Catholic nor being celibate predisposes a person to develop pedophilia, a married clergy wouldn't solve the problem ("Doctors call for pedophilia research," *The Hartford Curreant*, March 23). One has only to look at similar crises in other denominations and professions to see this. The plain fact is, healthy heterosexual men have never been known to develop erotic attractions to children as a result of abstinence."

9. "How can the Church stay quiet on the recent law passed allowing same sex marriages when it goes against all their teachings?"

In actual fact, as usual, "the Church" is not at all quiet, but it is also evident that "the Church" does not have the favor of the media – except when it suits them and they think there is general interest in what the Church may have to say, and this is true worldwide. July 19th, 2002, the CCCB's President published a letter in which he "Asks the Federal Minister of Justice to Protect the Institution of Marriage." You can find this document on the website of the Canadian Bishops Conference: http://www.cccb.ca/english/default_e.htm

I understand that the public usually relies on the media as the only source of information, but I remain saddened that those who consider themselves members of "the Church" do not seem to bother to avail themselves of accurate information from the various sources open to them. The CCCB website also has links to the Vatican, to the American Bishops Conference, and other sites. Even someone without access to a computer could phone or write the CCCB or obtain direct information through a friend. Our own parish church maintains a website with active links to many sources of information put out by "the Church", which is definitely not silent, except where the media silence her by drowning her out with other voices and opinions – usually biased against her.

10. "Attendance at Catholic churches is on the decline, as is confidence in their guidance. There is an acute shortage of priests and nuns entering the Church. It is time for the Church and their leaders to wake up, face facts and take the action required to punish the guilty, allay the cloud of suspicion which falls over all innocent clergy and restore the faith of parishioners throughout North America in the Catholic Church."

Attendance is down where? In your parish church? Many of the parishes I talk to report their attendance rising due to the participation of parents with their children in the Faith First catechetical program. So much of such impressions are just that, subjective, emotive impressions. In order to counter such irrationality in the course of planning meetings with parishioners, I have for years made accurate guesstimates of attendance at every Liturgy, and much of the time I can show people how wrong their "impressions" are. "How come there were so few people at Mass this Sunday?" I pull out the stats, and more often than not, there were actually more people than the previous week referred to. Go figure.

I won't deny that attendance declines in some places at times, because that is also a normal cycle of life in any church. Don't forget to factor in the 5 to 15 % mobility rate in most parishes, which includes the constant drain on our population to other provinces and countries; as people follow their

work. However, I do object to using the simple fact of periodic church decline as a trophy to render more legitimacy to the claims, misinformation, and accusations in this letter.

In light of the frame of reference of the author of this letter, how can we honestly interpret this declaration that there is a decline in confidence in “their guidance”, which I presume is meant to point the finger at the clergy once again, and the bishops? As I wrote above, confidence is not an issue for a believer and active disciple, but it is an issue for those hugging the sidelines, throwing stones from the comfort of their self-justifying and self-serving positions of superiority or wounded expectations. I remember another word of Jesus, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. And they all went away, beginning with the eldest.” For anyone who knows a priest really and truly, there is generally no problem with confidence in their guidance, notwithstanding the fact that in our scientific and technological sophistication and arrogance, we as the earth’s current generations have become almost entirely unteachable! Nor are we willing to forgive or excuse, which only love can do. All too often we have become so loveless! It is sad. Jesus himself said, “When the Son of Man comes again, will He find faith on earth?”

On the other hand, for those who have been once hurt or disappointed by a priest and who – even 60 years later are still stirring the pot and cultivating the poison of unforgiveness in their heart – no trust and confidence in guidance is possible, because there’s no intention of following anyone’s guidance. How can faith possibly survive in a heart filled with such bitter poison of judgment, bitter thoughts, and malice? How can a soul ever again receive God’s mercy if it is unwilling to give it?

As for the “acute shortage of priests and nuns entering the Church”, I would submit that those responding to these vocations are not entering the Church – they are already in it – but they are accepting to respond to Jesus’ call to leave everything and follow Him. What about you and all the faithful – are you in the Church? And if you aren’t yet IN the Church, what’s holding you back from entering the Church? You want the bishops and clergy to wake up – well, when will YOU wake up to your responsibility as a faithful follower of Christ? When will you begin to encourage youth – beginning with your own children – to sincerely listen for the voice of the Lord in their heart? When will you get off your duff and get fully informed about the historical record of our society and of our Church and come to her defense, that of our faith, and that of the Lord’s work? How will you make a daily or weekly contribution to our current culture’s disinterest in the voice of the Church and to the selective reporting of the media, so that “the Church” gets a regular and fair hearing for all issues of public interest, and in this way do your part to “restore the faith of parishioners throughout North America in the Catholic Church?”

11. “I believe that the Catholic Church in North America has struck an iceberg and is taking on water, and if it does not clean up the sexual abusers and those involved in any way, and also change some of its outdated rules, it will end up like the Titanic.”

At least the iceberg struck by the Titanic was an innocent and unconscious bystander, just floating along in obedience to natural laws of physics. The same cannot be said of the factors that are currently damaging the ship of Mother Church. Her own children have turned on her, like some wild beasts that devour their own parents when these momentarily become weak or are wounded and shedding some blood. The kind of attitude towards “the Church”, towards the victims of abuse and the perpetrators of abuse, towards those who unwittingly collaborated in inaction after abuse simply because no one knew better at the time – this entire attitude set is far removed from the attitude set mentored by Jesus, the “Good Shepherd”. The contemporary “horde smelling the Church’s blood”

would have prosecuted or executed the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, because his demand for an early share in his father's patrimony was tantamount to a death wish directed at the old man: "I can't wait for you to die off so I can inherit; so drop dead and give it to me now!" How can "the Church" inspire the confidence of those not baptized, when the baptized behave like this?

What the author calls "outdated rules" are "the Church's" best attempts to understand, to reformulate, and to apply in our own time what Jesus taught and demonstrated in his. This is all that "the Church" has ever tried to do in every generation since then. To join the voices of the "horde that stood at Jesus' cross on Calvary, taunting Him" and demanding "the Church" to get "with the times" is the very same voice that despised Jesus for convicting them of dishonest motives in the external practice of religion, all the while refusing to be changed in the heart, mind, and soul by the truth revealed by God for our governance, which form the core of both faith and religion.

OVERALL PERSONAL RESPONSE

Here now is my personal response to the letter as a whole. In a way, I appreciate the letter for giving me the opportunity to respond. On the other hand, I feel as though I've been mugged and robbed of over eight hours of precious time I could and should have spent attending to other duties and people with a greater need. However, as I write these words, I realize that if the "faithful" and the citizen have the right to gripe and expansively make use of their freedom to do so, then by the same token, so do I. For nineteen years of service as a priest, I have charitably and patiently stood by and watched uncounted people claiming to be well meaning and to care about the Church and God's affairs and then go ahead and tear it down. I for one am quite fed up with it.

For most of the life of the Church, the faithful did not have to be told that it was their duty to come to the defense of the Church and the faith, because they sensed it, they just knew it, and defend the Church and the faith they did. It could be known that they loved God precisely by their active defense of the faith and the Church – even at great risk to themselves – going as far as laying down their lives. That was gratitude for the great gift of salvation offered them and us in Jesus. That was awareness that it is precisely because of our sin and failing to measure up that we can see the great magnitude of God's love and mercy revealed and offered to us in Jesus Christ, Savior of all.

That is the origin of the hymn "Faith of Our Fathers." Where are the defenders of the faith and the Church now? It has become fashionable to beat up on the Church, and since the whole society has become allergic to the exercise of authority after World War II, all those who become part of that authority have had a hard time exercising it. Like wild animals smelling blood, the "horde" gathers around and pecks away at the "Body of Christ", with members and believers not realizing that they are themselves part of the body they attack with such energy.

I am feeling increasingly ashamed of these senseless, mindless, irresponsible and unloving attacks, and I remember Jesus saying, "He who does not gather with me, scatters." I remember all those who taunt the clergy with bitter accusations that "the Church" cares nothing for them and are refusing to send them the priests they need, with the age, stamina, energy, qualifications, experience, wisdom, conviction, talent, and enthusiasm they want and need. Then I wonder to myself, where are we supposed to get these priests, on trees? Where were they when God called their sons, and they said to them, "Oh no! No son of mine is going to be a priest!" Or "Are you sure, son? Why would you want to become a priest?" Or the stunned look of shock that is followed by silence and nothing more. Or "Well, that's admirable. Now, why don't you think about it first, after all, priests don't marry, you know?"

Then there's the tacit encouragement to the young couple to go ahead and live together rather than get married. After all, if our generation is failing, how can we expect our youth to do better than us? How arrogant of us not to see what John Paul II sees – our youth are probably better than us, because they have suffered much more than we did. We may have suffered material deprivations but they have suffered spiritual ones by being immersed in this current culture, which is almost totally godless, compared to the one in which we grew up. Many of them have been deprived of the presence, attention, affection, and rearing of their parents; who have been too busy with work or other occupations to spend the considerable amount of time needed by the average child.

In our response to our youth when they think out loud about the priesthood or religious life, the words we speak to them may all be true, but where is the encouragement or the sense that priesthood or religious life are truly great vocations – as great as the wondrous call to Marriage and parenthood? Where is the enthusiasm and hope that come from feeling part of something greater than ourselves? Are we to surrender all the ideals proposed to us by Jesus and buy into the ethos of our contemporary waist-high culture and just flop into a life lived only for ourselves with the related view that our children are just part of our property? It saddens me to think that we have raised generations of people who much prefer to be on the sidelines taunting Jesus carrying his heavy cross to Calvary, than to be caught among his followers. – What an embarrassing thought!

To be fair, though, I think it necessary to reflect a little on the nature of our contemporary culture and how living in it affects our ability to spontaneously think, speak, conduct ourselves, and live as Christians. You have probably noticed that we live in a culture of “bafflegab”. Is it because we no longer read the classic literature of the English language? We are often at a loss for the right word; so we just make one up, or borrow a word from computer technology and give it a new use in human affairs. That's OK as far as it goes, but some of these made-up words only convey the linear part of the reality at hand. Human life is much deeper and richer than that, and classic vocabulary is better suited to giving expression to the deeper meaning of life.

Similarly, performers often take up a name that is actually a nonsense word – a word that neither exists nor has any relevance or linguistic connection to any other language or existing word. We have become accustomed to making it up as we go along. Is it surprising that this practice should then generalize to the realm of thinking – either about life in philosophical terms, or about God and what He does in and through his Church in theological terms? Again, rather than submit ourselves to the discipline of grounding ourselves in demonstrable facts and established lines of discourse, we just make it up as we go along, declaring impressions as though they were fact.

PASTORAL RESPONSE

As I ponder this current state of affairs, I find it troubling to observe that so many of our contemporaries are unhappy about what they think is happening to the faith and our Church. They feel adrift, and they are adrift. What is the exact nature of their suffering, and what are the causes? How has this happened? What can be done about it, to help them solve the problematic causes of their confusion, paralysis in the face of it all, and their apparent anger and hopelessness?

Whatever happened to their Baptismal Robe of innocence and blessed participation in the very Divine Life of the Blessed Trinity freely given them by the Lord at the moment of their Baptism in water and Chrismation, or anointing with Holy Chrism? They were incorporated into the Lord Jesus' Mystical Body, making them Temples of the Holy Spirit, spiritual dwellings inhabited by the Most Holy Trinity, by the saving action of the Holy Spirit. They should still be bearing the fruit of the Spirit:

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“love, or charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, generosity, modesty, and chastity.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1832. (I changed the order to put last the three not in Scripture but found in traditional lists made by the Fathers of the Church and other documents over many centuries.)

How has it happened that they have come to feel and behave like outsiders, resentful of any lawful spiritual authority? When and how did they become naked, deprived of their Baptismal Robe of innocence? When did they cease to give their trusting yet mindful and intelligent obedience to the Lord’s will and call as He reveals these in every generation in his Church? How have they come to rely almost exclusively on outside sources, which are often ignorant and/or biased against the Lord and his Church, because – in imitation of and obedience to her Master – she opposes views and practices that many in society hold and aggressively promote? Since when have morality and the shepherding authority of the Lord manifest in his Church become a matter of opinion polls?

My pastor’s intuition is that we are living in a culture under the dominion of the father of lies, the original rebel against the Father’s plan of creation and redemption. We swallow the lies and we ourselves engage in spreading them, without critical examination of what we are doing. All criticism is turned outwards, lest we examine ourselves and discover our need for conversion. As a society, we have become very smug – proud, opinionated, unteachable, and even arrogant. We aggressively impose our views, and are very impatient and intolerant of disagreement; responding at the emotive level, rather than examining the issues more closely. For any issue, as in the abortion debate, we attack the opponent instead of demonstrating the logic of our view, perhaps subconsciously knowing we have no case on the basis of scientific integrity or moral rigor.

In choosing the road of power, influence, and intimidation, we give in to the temptations Jesus struggled so hard in the desert to resist, we abandon the way of truth, life, and love, and we estrange ourselves from our Creator and Savior. He reaches out to us through his pastors – however fallible they may personally be – but we refuse to be reconciled, we refuse to make our confession of sins before a priest, we refuse to let go of the control we have been deluded into thinking we have over our destiny and over the definition of public truth, and we begin to bear the fruit of the one who has now become our true father, the prince of darkness.

In closing, I make an appeal to all who may read or hear of these remarks of mine. Stop putzing around on the sidelines, stop throwing stones at Jesus carrying his cross in the persons of our priests, bishops, deacons, youth, married people, believers, and people of “the Church”. Stop resisting Jesus’ authority over your soul, your conscience, your life, and your eternal destiny. It’s time for you to acknowledge the way Jesus continues to choose to shepherd us in our own day, and to submit yourself with trusting obedience to his shepherding. It’s time for you to stop joining the clamor of the hordes taunting and trying to tear down the Church’s dignity and moral influence to shepherd and persuade. Instead, it’s time for you to join the voices of those loyal to Christ and do all you can to understand our Church’s teachings, to come to know and understand how they are rooted in God’s divinely inspired Word in the Scriptures, and then to put yourself at the Lord’s service in a loyal defense of his Church and the legitimacy of her shepherding authority in our day. It’s time for you to stand up and be counted, because the Lord is coming again soon, and when He does come on the clouds, it will be too late for you to say, and mean it, that you cared for Him when He was down on the ground and came to his defense. Now is the time to act. Don’t miss Him while He passes by!

May you open yourself to the abundant blessing our Creator, the Father of all, offers you each day through his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, the One Savior of the world!