

Response to Crisis in Church: Necessary Corrections Will Be Lost if Sensationalism Drives Rhetoric

By: Philip C.L. Gray, J.C.L.

Three events this past summer have rocked the Church as never before in this era and perhaps in her entire history. Unless you have been living on another planet, you are aware of them.

First was the finding by the Archdiocese of New York that then-Father Theodore McCarrick was credibly accused of molesting an altar boy in 1971 and 1972 while serving there. This was followed on June 20th by the announcement that the Holy See had removed him from ministry and further revelations that he had abused seminarians and young priests while Bishop of Metuchen and Archbishop of Newark.

Second, on August 14th, the Attorney General of Pennsylvania released a state grand jury report that over 300 priests had abused more than 1,000 children in six of the eight dioceses. (The Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were the subject of earlier grand jury reports.) During the next three weeks, attorneys general in five other states announced they are considering similar actions and I am sure this number will grow.

Third, over the weekend of August 25-26, an eleven page testimony by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, who served as apostolic nuncio to the United States from 2011 to 2016, exposed significant corruption at the highest levels of the Church. The allegations that concern me most are that the Holy See had been alerted to Archbishop McCarrick's sexual misdoings long before they became public knowledge and that a homosexual culture exists in many U.S. dioceses and the Roman Curia itself!

We recognize that the events revealed this summer are not comprehensive and represent symptoms of deeper problems. If the symptoms only are addressed, greater scandals will follow. The foundational problems that allow such corruption and evil acts to persist in the Catholic Church include widespread secularism, antinomianism, and a significant distortion of the identity of the ordained and the laity. These issues discourage the development of faith in an increasingly atheistic world, reject necessary structures that protect the rights of individuals, and discourage the proper relationship that should exist between the ordained and the laity.

Cardinal McCarrick and those whose corrupt performances allowed him to persist in his evil acts must be brought to justice. Those bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities who failed to act on complaints of sexual abuse or misbehavior by members of the clergy must be called to account. Efforts to obtain this justice must also begin a process of correction or these and other scandals will continue.

This is not new news. We have struggled with a sex abuse scandal and other forms of corruption in the Catholic Church for decades, and we have long known it reaches the highest levels of the Church. What must be understood is the connection between these scandals and a pandemic influence of secularism in the Church. The Church no longer informs the culture with her faith; rather, secularism informs authorities in the Church on how to behave. This secularism rejects the laws and structures of the Catholic Church that protect the faith and the people who believe. Ultimately, these problems are rooted in a distortion of identity and roles between the ordained and the laity.

If the correction of the scandalous offences focuses on forming new processes and establishing lay boards to investigate such things, we will only get more of the same. This is what happened in the 1990's and again in 2002. Catholics must insist that the laws of the Church be applied properly, and demand that faith inform the work of our pastors.

A comprehensive statement with a strategy for reform and steps that faithful Catholics can take to protect their rights is being prepared for publication by the Foundation and Catholics United for the Faith. Those interested in a copy can contact either apostolate to receive a complimentary copy at the time of publication.