



CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

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

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Introduction

This summer, three events rocked the Church as never before in this era. First was the finding by the Archdiocese of New York that then Fr. 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 after 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 state's 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. This number continues to grow.

Third, over the weekend of August 25th and 26th, an eleven-page testimony by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, who served as apostolic nuncio to the United States from 2011 to 2016, alleged significant corruption at the highest levels of the Church. The most concerning allegations are that the Holy See had been alerted to Archbishop McCarrick's sexual misdeeds long before they became public knowledge and that a homosexual culture exists in many U.S. dioceses and the Roman Curia itself. Archbishop Viganò has published two more letters since his original statement and remains in hiding. Public response from American Bishops to his testimonies have ranged from mild support to vehement condemnation.

Since the initial stories broke, all three situations have developed with additional revelations from a growing number of sources. Many bishops across the United States have responded with calls for new processes and a decentralized Latin Church. However, the Vatican recently directed the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) not to vote on new legislation until the Vatican holds its own planned meeting on the crisis in February 2019.

In the wake of all this, additional scandals have come to light. Across the country, state attorney generals are gathering evidence and pursuing grand jury reports similar to those in Pennsylvania. The Archdiocese of Houston offices were raided in November. Reportedly, federal agencies are also scrutinizing the Church for potential criminal activities that can be prosecuted. In Memphis, the Diocesan Bishop was removed by the Pope, purportedly because he angered many priests and laity with the large number of changes to assignments he made. Across the United States, bishops are not developing pro-active plans that attract Catholics back to the pews or vocations to the altar. On the contrary, in most dioceses, they are closing the doors to churches, and schools for that matter. In some

cases, bishops tax parishes into extinction with diocesan taxes reaching as high as 30% of parish incomes. In other places, otherwise viable parishes are closed, and their churches sold in what appears to be a targeted attempt to raise money to settle lawsuits. In many places, the morale of priests is low.

Understandably, enemies of the Catholic Church have used the opportunity to denigrate the One True Catholic and Apostolic Faith. One can hardly keep up with the news, much less with the blitz of responses being given throughout social and news media.

The continuing events publicly revealed this summer are not comprehensive of the Church Crisis. Readers of *Christifidelis*, clients of The Saint Joseph Foundation (SJF), members of Catholics United for the Faith (CUF), and thousands of other Catholics and non-Catholics alike have first-hand experience with public and private scandals associated with the public ministry of bishops, priests, and laity who work in the Church. Results of the crisis include the illicit removal of priests without cause, denigration of marriage through biased and corrupt annulment proceedings, the widespread merger of parishes and closure of churches, the financial misconduct occurring in dioceses and parishes, the negligence in adult formation, attacks on the rights of parents to home-school, denigration of Catholic education in general and the closure of schools, the inconsistency in applying doctrines in life issues and medical ethics, the negligence of Vatican authorities to enforce decisions they make in specific cases, and more. Not everyone considers one or more of these symptoms of crisis to be problematic. Yet, there is a common thread that runs through all of them.

Each of these issues is a result of something deeper. When a wildfire rages, smaller fires begin to burn in neighboring areas, ignited by drifting sparks and hot ash. Sometimes those hot sparks can be carried for miles by a strong wind and survive with enough heat to start another wildfire that burns apart from the first. Tragically, that is where we are today in the Catholic Church. The sex abuse crisis is a wildfire that must be put out; but it was started by a spark drifting from an even more pervasive wildfire. That wildfire is a deep and impersonal secular humanism.

Secular Humanism

Secular humanism (herein referred to as Secularism) is a comprehensive, non-religious life stance incorporating a naturalistic philosophy, a cosmic outlook rooted in science, and a consequentialist ethical system.¹ As explained by its proponents, Secularism is intended to touch every aspect of life, including the meaning of life and the identity and value of the human person. Proponents of the ideology espouse “*no belief in a realm or beings imagined to transcend ordinary experience*”.² Atheistic by definition, Secularism is broader than atheism because it seeks to provide principles for “*orienting a complete human life...which celebrates emancipating the individual from traditional controls by family, church, and state, increasingly empowering each of us to set the terms of his or her own life*.”³ The consequence of such an orientation is moral relativism. It goes by another name, Modernism; but its roots are not modern. The philosophical underpinnings of this evil are traced to Genesis 3, and its development can be seen throughout scriptural narratives and historical developments to the present day.

It is not the purpose of this paper to examine the reality of Secularism and its effects. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to identify the root cause of the crisis facing the Church today and offer practical solutions that *the lay faithful can pursue*. To do so, one must understand how Secularism has influenced the Church.

¹ <https://secularhumanism.org/what-is-secular-humanism/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The modernists and secular humanists have organized themselves with a clear purpose to influence political systems throughout the world. Their organizations have influenced textbooks from grade schools to universities, and proponents hold positions of power in private and public institutions globally. One only has to do a Google search on Secular Humanism or Modernism, and a massive amount of information written by its proponents becomes available. Read it and weep. If you have the time and inclination, I strongly urge you to pursue such a project. You will see for yourself the deep influence it has taken in the administration of the Church.

Because Secularism has already gained wide currency in our culture—in art, literature, scientific discourse, etc.—it holds influence over all of us. In large part, the extent of that influence is determined by the individual; whether one accepts it or not. This is good news for those of us who want to combat the spread of Secularism in our Church and world. Unfortunately, the operation of this ideology can be very subtle. Because Secularism's tenets are foundations intended to orient an individual's whole life, its manifestations are as varied as the individuals who ascribe to it. This also means that a person can explicitly reject Secularism in theory, while allowing its influence to permeate particular dimensions of his life. This occurs because many of the tenets of Secularism *sound very similar* to Catholic Social Teaching and are *almost like* a principle of the Natural Law.

As Pope St. Paul VI wrote in his first encyclical,

As we all know, the Church is deeply rooted in the world. It exists in the world and draws its members from the world. It derives from it a wealth of human culture. It shares its vicissitudes and promotes its prosperity. But we also know that the modern world is in the grip of change and upheaval. It is undergoing developments which are having a profound influence on its outward way of life and habits of thought. The great advances made in science, technology, and social life, and the various currents of philosophical and political thought pervading modern society, are greatly influencing men's opinions and their spiritual and cultural pursuits.

The Church itself is being engulfed and shaken by this tidal wave of change, for however much men may be committed to the Church, they are deeply affected by the climate of the world. They run the risk of becoming confused, bewildered and alarmed, and this is a state of affairs which strikes at the very roots of the Church. It drives many people to adopt the most outlandish views. They imagine that the Church should abdicate its proper role, and adopt an entirely new and unprecedented mode of existence. Modernism might be cited as an example. This is an error which is still making its appearance under various new guises, wholly inconsistent with any genuine religious expression. It is surely an attempt on the part of secular philosophies and secular trends to vitiate the true teaching and discipline of the Church of Christ (Ecclesiam suam, 26).

To use Pope St. Paul VI's language, Catholic clergy grow up in a culture of Secularism and are chosen as our leaders after they have "*adopted outlandish views*". In the United States, the Catholic Church is suffering from multiple generations of failed Faith formation. The 1970's and 1980's sex education programs and the moral liberalism that was rampant in Catholic catechetical materials were direct results of Secularism's influence. The problems engendered by these programs, which Catholics United for the Faith and so many other lay apostolates fought against at the time, are coming home to roost in the current crisis.

Secularism is succeeding. I will focus here on only two ways it does this within the Church:

1. Presence of atheistic tendencies: In the processes used by many in ecclesiastical authority and in the rhetoric they use to explain their actions, God is less and less seen as the source of identity for

those affected by the decisions. Often, He is removed from the decision making entirely. Sacred Scripture demonstrates how to keep God at the center of ecclesial decisions (c.f. Sirach 37:1-15, *et al.*). Scriptural examples are not being followed in many places. Rather, the use of secular models has taken precedent. For example, I recently reviewed several parish merger cases from three different dioceses. In all three dioceses, the bishop chose to use a secular methodology based primarily on a corporate model to determine the closure of parishes and churches. While secular concerns (like the cost of keeping the lights on) have a real impact on the functioning of the Church as a human institution, the problem is that secular methodologies do not take into account the practical experience of Faith, the necessity of living in Hope, or the obligation to act in Charity. Nor do they place emphasis on the necessity of parish experience in the lives of Catholic faithful. The result is a bad business plan that focuses on the amount of service delivery and not quality or the needs of the faithful in the pew. A parish is not a business venture and should not be run as one.

In preliminary discussions with clients, it is estimated that more than 30% of *practicing Catholics* will or have stopped attending Mass in these parishes. When this figure is brought to the attention of diocesan authorities, very few respond with pastoral sensitivity. Most respond with words like, “They aren’t good Catholics anyway,” or, “They were going to leave anyway.” In one case, the words used were, “So what? Let them go.” From a business perspective, it does not make sense to drive away one-third of your members. From a spiritual point of view, it is scandalous and sinful. God has been removed from the process.

2. Emancipation/Individualism: Because he is made in the image and likeness of the Triune God, man is intrinsically social in nature. If emancipation or individualism refers to a maturing of an individual into the person intended by God, there is legitimacy to the use of those terms. If one uses those terms to refer to a willful isolation from the legitimate influence of others, that violates the social nature with which we are created. It dehumanizes us. When one in ecclesiastical authority emancipates himself from the influence of his people or the obligations of the universal law, the result is clericalism, the implementation of which ranges from self-serving to tyrannical. This model of authority excludes the legitimate influence of a cleric’s subjects, and as a result, the true identity of ecclesiastical authority as service is lost (John 13:3-20; see also: Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

There are other ways Secularism is succeeding in the Church. I reflect on these because they strike at the very nature of what it means for us to be human. When identity in God is not honored, Unity—the first Mark of the Church—is reduced to lip service.

To effectively address the root of the crisis, we must return to an ecclesial model that reflects a true matrimonial relationship between husband and wife as intended by God from the beginning. After all, the First Man and First Woman were made in the image and likeness of God, in the image and likeness of His Society (c.f. Genesis 2), and Jesus uses this model to describe Himself as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride (Mt. 9:15; Jn. 3:29; *et. al.*).

Before offering five suggestions for what the laity can do to address this crisis effectively, I turn first to those who are often the forgotten victims of the crisis. There are many bishops, priests and deacons who endure with the saints, keep the Commandments of God, and hold fast to the Faith of Jesus Christ (c.f. Rev. 14:12). They have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, through which they encounter Jesus each day in prayer. Their love for God and fidelity to their vocations are shown by how they act; by their generosity, honor, and service to the People of God. I have been privileged to know and work with some of them. They recognize the dangers of Secularism and fight against it in many different ways. Most of you reading this position paper know a bishop, priest or deacon who falls into this category. They understand what it means to be *in persona Christi* and serve the Catholic

faithful as Christ serves His Church (c.f. Eph. 5:21-33). They act as a husband who honors his wife and does not lord it over her (c.f. 1 Pet. 3:1-7). They live and minister within a Society of Grace, not in the curse of man and culture (c.f. Gen. 3:16).

These men must be supported. They suffer greatly because of the crisis. Many struggle with morale, trust in their superiors, even depression. They bear a significant burden, and as men they suffer the effects of the strain. They must be supported with our prayers and encouragement. They are a part of the solution. They also provide a necessary spiritual protection for us. Spiritually, they bear a significant burden to shield us from the attacks of the Devil. Do not be afraid to associate with them, support them, and encourage them as a faithful wife would do these things for her husband. That will provide a model of behavior that is counter-culture and will be a significant element in addressing the crisis.

Solutions

I offer here a strategy for lay faithful to adopt in addressing the crisis. It consists of five general elements. Within the explanation of each element is a list of practical actions to take. These lists are not exhaustive. Circumstances in one's locality and one's abilities will determine what practical things one can do. I am confident each element must be implemented or the crisis will only deepen and other wildfires will begin to burn. The enemies of the Church will continue to influence souls away from Christ and His grace. Please, pray and consider what you can do, then act. These elements are: 1. Pray; 2. Organize; 3. Influence; 4. Stay engaged; and, 5. Evangelize. Just remember, POISE.

1. Pray: Atheism is the disbelief that God exists. When we exclude Him from anything, that exclusion is an atheistic tendency. He created all things; He should not be excluded from anything we think or do. Developing a personal relationship with Him through prayer is the best way to combat the atheistic tendencies of our culture in our daily lives.

In Genesis 2 and John 17, God makes clear that He made us for union with Him. Scripture is full of personal encounters between God and His people. He wants an encounter with you. That is why Jesus gives Himself in the perpetual sacrifice of the Mass and is present in tabernacles around the world. Additionally, He gave us His Holy Spirit in Baptism and made us Temples of the Holy Spirit. We who are baptized possess God and He possesses us because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Each of us should contemplate this truth regularly.

The importance of our personal relationship with God cannot be understated. Without it, knowledge of the faith will have the same effect as it had on Lucifer. The Devil has full knowledge of what is in Sacred Scripture; he saw God face-to-face; yet he rebelled. He rebelled because he rejected a personal relationship with his Creator. Developing that personal relationship begins with personal prayer.

Prayer is an encounter with God. It is important to understand that when we encounter God, we do not have to feel a certain way. Our experience of prayer may or may not be associated with a feeling; it may even be associated with feeling "bad". Please trust that it's ok if you do not "feel" God in prayer. The evaluation that prayer is not fruitful if we do not "feel" God is a distortion and temptation to despair. It is a tool of the Devil to discourage us from prayer.

Authentic prayer begins with trust that God is with us, regardless of our emotions in the moment. Think of it this way. A husband and wife experience a wide range of emotion when they are together. Most happy couples do not characterize their entire relationship by a single emotion. Sharing their entire lives, they are bound to experience the full range of human emotions at different times and seasons. What is constant in the midst of ever changing circumstances and

emotions is that they are engaged in their souls by the union of their beings. They are comfortable with each other. They are safe with each other. Most often, that is the experience of one in prayer. The emotional experience is not definitive. That's ok. Just be comfortable being with God.

If you are unsure how to pray, start by praying the Psalms. Just read them prayerfully one at a time. Take time to let their words saturate your mind. You will find that the Psalms encompass a wide range of emotion and human experience. They will stimulate your hope and deepen your faith. And, read the Gospels. The very words and actions of Jesus will encourage you. Most importantly, listen to what you read. Scripture is God's Word. When you read it or hear it, He is speaking. With or without emotion, you will encounter God because His Word is spoken to you.

Don't be afraid to use prayer aids. Praying the Divine Office of the Church is an excellent way to incorporate Sacred Scripture with prayer and unite our personal prayers with those of the Church. It provides structure and themes that are really helpful to many people. For more recommended aids to prayer, call CUF (1-800-MY FAITH).

Having said this, please understand that one's own personal prayer is not enough prayer. To combat the atheistic and secular tendencies in our culture, we must foster prayer within our families and communities. Schedule your prayer, and include:

- A. *Daily, family prayer*: Many families pray the Rosary. I strongly encourage it. If you are new to the Rosary, don't be afraid of it. If you do not find it helpful to your family's spirituality, choose another devotion and be faithful to it. Be sure to pray before meals and consider supplementing or substituting your family devotions with things like processions on Feast Days, or special prayers on holidays.
- B. *Community prayer*: Of course, we are all obligated to attend Mass each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. Try going as often as you can. Organize or attend private devotions with groups of people. Gather in your homes, or in your parish church if allowed. Becoming accustomed to praying together (especially when we don't have to) encourages a unity and fellowship that will provide a foundation of faith that is lacking in our culture.
- C. *Intercessory prayer*: As you pray, no matter how you pray, pray for others. Pray for our Pope, bishops, priests, and deacons. Pray for the faithful throughout the world. Unite yourselves to those who are persecuted in other parts of the world. Christian blood is being spilt today more frequently than it was in Apostolic times. Intercessory prayer strengthens our unity of Faith. And, as an important part of intercessory prayer, forgive those who have harmed you and pray for them. In this way, we are certain of God's mercy on us (Mt. 6:12, *et al.*).

Each person and each family will develop prayer and devotions in keeping with their unique spiritualities. This is a wonderful thing. Let the Holy Spirit guide the development of your personal, family, and community prayer; but you must pray to receive His guidance. If you do these things, you will begin to realize that God is part of everything you do, regardless of how you are feeling. And, by example of prayer, we will combat the atheistic tendency to exclude God from any part of our lives.

2. **Organize**: We are social creatures. Just as God is a society of Three Divine Persons, Man is also a society of persons. And, we are called to the same unity possessed by God (John 17:20-23). Just as the Divine Persons of the Trinity act in perfect harmony, we must strive to live and act in that same harmony (c.f. 1 Tim. 2:1-3, *et al.*). By Divine and Natural Law, we have a *right* to associate together and pursue apostolic activities of our own initiative (Canons 215-216). We have no obligation to ask a bishop's permission to do this. Under certain circumstances, we have an *obligation* to form associations and address problems and concerns of our own initiative. I believe the current crisis begs for these lay associations.

In 1968, H. Lyman Stebbins associated with a group of laity to found Catholics United for the Faith (CUF). Our mission is, “To unite the faithful from all walks of life in order to support, defend, and advance the efforts of the teaching Church.” CUF does this through its membership, but especially through its chapter program. At one time, CUF boasted over 100 chapters across the United States and internationally. Although this number has significantly dwindled, the time is ripe for a resurgence in chapter activity because where sin bounds, grace abounds still more (Rm. 5:20).

After Vatican II, CUF was not the only apostolate to organize the faithful. Across the country, a fairly large number of apostolic activities developed to address specific needs or local circumstances. Many of these apostolic groups centered around retreat centers or bookstores; some developed along ideological lines such as a commitment to homeschool or adherence to the 1962 Missal. Whatever the focus, these groups collectively helped to preserve authentic Catholicism in the United States.

It’s time to organize again. Faithful Catholics need to organize under a common goal of renewal. If you are reading this and saying to yourself, “Easier said than done.” Or, “Not me, I’m not good at that.” I understand and so did Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, and St. Juan Diego. All of them believed God picked the wrong person for the task assigned. They had a common timidity. They also had a common fidelity to do what was asked of them. Like Mary, they all said, “Yes.” Each of us must do the same. Please, consider either organizing a group locally or joining one.

The purpose of organizing such groups is threefold. We must come together for common prayer, for moral support, and to influence our parishes and dioceses for renewal.

As Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in My Name, I am there among them” (Mt. 18:20). Common prayer has an amazing effect on our spiritual morale. And, it does help to bring about necessary renewal. Nothing we do will ever achieve merit if it is done outside of grace. Prayer brings the grace.

A house divided will fall. The Devil knows that. When we gather to provide moral support, we hold each other up. We all need that. Even those who hold legitimate differences can be moral support to each other. Don’t look to the small things that divide us, be united in the important elements of our Catholic Faith.

If you need help organizing, call CUF at 1-800-MY FAITH. We have resources to help you do just that.

3. Influence: The laity have a legitimate and powerful role as influencers within the Body of Christ. If only we would use it in an organized way, we could exert significant influence to bring renewal to the Church. There are three very practical ways to begin exercising this role.

A. *Matthew 18:15-17:* This passage provides a four-step process to address concerns and conflicts in the Church. First, one approaches the offender privately and tries to win him over. Failing that, he takes a few others along for a less private talk. Failing that, he turns the offender over to the Church. Failing that, he turns him over to the world. More than two decades ago, CUF developed a protocol that explained how to apply Jesus’ words during contentious situations in the Church. I recently reviewed that protocol and updated it to reflect the disciplines of the Church. I urge anyone who wishes to understand how to engage a pastor or bishop on a matter of contention to call CUF (1-800-MY FAITH) and ask for a copy of our protocol. It is completely in line with Sacred Scripture and the disciplines of Canon Law.

That being said, there are two things that one should understand about applying Matthew 18:15-17. First, the processes found in Canon Law do not exactly coincide with the words of

Jesus. For example, to file an appeal against an administrative act of a bishop requires a person to act within 10 days after gaining knowledge of the administrative act. That is not enough time to meet with the bishop privately—even if he would meet with you—and follow that with a second meeting with two or three others in attendance. I highly recommend that if one is grieved by an act by a pastor or bishop, do not wait, get help from a canon lawyer. If a true violation of law or rights has occurred, I usually recommend filing the initial appeal immediately to secure standing. Processes can always be suspended to allow for constructive dialogue. Such dialogue is always recommended, but do not lose your chance to pursuing the third step—turning him over to the Church—because you were being led along in dialogue. Too many people have lost opportunities because they trusted the dialogue and did not secure their rights to appeal under Canon Law. If you do not know a canon lawyer, call The Saint Joseph Foundation (740-937-2054). If we cannot help, we will make every effort to refer you to someone who can.

Second, to turn him over to the world means just that. We should exhaust all possibilities both personally and within the Church to resolve disputes with the ordained, even disputes between Catholic faithful. God wants us to do this (1 Cor. 6:1-4). When these efforts fail, we should use secular means to obtain justice. Victims of sex abuse are using social media and lawsuits to get justice after years of cover-up. There are other areas that have gone ignored by Church authorities. In any dispute where justice is not accomplished in the Church, if a secular venue is available, it should be used. In fact, Vatican authorities have upheld the rights of priests, religious, and laity to use civil means in their pursuit of Justice. The key is doing it in a way that does not harm good morals.

- B. *Get involved in parish and diocesan groups.* We are most influential with people who know us and need us. So become known and become needed. Locally organized groups of the laity should coordinate efforts to obtain representation on parish and diocesan councils and review boards. Use professional expertise as volunteers to help the Church. Use your positions as volunteers to influence Church leaders. That is exactly what secularists are doing. They need to be replaced.
- C. *Manage the money.* A significant area of influence is the area of finance. Money drives the Secularism machine, but it does not drive the faith based and authentically pastoral approach. Virtue drives those who are faithful to Christ. One way to separate the Secularism machine from the Virtue driven is to control the money. How can you do that and still fulfill obligations to support the Church?

The faithful should establish local and regional trust funds that are controlled by donors with the sole purpose of supporting a particular parish or diocese. Instead of putting money into the collection basket or sending money to the bishop's annual appeal, put it in the trust fund. Send the pastor or bishop a notice of donations collected each week and let him know that the fund will gladly pay the necessary bills.

This solution has been used in a number of parishes very effectively. It does not take the rich to make it happen; but it does require broad participation of the faithful. It is completely legitimate, completely in keeping with the moral law, and provides the faithful with significant influence while also protecting a parish or diocese from bankruptcy due to lawsuits involving priests or bishops.

Current federal laws do not require a church to report its annual income or its assets. All other non-profit corporations must file a tax return that provides this information. The current law allows pastors and bishops to hide money easily or commit fraud. Shuffling pedophile priests is a problem; so is shuffling money. Establishing local and regional trust funds controlled by

the donors would be easy to arrange under state and federal laws and would remove a significant source of temptation and scandal. It's been my experience that the priests and bishops who are virtuous and desire active collaboration with their people will not object.

Financial control and transparency will not happen overnight, but great endeavors begin with first steps. If locally organized faithful made public the establishment of such a fund, and kept it transparent, that same group could respond appropriately to the differing reactions they receive. And, based on the reactions, that same group could determine the influences of Secularism and those of Virtue.

4. **Stay engaged:** Saint Theresa of Calcutta would often say, "We are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful." Let God be successful. Let us be faithful stewards of the gifts He has given us. I remember many cases that I lost, but my clients would tell me, "*If it were not for you, I would have left the Church. I believe there is injustice here, but I will not let them come between me and my God.*" I count those cases as won. We must be faithful to God in our prayer, in our relationships, and in our apostolic outreaches. In our faithfulness, we must let Him use us as instruments as He sees fit; not as we would like. That means we accept the outcome, knowing that only He knows the real outcome. Perhaps hearts were changed that we do not know; or perhaps our efforts thwarted a greater evil, like soldiers who delay an advancing army, giving their brothers in arms a chance to re-group and fight more effectively. Be faithful; stay engaged; don't give up. This is so much easier to do when you encounter God in prayer, associate with like-minded Catholics, and pursue common apostolic activities.
5. **Evangelize:** At a practical level, the necessary evangelization to address the current crisis in the Church requires evangelization of Catholics in the pew. Because of the influence of Secularism, evangelization in the United States must begin within the Catholic Church. It is not good enough to *teach about the Faith*, we must *teach the Faith*. There must be a primary shift from giving information to growing in virtue. Of course, it helps to gain knowledge so one can grow in virtue. However, knowledge is not power, virtue is. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge results in pride and encourages a secularist mentality. Knowledge that is built on the Virtue of Faith empowers us to move mountains. Our evangelization must begin with spreading the Faith and living virtuous lives. The average Catholic in the pew must begin to understand that growth in virtue is what gets us to Heaven, not the knowledge we gain (Mt. 25:31-46). When Catholics learn to develop a personal relationship with God (Piety), respect the human dignity possessed by everyone (Justice), choose actions with the purpose of attaining Heaven (Hope), and forgive others, treating them as one would like to be treated (Charity), the very tenets of Secularism will be rejected by their way of life. Living a virtuous life helps us recognize injustice when it occurs and stirs a spirit of courage to address it. Don't be afraid to engage your brothers and sisters in the pew with an example of virtue. Talk with your pastor to bring in speakers or programs that encourage virtue development as a foundation for knowledge of the Faith. If you need recommendations, call CUF (1-800-MY FAITH).

On Hierarchical Reform

Many are responding to the current crisis in the Church with calls for new processes in Canon Law or more lay review boards. Some are calling for a decentralization and greater autonomy from Rome. Many use the opportunity of chaos caused by the crisis to advance agendas that are contrary to the nature of the Church and that would frustrate her purpose as a Vessel of Mercy and Grace. After more than two decades of private practice in Canon Law, I know that the Church has always had processes available to correct the errors and crimes committed by clerics.

If the bishops pass new legislation allowing new processes to try wayward priests, how will this response differ from that given in 2002? In the wake of the 2002 crisis, the bishops implemented the new processes they wanted. Time has proven these changes ineffective. Those bishops who intended to shuffle pedophile priests continued to do so. In addition, some misused the processes to remove good priests from ministry for personal or political reasons. Because bishops have proven they are willing to ignore or abuse existing laws, multiplying the laws will not make those same bishops willing to respect and obey them. New processes are not necessary. We need fidelity to our existing body of Canon Law and integrity in action by our bishops.

Lay review boards are a great idea, but not the way some bishops arrange and use them. They are not usually objective, though not always by fault of the members. In many dioceses, members are hand-picked by the bishop. The information provided to them can be easily manipulated. I have personally seen this done in multiple cases. Often, there is little or no training given to them. Members of such boards must have a strong understanding of the objective principles of the Natural Law or their work will not reflect the Virtue of Justice. Without proper formation, the tenets of Secularism that are so deeply ingrained in our culture will influence their work. A lay review board will be more likely to serve successfully and objectively if its members are elected by the laity themselves and undergo a training in the Principles of Natural Law and objectivity. Let the laity control the process for the appointment and removal of the board members; let the bishop develop a proper training program. The process may be a bit more difficult to arrange, but the end result would be more representative of lay involvement and give greater confidence that the reviews conducted are objective.

Some argue that the Eastern Catholic Churches have successfully used a decentralized system and the model should work in the West as well. This is not a fair comparison. The Latin Church is one of 24 Churches *sui iuris* whose unity under the Pope constitutes the Catholic Church. It is the largest of the Churches *sui iuris*. Its Patriarch also happens to be the Pope. The head of each Church *sui iuris* possesses similar power over his Church as the Pope does as Patriarch of the West. Suffice it to say, each of these Churches developed under particular circumstances in the times and cultures in which they were founded. Their internal structures reflect their organic development. What works for them because of those historical circumstances have shown not to work in the Latin Church. Historically, decentralization in the Latin Church has resulted in significant politicization and polarization. That's a historical argument against the idea. Now let's be practical. Is it wise to entrust the henhouse to the fox? If bishops shuffle pedophile priests now, it will be so much easier to do if they control the process completely. Decentralization is a bad idea.

What do we need? We need faithful clerics. We need men who will be faithful *in persona Christi*. If a bishop is faithful, he will use the processes already at his disposal to address problems. If a priest or deacon is faithful, he won't commit crimes. We need fidelity, not new processes developed because of sensational rhetoric. This is the only way we can ensure authentic Church renewal that is sustained into the future.

To this end, improving the vetting and training of seminarians will prove essential first steps. I have been told by many priests that their seminary training did not prepare them for the realities of pastoral ministry. One area greatly lacking in seminary formation is the identification of moral evils present in our society and a systematic presentation of how to address them in priestly ministry. A priest should be able to recognize the influences of Secularism as it manifests itself in his parishioners' lives and be equipped with spiritual and practical remedies. In the early 5th Century, St. John Cassian wrote *The Monastic Institutes*, a treatise which provided practical advice on how to train a monk to root out sin in himself and others. Such an approach will help priests offer the treasures of the Church's timeless wisdom within our historical and cultural context. This is a task that falls on the bishops, and I hope

those reading this will consider effecting some practical changes in their seminarians' formation before ordination.

It is not only the clerics in the United States that must be faithful. We need fidelity from Vatican authorities to enforce the laws already in place, including the 2016 procedures for the removal of a bishop. That June 2016 *motu proprio* provided that a bishop “*can be legitimately removed from this office if he has through negligence committed or through omission facilitated acts that have caused grave harm to others, either to physical persons or to the community as a whole. The harm may be physical, moral, spiritual or through the use of patrimony...even without serious moral fault on his part*” (Art. 1 §1-2). Unless the Vatican enforces its own laws and directives, bishops will continue to act with impunity.

A Call to Action

Proactively and realistically, if we want the Church crisis to be addressed, the laity must wake up and realize that our Baptism gives us a divine power and influence that must be used for the renewal of the Church. We must pray and develop personal relationships with God, organize ourselves and develop lasting relationships with like-minded Catholics, influence our local parishes and dioceses by getting involved—even by controlling finances, stay engaged even when it is difficult, and evangelize by encouraging others to pray and develop virtue. We must be united in the Faith for Christ.

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