

## 5-8-08 - Will bishops finally be held accountable?

By Eileen Ford, Gloucester Daily Times, MA

I was encouraged by reports of last month's meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and survivors of clergy abuse, and pray that Benedict will take some action against the men who aided and abetted the sexual abuse of children and still remain in positions of power and honor in the Catholic church. Only Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law was forced to resign and he's now in charge of a Vatican Basilica.

I wrote to Law's successor, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, and thanked him for arranging the papal visit with survivors, reminding him that the meeting would not have happened without Law's resignation. Under O'Malley's leadership, victims, faithful parishioners and honorable priests are finally engaged in the process of healing, but many Catholics in other dioceses are still embarrassed and ashamed of their leaders.

I've been a member of the Voice of the Faithful in 2002, and have written many letters to bishops, begging them to go beyond legal concerns and treat victims with compassion. Only Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit stated publicly that the moral authority of the Catholic church will never be restored until bishops are held accountable for their role in the clergy abuse crisis. Their negligence has cost over a billion dollars so far and continues to damage the credibility of the church.

I audited a two-week course, "The Church of the 21st Century," at Boston College in 2003, taught by the Rev. Donald B. Cozzens, author of "The Changing Face of the Priesthood," "Sacred Silence" and "Faith That Dares to Speak." Cozzens' insights are formed by his experience as counselor to priests, vicar for clergy and religious in the Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio, teacher of psychology and theology and rector of a seminary.

In the introduction to "The Changing Face of the Priesthood," he said: "In the chapters ahead, I draw upon observations from my own pastoral experience, ... In doing so, I have tried to write from my center about what matters most to me. And I write aware of Kathleen Norris' warning that 'when we write from the center ... when we write about what matters to us most, words will take us places we don't want to go. You begin to see that you will have to say things you don't want to say, that may even be dangerous to say, but are absolutely necessary.'"

I'm currently reading Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's "Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church; Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus," another man with the courage to say things "dangerous to say" in an institution that denounces homosexual behavior and all sexual activity outside of marriage but overlooks the perverted behavior of "celibate" bishops and priests.

In 1994, Robinson was appointed by Australian bishops to respond to revelations of clergy abuse and he served nine years in that position. When he expressed concern about

the lack of response from the papacy in a public meeting with victims, he was criticized and referred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Discouraged by a lack of compassion at "the highest levels of the church," Robinson resigned his position as auxiliary bishop in Sydney and wrote this book describing "a better church, a church that is not contrary to the mind of Jesus Christ" advocating "the case for reform" and urging the church to "confront all factors that have in any way contributed either to abuse or to the inadequate response to abuse."

It was not "excessive media coverage" of the crisis "that resulted in unnecessary damage to the bishops and the entire Catholic community" as church leaders frequently claim. The damage was self-inflicted by a hierarchy that refuses to examine the root causes of the financial and sexual scandals in the church and the implosion of the church will continue until they have the courage to do so.

In a full page ad in the New York Times last month, VOTF asked "How can our Church be a moral beacon when so many bishops who repeatedly transferred known predators remain in office?"

The ad called for the transformation of the Church, declaring a vision for "a Church that is open, transparent, and accountable ... a Church that embraces the gifts and talents of the laity ... a Church governed by compassion, informed by justice, empowered by equality, and animated to act collegially. But we cannot attain this transformation until we heal the wounds still open."

Now that a pope has acknowledged one of those open wounds, will prelates finally be held accountable for their negligence?

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