



What does a healthy church culture look like?

CATHOLICS OF EVERY STRIPE have been discussing what needs to happen in the U.S. and global church to create a healthy Catholic culture, where sexual abuse and harassment are prevented and, if present, immediately stopped, where cover-up and secrecy are not the response to misdeeds, where authorities are held accountable. This is not a “vocation culture” as it is usually envisioned; rather these basics are simply a starting point for a more authentic church, which is the only type of church that can foster genuine vocations. Current conditions in the church make it hard for people to desire a public role within the institution.

To answer the question of what makes a healthy church culture, it’s important to identify what has gone wrong, and therein lies the rub: the analysis is different depending on where one stands. HORIZON begins this discussion with the supposition that no one faction or group in the church necessarily has the corner on truth; there may well be simultaneously valid concerns from groups that are seemingly at odds. With that in mind, HORIZON here presents a small cross-section of voices, all of them weighing in

HORIZON presents thoughts from Catholics with varied backgrounds and perspectives.

on the question of how to rebuild what many are calling “a broken church.” It is impossible to capture the full extent of the discussion in these pages, but we hope these remarks contribute to a discussion marked by charity. The following commentaries are all excerpts from longer essays.

Deconstruction of intolerable culture

We call upon the church leadership to implement plans immediately to support more fully the healing of all victims of clergy abuse, hold abusers accountable, and work to uncover and address the root causes of the sexual abuse crisis. It is clear that more serious action needs to be taken to ensure that the culture of secrecy and cover-up ends.

We also call upon church leaders to speak with honesty and humility about how this intolerable culture developed and how that culture will now be deconstructed, and to create places where church members can express our anger and heartbreak. We are committed to collaborate in the essential work of healing and transformation that our church so desperately needs.

Finally, we recognize that the vast majority of priests have not committed abuse and are suffering greatly because of the actions of some of their brothers. We offer them our prayer and support as they continue their min-

istries in these very challenging times and as they too struggle to understand the complexity of factors that led to this deplorable situation.

—*Dominican Sisters of Peace, Sisters of Loretto, Ursuline Sisters of Louisville, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth*

Acknowledge change; lift the veil of secrecy

New abuse allegations have not disappeared. In the last three years, 22 allegations of abuse occurring during 2015-2017 have been made. This is an average of about seven per year nationwide in the church. That is far too many. Nothing is acceptable other than zero. At the same time, to put those reports in some context, 42 teachers in the state of Pennsylvania, where the [August 2018] grand jury reported from, lost their licenses to educate for sexual misconduct in 2017. As recently as 2015, 65 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) were in “teacher jail” for accusations of sexual abuse or harassment in that county alone.

The current wave of “educator sexual misconduct” has yet to receive the same aggregation and attention that clergy sexual abuse has by the media (although *The Washington Post* has rung a warning bell and Carol Shakeshaft has written extensively on it in academic work). As the John Jay researchers note, “No other in-

Number of alleged offenses reported since 2004
“occurring or beginning” during each 5-year period

1600														
1400														
1200					1367	1343								
1000				1025	1202									
800														
600							1002							
400		591						518						
200	510													
0									217					
										129	80	99	101	22
	1954 or earlier	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017

Data from Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

stitution has undertaken a public study of sexual abuse and, as a result, there are no comparable data to those collected and reported by the Catholic Church.”

“It is happening in other institutions” is by no means any sort of excuse and that is not what is intended by referring to these realities. Instead, these other cases provide a context. As the [Pennsylvania] grand jury report authors note, the church has changed in the last 15 years. But you cannot “fix” the past nor can it be erased. This won’t all fade away. It’s nothing that can ever be outrun. You have to deal with it. The church did not sufficiently do so in 2002 and the years that followed. Creating new policies to prevent future abuse is not a sufficient response to the legacy of what happened. Now, in 2018, it is time to lift the veil of any secrecy that remains. If not, the same cases will emerge again and again as if these were a wound that scabs but never heals. Every time that scab is removed it will bleed again and again. As painful as it is now, it is the time to deal with this great injury the church brought upon itself. If anything, the re-emergence of these cases again and again should reveal that this wound has potentially deadly consequences if it is not dealt with completely once and for all.

—Mark Gray, blog “Nineteen Sixty-four,”
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate,

Incarinate a father’s love

This crisis is about the recovery or death of the image of the priest as father. Where the priesthood ceases to model human fatherhood, when its members do not credibly incarnate a father’s love in their dealings with everyone, especially the most vulnerable, then how can the priesthood minister effective supernatural fatherhood in the Person of Jesus, who says, “To have seen me is to have seen the Father?” It morphs into a corrupt, impotent, self-serving caste.

—Father Dominic Allain in *National Catholic Register*

No to clericalism

It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s people. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the people of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives. This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the

church’s authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred. Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.” Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say “no” to abuse is to say an emphatic “no” to all forms of clericalism.

—Pope Francis: *Letter to the People of God*,
August 20, 2018

Pursue the truth

There are some church leaders who are reminding us that our emphasis right now should be on the victims of clergy sexual abuse. This is undoubtedly correct, and the church should always strive to minister to victims in a way that can bring about healing and reconciliation. Cardinal DiNardo, in his statement, addressed them directly: “To the survivors of abuse and the families who have lost a loved one to abuse, I am sorry. You are no longer alone.” But in order to provide true justice to the victims, we need to make sure we understand the full failure of the structures and the individuals that enabled them to be victimized in the first place.... The truth sometimes leads to uncomfortable situations. As Jesus also shows us, it sometimes leads to the cross.

We should not be afraid, though, to pursue the truth. For in pursuing the truth, we are pursuing Jesus Christ himself.

—Our Sunday Visitor *Editorial Board*: Don Clemmer,
Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott Richert, York Young

This is a crisis in church structure

I am reminded of a verse in our Franciscan Rule of Life: “Let all be carefully attentive not to become angry or upset because of another’s sin. For anger and disturbance impede love in themselves and in others” (TOR Rule 24). In pondering the wisdom of St. Francis of Assisi, I am realizing what his message is really saying to us today. Anger is not a bad thing—if we use its energy in a positive way. This takes time, thought, prayer, and sincere dialogue. Anger causes us to wrestle with the tough questions and requires that each one of us find our voice. It can be our positive energy source.

It's time to sincerely look at our current church structures and take note of who is not permitted around the altar. We are living in a world and a time like no other. Women have found their voice, and the laity are no longer uneducated. Family units are broken down, and there is a spiritual hunger in our world that needs to be fed from the pews and the various stark paths people find themselves on.

It's so important that we begin to talk about the impact this crisis is having upon each individual and our beloved church. We cannot lose sight of the fact that this is a crisis of the Catholic Church structure, and should not be that of our Catholic faith in which we have been immersed through Baptism. Our faith is in God! Not in buildings, or structures of power, or fine gold or rich materials or human beings. The church belongs to the faithful!

Personally, I don't believe the solution to this global crisis of the Catholic Church is simply about creating better policies or providing monetary compensations to victims. It's much bigger and deeper than that. As a people of faith, we have a responsibility to bring this crisis into our daily prayer and thoughtful conversations. It is crucial that we reverence the rightful place of anger in our hearts and allow its energy to stir our voices and advocate for change and rebuilding of our church. "Prayer changes people and people change things!" (Burton Hillis).

—Sister Julie Myers, O.S.F. "The other side of anger,"
in *Sisters of St. Francis* blog

The church penitent

Institutional custodians naturally want to defend against attack; they want their houses to look clean and clear, above reproach. And the church is an especially grand and beautiful house. The bishops who hid the horrendous crimes in Pennsylvania wanted to protect an image of perfection, even as they confessed—as a matter of doctrine—their own sinfulness and that of every clergyman, every human, and every institution. The doctrine is correct. The cowardly, callous denials and cover-ups were lies, motivated by self-preservation and clubbish tribal pride. Whitewashed sepulchers, strutting a clean, shallow prettiness.

If, in 1947, the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania had rent its garments over the first case of priestly abuse, parading its ugliness in front of the world, the next 70 years in that church would have been different. There are a thousand practical reforms that can and should be

undertaken to prevent future abuses—many have already been put in place. But first the concomitant sin of pride needs to be addressed, embroidered vestments traded for sackcloth and ashes—perhaps literally. Spiritual and moral leadership from the American Catholic Church in the foreseeable future will need to be of a radical kind—a Christian kind, you might say. The church will need to become an institution *sui generis* in American society, humbly open about the human filth ringing its central spiritual and moral treasures. The Church Penitent. Keeping up the appearance of holiness will no longer work.

This change would be beautiful in a dark, illuminating way. Our society is drowning in self-acquittal, even—especially—in this age of perpetual, disingenuous, PR-composed apologies. Could the Catholic Church be the first institution to present itself as containing simple, undeniable wickedness, and swathed to the point of immersion in the ugliest fluids of our condition? Could it present itself as sibling to sinners, pining for a grace it in no way deserves, wounded but pointing toward the light? This would be a new kind of church, and also very old. If this is indeed where the American church is headed, all people of good will should hope that she succeeds and comes back from this self-inflicted wound stronger, because openly, unabashedly, and beautifully weak.

—Ian Marcus Corbin in "The Church's Future Beauty"
in *First Things*, September 3, 2018

Science and the changes we need

The church is a closed system. Rules, fixed order, dogmatic formulas, unyielding laws, patriarchy, authority and obedience under pain of judgment and death, all have rendered the church impervious to evolution and to the radical interconnectivity that marks all levels of nature. A closed institutional system in an evolutionary world is bound to die out unless new energy can be put into the system or the system itself undergoes radical transformation to an open system.

Incorporating science into seminary education will not preclude abusers, but over time the formation of new structural systems that are more consonant with nature as cooperative interdependent systems might allow for greater transparency, interdependency, and accountability. To accept modern science as part of theological education and development of church doctrine is to recognize the full inclusion of women in the community of biological life.

—Sister Ilia Delio "Is new life ahead in the church?"
in *Global Sisters Report*

Accountability, transparency

We must hold our leaders accountable. We must advocate for transparency. We must never stop dreaming of a future where dignity is restored.

If we desire to take up the cause to #RebuildMyChurch, then we must do so within our own hearts first. The church is more than leaders who have failed us. Each one of us makes up the church—we are its living stones. As a community, we are invited to manifest the kingdom of God right here and now.

The church calls us to transform our world, both inside and outside our church buildings. We must call out abuse wherever we see it, and we should strive to build a world where people are cherished and valued.

—Sarah Yaklic, “Moving from Hurt to Action in Today’s Sex Abuse Crisis” in *grottonetwork.com*.

Culture, attitude, theology must shift

My point has always been that the law alone does not solve problems. Yes, we need standards and strategy. But culture eats strategy for breakfast, and law does not change culture on its own. Yes, we need laws, and therefore I have suggested to canon lawyers that they consider clearly defining what is punishable and how will it be punished and not leaving all the space for discrimination and decision making to the senior judge, as it is now. But we need also a change of culture and attitude in the sense of “I am prepared to do whatever can be done and to pay a high cost, a cost that may be as high as my removal from office, to do all I can so young people are safe.” ...

How do we understand being a church in the world today? What do we need to learn in relationship to modern society, modern science, modern administration? There is a model of theology that is disconnected from all this, and people may say theology is a completely different cup of tea, but do we not need to reflect within the context of the day-to-day life in which we live? For example in an era of mass communications, of social media, of transparency, of authenticity, etc., don’t we need to reflect on its impact on our faith life, the relationships among us, our relationships to God?

—Father Hans Zollner, S.J., president of the Center for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, in an interview on *americamagazine.org*.

Vulnerable adults and structural change

I think you could eliminate a lot of this abuse [of vulner-

YOUR THOUGHTS, PLEASE

HORIZON editors would like to probe your thoughts on two questions:

1. What does a healthy church culture look like?
- 2). What prayers, practices, or perspectives give you hope?

We ask the first question because the problems in church culture that have led to abuses of power are in open discussion right now, and where that discussion takes us will affect vocation ministry. The second question has always been important and we hope HORIZON continues to be a place where vocation ministers share the ways they are sustained in ministry.

Unless you specifically ask us to NOT print your name and/or response, the editors will consider using your submission in whole or part in future editions. Not all responses will be used; those used will be edited for length and editorial style.

Please send your responses to cscheiber@nrvc.net

Thank you for being part of these important discussions.

able adults] by changing things structurally within the church. When I look at these cases, and I look at them all the time, I see many people who are lonely, I see people who are not mature sexually, or they are experimenting; but by and large, they are just seeking contact with other people in a very natural and intimate way.

Maintaining a celibate lifestyle is easy for some men, challenging for others and impossible for some. Does that mean the man cannot be a good priest? This is a question that needs to be discussed within the framework of how to prevent future misconduct. This is not to say that eliminating the celibacy mandate will prevent all future [adult-on-adult] abuse. But for many of these priests, their human needs are not being met. And that leaves them to fill the loneliness with stupid behavior that I see so often.

—Kathleen McChesney, who established and led the Office of Child and Youth Protection of the U.S. bishops, in an interview on *americamagazine.org*