

In the Vineyard

January 4, 2007

As most of our readers know, VOTF will mark its fifth anniversary this year. Our emergence was occasioned by the horrific revelations in Boston, Massachusetts on January 6, 2002 of a long-standing practice in the Catholic Church of clergy sexual abuse of children and the moat built by some bishops and priests around those crimes. See Commentary for "VOTF: Five Years Old".

VOTF NATIONAL News

VOTF has appreciated the twenty months of genuinely pastoral care by Executive Director Ray Joyce. Ray will be leaving VOTF for another opportunity and to spend more time with his family. Long-time VOTF member Mark Mullaney will step in as interim Executive Director. See Mary Pat Fox's announcement [here](#).

Remembering VOTF's beginnings - Boston VOTF to host a fifth anniversary Mass in the church where VOTF began. The first meeting was called on the heels of the *Boston Globe's* disclosure of clergy sexual abuse and its cover up. The VOTF Boston Council is sponsoring a day of remembrance for all those who have been wounded by this tragedy. A Mass will be held on SATURDAY, JAN. 6, 9 A.M., AT ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST CHURCH, 9 Glen Rd. in Wellesley, MA, (just off Rt. 16) followed by a RECEPTION in the St. John school basement (Philbin Hall) where the first listening sessions were conducted.

Survivor Community News – A message from SNAP New England on the fifth anniversary of the Boston Globe's disclosure; an exhibit at Weston Jesuit School of Theology titled "Heart of Sorrow, Heart of Wisdom: A Memorial of Hope and Renewal for the Sexual Abuse Tragedy"; new leadership for the VOTF National Survivor Support Working Group; Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, a psychologist who works with survivors of sexual abuse, comments in the Dec. 29 issue of *National Catholic Reporter*; "Hand of God" documentary details. Carolyn Disco, VOTF NH, reviews "Hand of God".

"SOME-Things" to Think About:

One of the longest serving and most pastoral voices in the Church has been removed from his parish. Read about **Bishop Gumbleton's upcoming departure** at <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/>; and his own remarks to *National Catholic Reporter*, where his "Peace Pulpit" column will continue: http://www.ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006d/122906/122906j.php.

More on the **Bishop Bruskewitz/Cardinal Re excommunication story** at *Commonweal*. Go to <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/post/index/653/Bruskewitz-excommunication--canon-law>; also Bishop Bruskewitz responds to the excommunication move against Call to Action and other reform organizations in the diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska. See *National Catholic Register* at <http://ncregister.com/site/article/1643>.

“**Pope Benedict XVI’s** personal preacher, it was reported recently, asked the pope to declare a day of fasting and penance to atone for the ‘abominations’ committed inside the church ‘by its own ministers and pastors.’” Several correspondents have objected to what they see as misplaced responsibility; one said, “Why should I do penance for the transgressions of pedophile priests and the criminal bishops who shelter them?” See *National Catholic Reporter* for this story at http://www.ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006d/122906/122906x.php and let us know what *you* think at pthorp.ed@votf.org.

Church finances continue to alarm: Kris Ward sent the following story from the *Cincinnati Inquirer*: “Money is so tight at the Archdiocese of Cincinnati that the central office is now taking a bigger share of donations from its parishes’ Sunday collection plates.” <http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061231/NEWS01/612310366/-1/all>.

Villanova University’s Charles Zech’s study of church embezzlement is noted at these sites: Catholic Online at http://www.catholic.org:80/national/national_story.php?id=22413 and http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=22414; *National Catholic Reporter* at <http://ncrcafe.org/node/779>.

Remember the little church that roared? The recent story about St. Stanislaus Kostka ran on KMOX at http://knox.com/play_window.php?audioType=Episode&audioid=194609. “KMOX’s Berta Collins takes an in-depth look at how things have changed for St. Stanislaus Koska, and for the priest who’s been leading the faithful.”

DIOCESE/State Watch

Bridgeport, CT: “As expected, the Diocese of Bridgeport has filed an appeal of a Superior Court judge’s ruling that thousands of pages of secret court files involving lawsuits against some of its priests be made public.” See the *Hartford Courant* at <http://www.courant.com/news/local/statewire/hc-27005846.apds.m0779.bc-ct--churdec27,0,7140959.story>.

VOTF Kentucky representatives met with chief officers of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky. The affiliate was hoping to gain support from Kentucky’s four bishops to strengthen legislation for the protection of children. From Louisville, KY Area VOTF coordinator Vince Grenough came the following message: “I am very happy to tell you that the meeting in Frankfort yesterday with the staff of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky and leaders of Voice of the Faithful in Kentucky went very well. We view it as a good first step toward a working partnership between VOTF and our four Kentucky Catholic bishops to strengthen laws regarding sexual abuse of children. Details will follow.”

- The *Kentucky Post* notes that the Vatican “has overturned a more than four-year-old decision of Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk” to place a former Elder High School teacher on administrative leave.” The article notes that the priest is back on active duty and that this priest had already reached a settlement with an accuser. For the full story, go to <http://news.cincypost.com:80/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061230/NEWS02/612300345>

Chicago, IL: According to the *Chicago Sun Times*: “The Archdiocese of Chicago has reprimanded the principal of Our Lady of the Westside School for allowing her boss, the Rev. Daniel McCormack, to teach and coach at the elementary school even after sex abuse allegations came to light, NBC 5 reported Monday night.” The principal has accused the Archdiocese of using her as a scapegoat. See http://www.suntimes.com/news/metro/177746_CST-NWS-priest19.article and http://cbs2chicago.com/local/local_story_353231505.html.

Remembering Fr. Jim: A few weeks ago the *Vineyard* published a message about Fr. Jim Sullivan’s (NY) illness; he died on December 13. For the notice of Fr. Jim’s death, go to <http://www.legacy.com/Link.asp?I=LS000020280892X>. For Guest Book comments, go to <http://www.legacy.com/Newsday/GB/GuestbookView.aspx?PersonId=20280892>. Thanks to Fr. Jim’s good friend Cathy Kelly for keeping *Vineyard* readers in touch with Jim’s last weeks.

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

Pope John Paul II’s call for a “new feminism” received some recent attention at Notre Dame. Go to http://uscatholic.claretians.org/site/News2?abbr=usc_&page=NewsArticle&id=11611. What do you think? Write to pthorp.ed@votf.org.

LETTERS to the editor respond to commentaries on dissent that appeared in the Dec. 14 *Vineyard*.

QUOTE for our time: “The minister of the word, the preacher and author, the confessor and counselor, now wore the mantle of prophet. He could make you feel uneasy if you did not take a stand. But if you honestly disagreed with him on the best way to approach these issues you did not lose his affection. He was encouraged when this spring Bishop DiMarzio working with the presbyteral council hosted a meeting with the resigned priests of the diocese, a gathering that has opened many new lines of communication.... May Christ the good Shepherd, the Shepherd of souls, welcome you home.” *From the eulogy for Fr. James Sullivan delivered by Msgr. Ed Wetterer.*

National News

The VOTF Boston Council is sponsoring a day of remembrance of all those who have been wounded by this tragedy. A Mass will be held on SATURDAY, JAN. 6, 9 A.M., AT ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST CHURCH, 9 Glen Rd. in Wellesley, MA, (just off Rt. 16) followed by a RECEPTION in the St. John school basement (Philbin Hall) where the first listening sessions were conducted.

SURVIVOR Community News

COMMEMORATING the fifth anniversary of the public disclosure of clergy sexual abuse and its cover up, January 6, 2002 in the *Boston Globe*:

- *From* Ann Hagan Webb, SNAP New England Coordinator, 781-239-1182: On SUNDAY JANUARY 7, 2007, SNAP (The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) and STTOP (Speak Truth to Power) will host a PANEL PRESENTATION featuring David Clohessy, National President of SNAP, Carmen Durso, lawyer for clergy abuse survivors, Walter Robinson, *Boston Globe* spotlight team, and others in Boston. A solidarity march recognizing that the “crisis isn’t over” will begin at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross at 1:30 p.m. It will proceed to the New England School of Law (154 Stuart St., Boston) where David Clohessy will lead a panel discussion on: SECRETS TOLD — A Five Year Retrospective on Clergy Abuse.

SNAP is also scheduling events in the several other locations. For the latest update go to SNAP’s website at <http://www.snapnetwork.org/>

HEART OF SORROW, HEART OF WISDOM: A MEMORIAL OF HOPE AND RENEWAL FOR THE SEXUAL ABUSE TRAGEDY

This is a proposal for a memorial of the sexual abuse tragedy by Samuel Fuller O.F.M. Cap. Fuller is an artist/sculptor and a student at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology who conceived of this memorial as a class project. A scale model is currently on display at the EDS/Weston Library.

VOTF and SNAP members as well as all interested individuals are invited to view the exhibit and meet the artist on Monday, January 8, at 7:00 PM. We will gather at 5 Phillips Pl., Cambridge, on the campus of Weston Jesuit and then go to the Library across the street. Refreshments will be served. On street parking is available especially in the area around the Cambridge Common. The school is located close to the Common and near the Sheraton Commander Hotel.

Zingerplatz Pictures announced the long promised DVD release of its Award winning feature length **documentary, “Hand of God.”** This full-length ”Director’s Cut” version of the film – as seen at film festivals and other screenings across the country – is now

available for purchase by credit card directly from the “Hand of God” film website. Go to the “Buy the DVD” page where you can utilize Google. For residents of Boston’s North Shore, the DVD can also be purchased at CinemaSalem – the site of several sold-out screenings of the film. Other stores may be supplying the DVD in the coming months.

Hand of God also premieres on PBS’ Frontline on January 16th at 9:00pm. For more details [click here](#).

NEW Leadership in the Survivor Support Working Group – Kris Ward

Kris distributed the message below on December 28

Today, December 28, is the Feast of the Innocents. As we mark it we are nine days from the fifth anniversary of the breaking of the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the Archdiocese of Boston on January 6, 2002.

Today speaks in a chilling way of the horror and tragedy. Murder in the first century speaks to us across 20 centuries into the third millennium where again there is horror inflicted upon innocents, the victims of clergy sexual abuse.

This feast dates back as far as the fourth century. It is a curious coincidence that we now know from Father Doyle, Richard Sipe and Patrick Wall’s book, *Sex, Priests and Secret Code* that the sexual abuse of children goes back to the fourth century as well.

It seems, in a sad yet real way, that this day should come before the anniversary — the Epiphany of our knowledge of the scandal, and the beginning of the faithful’s response in our movement as Voice of the Faithful. The victim survivors, their families, those who did not survive and their families, suffered for so long in a limbo of sorts before the scandal broke. In this space of days, we can give honor to their suffering by re-pledging ourselves to the support of survivors and reinvigorating our efforts to show and be that support. There is so much more to be done and so many more people needed to do it. .

There is a passing of the torch this day, an appropriate day we believe, for news of the Survivor Support Working Group. Steve Sheehan and Marge Bean who have diligently carried the leadership of this Working Group have asked for reinforcements — and rightly so. They have labored long and hard. I and they believe that there are members of Voice of the Faithful throughout the country and the world who will walk this painful but, oh so necessary journey with them and use all of our will and mien to bring as much good out of this tragedy as can be done. Nothing is impossible with God.

I am honored to become the chair of this Working Group and with this message invite your participation as well. This is a Working Group without limitation. Please don’t hold back.

Anniversaries are times to take stock. They are deeply part of our lives as Catholics and as close to us as the anniversaries we mark each year of the Nativity and the sacred Triduum.

As we come to the brink of this important anniversary for our movement, please take time on this Feast of the Innocents to re-examine what impelled you to join Voice of the Faithful.

There would be no opportunity for reform in our time if not for the suffering of the innocents. The Survivor Support Working Group seeks your support --- and your action. Please take a moment to join. We will keep the whole organization abreast of our news but there is much work and action needed. --- across the country and the world. If not you, then who?

Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, a psychologist who works with survivors of sexual abuse, comments in the Dec. 29 issue of *National Catholic Reporter*; "Since sexual abuse of young people by priests drew national attention in 2002, church officials have offered a litany of assertions that things are not really as bad as they seem, or that groups and individuals, such as the scandal-obsessed media or those opposed to the teachings of the church, are engaging with the crisis to advance their own agendas. Lately, there is a new word on the street. Now, according to the claims of spokespersons for the church, it's plaintiffs' attorneys and their greedy clients who are victimizing the Catholic church and fueling the scandal." Subscribers can access the full text at http://www.ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006d/122906/122906m.php.

Hand of God film exposes McCormack's record A Review by Carolyn Disco

Hand of God, a documentary in which a survivor of sexual abuse by Rev. Joseph Birmingham exposes the denials, evasions and lies to him by Bishop John McCormack will be broadcast on national television beginning Tuesday, January 16, 2007, 9PM on Public Television's *Frontline* series.

Check for local listings at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/handofgod/#> The film was written, produced and directed by Joe Cultrera, the brother of survivor Paul Cultrera. It tells the story of Paul and his family over the last 40 years as they come to terms with Birmingham's molestation.

The documentary does not descend into depression, but recounts with intelligence and laugh-out-loud humor, the struggle to fight back. "It is a poetic portrait of family, community and the triumph of individual spirits," according to brother Joe. Paul traces his reactions to abuse, from shame and fear, to the courage to heal. His mother and father, 86 and 91 years old respectively, win your heart with their bedrock love of family. Their willingness to participate in the film is a gift. But their sense of betrayal is palpable, reinforced at the end by the closure of the parish that had defined their community.

Where the story takes a sharp turn is in Paul's encounters with Bishop John McCormack in 1994, 30 years after the abuse. Paul charges McCormack with lying to him about his knowledge of Birmingham's record.

Paul said McCormack had told him the only information he had about Birmingham was from a 1970-1 report, and that he had had no contact with Birmingham or subsequent knowledge of other abuse. He added that Birmingham had died about six or seven years ago. Paul went home

to New Mexico, and later called McCormack to ask for a copy of the death certificate, to confirm the abuser was really dead. Paul was having recurring nightmares that he was still alive.

At that point, contrary to statements about no contact between the two, Paul says McCormack spoke of visiting Birmingham in the hospital, and going to his funeral. Paul ultimately discovered there were multiple victims McCormack knew about, found six documents to prove it, and even learned that the two were seminary classmates who had celebrated their silver anniversaries together on a European trip. In his capacity as secretary of ministerial personnel since 1984, Paul felt McCormack must have had significant knowledge of Birmingham's record.

For example, McCormack was the recipient of a treatment center's report about Birmingham in 1987, which noted Birmingham had not abused in 17 years. McCormack did not inform doctors that Birmingham re-offended before being sent away, information he admitted in a deposition he "might have" had. He also admitted that he and a bishop with whom he worked at the time would have talked about Birmingham's record of abuse. McCormack typically claims that he did not have access to secret archives until 1993; perhaps in many instances he did not need it since he discussed, created or received so many archive documents himself. But in depositions, his memory loss is of astounding proportions.

Paul was deeply affected by McCormack's dishonesty and wrote a statement titled, *The Preacher is Lying*, part of which is referenced in the movie. It would have meant so much to Paul to know that he was far from the only victim of Birmingham. He said McCormack's advice to "put it all behind" him and not sue the diocese was self-serving. After smelling deception, Paul did sue, and wrote that during negotiations McCormack denied that the Archdiocese had knowledge of abuse prior to Paul's. Documents released in 2002 proved that claim false.

The sequences about McCormack are damning, and like the rest of the film, filled with religious imagery. Water, symbolic of baptism, is a recurring theme, flowing over altar boy figurines, eventually drowning them. The deft use of many images conveys the shattered lives wrought by deference to clergy.

Paul and Joe understandably want nothing to do with Catholicism, while their parents continue to be active, though aware of the pain associated with the Church. Paul Sr. says, "I'm 91"; his faith is ingrained over a lifetime. Their mother smiles lovingly, that, no, she does not believe her sons will go to hell for leaving their practice of the faith.

An astonishing postscript to Paul's statement about McCormack's lies came in February 2004, when McCormack visited a Merrimack parish. When I asked the bishop to acknowledge please his lies to Paul and others, so that people could heal based on truthful responses, McCormack denied lying and asked me, "Do you believe the survivors or do you believe me?" I was dumbfounded. This documentary reinforces my original silent answer: I unreservedly believe Paul Cultrera, since my bishop prefers spin to telling the plain, simple truth.

COMMENTARY

THOMAS MERTON ON ECCLESIAL REFORM AND RENEWAL

Rev. Patrick W. Collins, Ph.D.

This is the third and final installment of Fr. Collins' essay. See the Vineyard issues of Nov. 16 and 30 for the first two parts. The VOTF Cleveland, OH site has the complete

text at www.votfcleveland.org and Fr. Collins has his own web site at www.vatican2.org/patrickcollins/.

Another of his concerns was what he discerned to be the Church's becoming swallowed up in excessive activism in order to prove its worth in the secularized twentieth century. This was a betrayal of its purpose to be prayerful and a contemplative presence in the world. He asked, as the third session was about to begin why that was happening? "I think the root of the trouble is fear and truculence, unrealized, deep down. The realization that the Church of Rome is not going to be able to maintain a grandiose and preeminent sort of position, the old prestige she has always had and the decisive say in the things of the world, to some extent even in the last centuries. Contemplation will be regarded more and more as an official 'dynamo' source of inspiration and power for the big guns out there: Carmelite nuns generating electricity for the Holy Office, not so much by contemplative prayer as by action and official public prayer within an enclosure. In a word, the tempter of the Roman Church is combative and 'aroused' and the emphasis on contemplation is (if there is any at all) dominated by a specific end in view so that implicitly contemplation becomes ordered to action, which is so easy in a certain type of scholastic thought, misunderstood. When this happens, the real purity of the life of prayer is gone." (HGL ,367-368)

At the end of session three Merton was more convinced than ever that the Church was having great difficulty moving beyond its ancient philosophical structures which meant little to that time and place. "It is even more true that among many Christians there is a lack of a living presence and witness to God, but rather an abundance of words and formulas, together with rites that many no longer understand. It is the old problem of institutional religion and of traditions that remain fixed in the past" (HGL, 452).

The Trappist wrote to a Sufi scholar, Martin Lings, in early 1965 of feeling caught between baroque conservatism and "a rather irresponsible and fantastic progressivism a la Teilhard." He was trying to cling to what he called "a sane and living traditionalism in full contact with the living contemplative experience of the past – and with the presence of the Spirit here and now." (HGL, 454) He somewhat cynically sensed that progressives didn't know what they were talking about "in their declarations about modern man, the modern world, etc. Perhaps they are dealing with some private myth or other. That is their affair." (HGL 546) Merton was in favor definitely of "a new mentality" in the Church but one that "implies above all a recovery of ancient and original wisdom. And a real contact with what is right before our noses" (HGL, 382).

In the years following the Council, despite the initial enthusiasm for renewal and reform, Thomas Merton judged that the conciliar hopes were being sidetracked or neglected. "It is getting clearer and clearer that the institutional Church does not measure up to the tasks that she believes and proclaims to be hers, and it is a wonder more people are not fully aware of that. I guess a lot are..." (HGL, 166). He expressed his fears that an authoritarian Church would destroy itself by becoming increasingly incredible to its thinking members. "Authority has simply been abused too long in the Catholic Church and for many people it just becomes utterly stupid and intolerable to have to put up with

the kind of jackassing around that is posed in God's name. It is an insult to God Himself and in the end it can only discredit all idea of authority and obedience. There comes a point where they simply forfeit the right to be listened to" (HGL, 230).

In early 1967, in correspondence with Rosemary Radford Ruether, the monk was trying to identify his place within the Church, wondering if he belonged there any longer. "I do wonder at times if the Church is real at all, I believe it, you know. But I wonder if I am nuts to do so. Am I part of a great big hoax? ...there is a real sense of and confidence in an underlying reality, the presence of Christ in the world which I don't doubt for an instant. But is that presence where we are all saying it is? We are all pointing (in various directions) and my dreadful feeling is that we are all pointing wrong. Could you point someplace for me maybe?" (HGL, 499-500)

Ruether told Merton she considered the Church to be less of an institution and more of a "happening." He liked that image and thought that if the two of them and others were thinking in this direction "then there is something going on." He said, though, that he felt the Church of the future "will be a very scattered Church for a while. But as long as I know what directions to be the one to go in, I will gladly go in it." He just did not want his sense of Church to be a "deception." "Because if that is where God speaks and the Spirit acts, then I can be confident that God has not abandoned us. Nor left us at the mercy of the princes of the Church." As he looked back over the history of the Church, he could see "a bigger and bigger hole of conscious bad faith." One example of which was the Catholic Church's dictating to all other religions "that we are the one authentic outfit that has the real goods" (HGL, 500-502).

By mid-1967 Merton was clear that he needed "to be free from a sort of denominational tag. Though I have one in theory (people still have me categorized in terms of *The Seven Storey Mountain*). I am really not any of the things they think, and I don't comfortably wear the label of monk either, because I am now convinced that the first way to be a decent monk is to be a non-monk and an anti-monk, as far as the 'image' goes: but I am certainly quite definite about wanting to stay in the bushes (provided I can make some sort of noises that will reach my offbeat friends)..." (HGL, 511) He even told Ruether that, in some ways, he was "sneaking out the back door of the Church without telling myself that this is what I am doing. I don't feel guilty about this, though, and am conscious of it" (HGL, 509).

Later in 1967 the Trappist wrote of his pure faith as a Christian. "Of all religions, Christianity is the one that least needs techniques, or least needs to depend on them. Nor is the overemphasis on sacraments necessary either: the great thing is faith. With a pure faith, our use of techniques, our understanding of the psyche and our use of the sacraments all become really meaningful. Without it, they are just routines" (HGL 532).

Thomas Merton's attitude toward church reform came through perhaps most strongly in his reactions to the resignation of English theologian, Father Charles Davis, both from the priesthood and from the Roman Catholic Church in early 1967. He judged Davis' criticisms of the hierarchy as not "altogether baseless or unjust." Merton said that the

institutional church at that time was “too antiquated, too baroque, and is so often in practice unjust, inhuman, arbitrary and even absurd in its functioning. It sometimes imposes useless and intolerable burdens on the human person and demands outrageous sacrifices, often with no better result than to maintain a rigid system in its rigidity and to keep the same abuses established, one might think, until kingdom comes.”

While Merton shared and respected Davis’ anguish about the state of church affairs, he could not, however, follow him in his conclusion “that the institutional Church has now reached the point where it can hardly be anything other than dishonest, tyrannical, mendacious and inhuman...” “One can feel Fr. Davis is still a brother without coming to the same conclusions as he did.”

Merton noted an endemic pattern of combativeness in Catholicism, a necessity to prove an adversary wrong and a compulsion to always be right. This, he said, can easily lead to witch-hunting in the Church and “finally needs to find them in Rome.” “There comes a time when it is no longer important to prove one’s point, but simply to live, to surrender to God and to love. There have been bad days when I might have considered doing what Fr. Davis has done. In actual fact I have never seriously considered leaving the Church, and though the question of leaving the monastic state has presented itself, I was not able to take it seriously for more than five or ten minutes.... The absurdity, the prejudice, the rigidity and unreasonableness one encounters in some Catholics are nothing whatever when placed in the balance with the grace, love and infinite mercy of Christ in His Church.... This by no means implies passive obsequiousness and blind obedience, but a willingness to listen, to be patient, and to keep working to help the Church change and renew herself from within. This is our task. Therefore by God’s grace I remain a Catholic, a monk and a hermit.”

Finally in this Lenten circular letter to friends, Merton wrote that, ever since he had come to live in his hermitage, he has wanted to stop fighting and arguing and proclaiming and criticizing. “When one gets older,” he said, “one realizes the futility of a life wasted in argument when it should be given entirely to love” (*Road to Joy*, 95-97).

In the end Merton could see himself as a bridge builder within the Church “to keep communication open between the extremists at both ends.” For “whatever may happen,” he believed, “let us remember that persons are more important than opinions.” (HGL, 324-325) One of the things he most admired about John XXIII was his commitment to the Socratic principle. **“This means respect for persons, to the point where the person of the adversary demands a hearing even when the authority of one’s own ecclesial institution might appear to be temporarily questioned. Actually, this Socratic confidence in dialogue implies a deeper faith in the Church than you find in a merely rigid, defensive, and negative attitude which refuses all dialogue. The negative view really suggests that the Church has something to lose by engaging in dialogue with her adversaries. This in turn is a rejection of the Christian Socratism which sees that truth develops in conversation.”** [bold added] This meant for John and for Merton that one meets one’s adversary as an equal and “The moment one does this, he ceases to be an adversary” (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 217-218). He could

see this new life for the Church beginning to be expressed in Latin American, Africa and Asia and he felt that the real movement, when it comes, will start of itself.

Perhaps, as his life ended suddenly and tragically in 1968 at the early age of 53, Thomas Merton had become in his own renewal and reform an incarnation of something he had written to Catherine de Hueck Doherty in 1966: “Well, we won’t really get out of the wilderness until everything is pressed out and there is nothing left but the pure wine to be offered to the Lord, transubstantiated into his blood” (HGL, 24).

CONCLUSION

What can we who continue to care about ecclesial renewal and reform learn from these gleanings from Merton’s writings?

The Church is not primarily an organization but an organism. One seeks to reform the structures of an organism in a much more interior way than one sets about to restructure an organization. One begins in a sense from the inside and works toward the outside. I submit that one of the reasons the reforms of the Second Vatican Council ran into trouble and have caused so much contention and division is that reform was not preceded by or at least accompanied by profound spiritual renewal in the Mertonian model. In many ways today’s intense questing for spirituality can be read precisely as a symptom of the Church’s failure to take spiritual renewal more seriously than ecclesial reform.

Reforming Church governance is not about shared power but about mutual empowerment in the Holy Spirit. And that comes first of all and primarily from being persons and communities of shared contemplative prayer. Otherwise it can become much ado about nothing. Theology can be a word game and governance a power struggle.

The Church exists as servant of The Reign of God. It is not about itself but is a pointer to The Point. Unless spiritual renewal is at the core of ecclesial reform, the cart can be before the horse and the entire endeavor will not be properly rooted and grounded. It will be like building a house on sand rather than on a firm foundation. That is why I began by quoting an old age: A theologian is one who prays and one who prays is a theologian. And Thomas Merton was just such a contemplative theologian.

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LETTERS to the editor

Letters responding to *Vineyard* Nov. 30 commentary on Dissent:

“Just an historical note on Gaile Pohlhaus’ comment on Bp. Bruskewicz’s excommunication venture: the original Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1917, not 1910.

All of us on the liberal side of the aisle remember (at least if we are over 50) our pleased reaction when Abp. Rummel excommunicated New Orleans politician Leander Perez and some of his associates over their resistance to the racial integration of parochial schools and Cardinal Cushing’s excommunication of Leonard Feeney over his extremist interpretation of *extra ecclesia nulla salus*. I think in both of those circumstances excommunication made sense where there was a danger that people both inside and outside the Church would misunderstand positions taken by prominent Catholics as being within acceptable parameters of orthodoxy. Because of the variety of positions taken by the various groups whose members were excommunicated by Bishop Bruskewicz, I am uncertain whether the message is as clear. If not, did it need to be sent?” *Michael R. Merz*

“I’m wondering whether VOTF has issued any response to the new USCCB document on receiving Communion.

The document seems to bar anyone with a disagreement with magisterial teaching from receiving Communion. The new document reads: ‘If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain.’

How sad to see this rigid stance from the same body that, in 1968, published norms for licit theological dissent!

Here’s a selection from the 1968 text. After making clear that the ordinary response to clear and authoritative magisterial teaching is assent, they state: ‘The expression of theological dissent from the magisterium is in order only if the reasons are serious and well-founded, if the manner of dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the Church and is such as not to give scandal.’ In sum: In 1968 the bishops recognized the liceity of dissent, though requiring that it be careful and respectful, while today’s leadership expects those who dissent to refrain from communion. In sum, the cost of dissent on non-infallible teachings is to be cut off from the grace of Eucharistic communion. Thomas Aquinas, who recognized that true teaching need not fear intelligent discussion, even disagreement, must be weeping.

It is clearly the case that much contemporary dissent on non-infallible teachings, including the question of the ordination of women, priestly celibacy, contraception, homosexual relationships, et al. do meet the norms for licit dissent according to the 1968 document. And I would note that the present document is itself a revision—a dissent!—from the earlier authoritative bishops’ document.

Since VOTF has been vocal in raising questions concerning Church practices, and calling for change, it might be worth keeping an eye on how this document is used. My sense is that it provides further documentary justification for actions like Bruskewitz’s, though of course this document only urges those in disagreement to ‘refrain’ from Eucharist.

Thank you for your work!” *Lisa Fullam, Ass’t Prof. of Moral Theology, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley*

VOTF: Five Years Old

Even With ...

As most of our readers know, VOTF will mark its fifth anniversary this year. Our emergence was occasioned by the horrific revelations in Boston, Massachusetts on January 6, 2002 of a calculated and long-standing practice in the Catholic Church of clergy sexual abuse of children and a moat built by some bishops and priests around those crimes. The moat remains in place *even with* the advent of VOTF, BishopAccountability.org, and other older organizations (SNAP foremost among them) that continue to demand accountability throughout the Church; *even with* dioceses being hauled into court in order to get at the truth; *even with* the publication of grand juries’ reports that read like the most sordid of fictions; *even with* state legislative reforms that “correct” inadequate statutes of limitations while the Church fights those same reforms; *even with* survivors continuing to emerge with yet more stories of abuse; *even with* the current Pope’s call for honesty and justice in the interest of survivors and their families. The “even withs” go on and on.

In the next several issues of *In the Vineyard*, we will post commentaries and reflections on the past five years of our shared awakening; taken together, these years must be seen as a phenomenal shift in the way Catholics are Church – from the U.S. and Canada to Ireland and Australia. In one sense we have come a great distance from what Jim Post called couch-potato Catholicism; in another sense, we have much further to go than we could have guessed in 2002. We invite you to participate in this ongoing discussion of the way we are/will be Church in the 21st Century. Write to pthorp.ed@votf.org.

From Svea Fraser, founding chair of the Priests’ Support Working Group

1/6/02 was another 9/11 for us Catholics. For me, it was a double whammy as I was serving as a Catholic chaplain at Wellesley College, leading an energetic group of Newman students and encouraging them on their faith journey. Suddenly, the Church that is my home, and the Church that I represented professionally, was revealed as guilty of a horrific crisis of abuse and cover up. The feelings of shock, outrage, betrayal and

confusion rushed in on me like a tsunami of destruction. I went to speak with my friend and mentor, Fr. John Philbin (boy, do I miss him!) and asked him, “What do I do?” Unhesitatingly, he responded, “You tell the truth.”

Our movement grew out of that conviction: we had to raise our voices. We could not remain silent until justice is served and trust is rebuilt. We have all been betrayed—none so egregiously as the children who have been abused, but everyone of us has had something precious stolen from us.

Unlike the twin towers that fell to the ground within an hour on 9/11, the buttresses of the institutional Church are still crumbling as we continue to use our voices (and our time and our talents) against injustices that have not ceased since that fateful day.

From Peggie L. Thorp, founding editor of Voice and In the Vineyard

January 6, 2002 was the half-way mark in a two-year “sabbatical” I’d taken in order to write a book. The working title was *Why We Stay* and it was purporting to address the question of what keeps otherwise intelligent women in such a diminishing and discriminating institution. My thesis was that one keeps the institutional Church at arm’s length; we live our faith in the light that touches all the faithful. We stay for that faith and in that light; the hierarchy stays on their side and we stay on ours. Ridiculous, but it seemed to work. The *Boston Globe* on January 6, 2002 basically turned my argument on its head. I remember staring at the paper and hearing myself saying, “This is what we get at arm’s length.” The question, then, moved quickly from the Why of staying in the Catholic Church as a woman to the How of staying as an adult. For me and for thousands of others, Voice of the Faithful grew out of that sentiment. The earliest lesson I learned is that silence is not an option – for the Catholic least involved in the work of the Church, for the lay person most active in parish service, for the parish priest, for the Pope. We have so very far to go but I still believe that the lay voice is imperative *on every single issue that touches our faith lives*. As a faith community, we have to say individually, “These people raped my children; and these others let it happen.” If we can wrest those words from mental images, movie clips, and the journals and testimonies of survivors and their supporters, and own those words, we will never again wrestle with our own silence.

From Mary Scanlon, founding chair of the Support for Survivors Working Group

We have traveled a long road since January 2002. Before that date, many of us Catholics rested comfortably with the image of our Church as the noble protector of the poor, the champion of justice and peace, the safe haven during times of suffering, and the place for celebrating life’s joyful occasions. Surely, we did see imperfections: the neighbor who passed the collection plate while cheating on his taxes or his wife; the embittered priest whose homilies were the antithesis of Christ’s kindness; the self-important bishop whose lust for prestige and power deprived him of the ability to listen and learn from others. We recognized these flaws and even cherished the notion that they were signs of our human frailty – the exceptions that accentuated the overall goodness in the Church. We

believed that the Catholic Church *en masse* was basically all about bringing people into a closer relationship with God by instilling faith, hope, and love. At least I did.

That was five years ago. Before the *Boston Globe* reported Father John Geoghan's sexual abuse of children, then a cascade of other offenders. Before we learned that Cardinal Law had knowingly transferred pedophile priests from one parish to another, and before we learned that other bishops had done the same. In 2002, we saw infiltrating the Church the awful evidence of widespread, criminal, willful disregard for the wellbeing of our children. Once we recovered from the initial shock, we had to ask ourselves to what extent had we lay persons been complicit in the degradation of the Church by forfeiting so much of our spiritual responsibility to the ordained. By neglecting to assume more vital involvement in the life of the Church, we not only allowed, but compelled, the clerical control that has had such destructive results. The aggregation of power in the hierarchy, the demoralization of priests, and the marginalization of the laity, then, must be considered at least in part due to the apathy of the laity. Of course, those who directly violated children - our children - and those who knowingly shielded them bear unequivocal responsibility. Nevertheless, there is plenty of shame to go around, and we lay persons must accept some of it.

As I look back on 2002, I now realize that I was incredibly naïve, and comfortable in my ignorance. Then, suddenly, my frame of reference was shattered. A short anecdote may help to explain. When VOTF was in its incipient stage, I was part of a delegation that met with Cardinal Law's inner circle in an attempt to help the hierarchy to understand the devastating effects of child abuse. During the meeting - and a stiff meeting it was - we offered the insights of family but were told that "revelation is given to the hierarchy, not to the laity". Suddenly, I knew for certain that I would have to commit to changing this Church if I hoped to stay in it at all.

Worshipping in community has always been an important source of guidance and sustenance for my family and me, and I believe that we learn important lessons about the dynamic love of God through natural and spiritual families. I needed a spiritual family, people who are authentic, tolerant, just, dedicated, and wise. I turned to people of courage whom I saw speaking up and taking action, even in the face of rejection and personal risk, namely the survivors of clergy sexual assault, priests who championed the dignity and rights of those who are marginalized (even to the point of placing their livelihoods in jeopardy), and other members of the VOTF community. Their bravery inspires me to speak out against injustice and intolerance, and to work for reform from within this Church that I love.

I believe that the Catholic Church can become relevant again in the lives of those who search for a framework of living decent lives and raising children in dignity, but only if we the laity raise up and claim the promise of Vatican II. I believe that revelation *is* given to the laity, and that with that revelation comes the responsibility to claim a share of the Resurrection for all of God's children. Let us not leave the job to others, not to the priests, not to the bishops, not to other lay people, but let us each individually and collectively take on the job ourselves. What a powerful sign of the radical love of God.

This is my prayer for the New Year.