

June 18 In the Vineyard

News from National

The following press release was sent out yesterday from VOTF.

VOTF QUESTIONS BISHOPS' ABILITY TO LEAD

June 17, 2009

Boston- As bishops gather in San Antonio for the spring meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Voice of the Faithful wonders what they will accomplish. Unfortunately, the agenda for this meeting reflects a lack of leadership that Catholics have come to expect from their bishops. Instead of addressing continued failures of transparency and accountability, the opening of records about clergy abuse and the availability of the sacraments for future generations, the U.S. bishops plan to discuss liturgical translations, marriage, and a liturgy of thanksgiving for human life.

The time to talk about liturgical translations will come, but the leadership needed in the Church today goes far beyond deciding which English word best matches a Latin word inserted centuries ago into the Mass.

Moral leadership begins with addressing continued cover-ups regarding clergy sexual abuse and finding ways to keep our faith communities alive, not closing parishes as an "answer" for declining numbers of celibate diocesan priests. Moral leadership does not fear collaboration with the laity on the many problems facing our Church today.

We pray that the bishops can take steps towards a transformed Church by beginning to address such problems.

2nd Request! Let Your Voices Be Heard! We Need Your Input!

As a grassroots movement, ensuring that the voices of our members are heard is critical to our success. A task force committee has been formed to investigate and propose alternative models to the National Representative Council to best represent the grassroots voice of the VOTF membership. The committee has begun its work and will present proposals at the September meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Co-chairs are Elia Marnik and Mary Pat Fox. Members also include Bill Casey, Ron DuBois, Svea Fraser, Anne Wilson, David Biersmith and Jim Beyers. The committee is actively soliciting input from VOTF members. You can send your suggestions to Elia or Mary Pat at the email addresses below.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Elia Marnik
eliamarnik@comcast.net

Mary Pat Fox
mpfox1@aol.com

Nominations for Priests of Integrity Awards

Presentation at the 2009 VOTF Conference

All affiliates and members of VOTF are invited to nominate priests whose actions exemplify the gospel imperatives of honesty, openness, courage and compassion. While many priests work faithfully and often anonymously in their ministries, we encourage acknowledgment of specific acts that demonstrate the leadership needed in our church.

More Information about
Nominations for Priests of Integrity Awards

Please Join Us!

2009 Voice of the Faithful National Conference

Making our Voices Heard

Hosted by the Long Island Voice of the Faithful

October 30-31 2009

Featured Speakers: Joan Chittister, O.S.B and
Fr. Thomas Reese, S.J.

Location: Huntington Hilton, Melville, Long Island

[Click here for hotel information](#)

Join us as we pray together as one voice, learn about VOTF's current strategic plan and exciting new projects, and participate in stimulating conversations. It is a great chance to catch up with old friends and make some new ones as we convene some of the most active and committed Catholics to "make our voices heard."

Affiliate News

VOTF Ireland Releases Statement

The failure of the Irish Bishops' conference to respond adequately on June 10th to the Ryan report of May 20th means that there is now a complete leadership vacuum in the Irish Catholic Church.

While stating accurately that ‘the Ryan Report represents the most recent disturbing indictment of a culture that was prevalent’ in the church, the Irish bishops do not clearly accept that bishops themselves had any responsibility for this prevalent culture. As all of the indicted institutions lay under the diocesan oversight of Irish bishops – who also clearly failed in their role as supreme guardians and teachers – this is inexcusable.

Nor do the bishops declare any intention to discover the origins and causes of that culture of cruelty - as called for by Bishop Noel Treanor of Down and Connor on May 24th - or to involve the whole people of God in a process of discernment and renewal.

As this amounts to an evasion of their clear responsibility as leaders, the bishops’ offer of pastoral outreach to survivors is completely unconvincing. Generations of Irish bishops have maintained a cruel culture of deadly secrecy, silence and denial in relation to clerical abuse, and have failed as guardians, teachers and pastors. All survivors are owed an explanation and an apology for this.

Convinced that the culture of cruelty indicted in the Ryan report is directly related to the church’s aloof, secretive and unquestionable system of government; to the absence of structures of accountability in every diocese involving lay people as of right; and to the legacy of a distorted theology founded upon Fear rather than Love, we are satisfied that these problems and this culture continue to plague the church. We therefore call upon the Irish Bishops Conference to accept the responsibility of bishops also for this culture, and to initiate an exhaustive inquiry.

Nothing less than this can have any hope of re-establishing the moral authority of Catholic leadership in Ireland, or the lost confidence and trust of the people of God.

Chicagoland VOTF Presents Local Pastor with *Priest of Integrity Award*

Father Pat Brennan, long-time pastor of Holy Family Parish in Inverness IL received the first Priest of Integrity Award from Chicagoland Voice of the Faithful. The Award cited Father Brennan as a gifted preacher, drawing parishioners from 90 surrounding communities, as the driving force behind the formation of small Christian communities, active social justice ministries, and as a man of deep faith who has spoken boldly about the hierarchy’s mishandling of the clergy sexual abuse scandal.

Chicagoland VOTF Presents Local Pastor with *Priest of Integrity Award*

The award was presented at the Pentecost Sunday 11 AM Mass, May 31, 2009, following Father Pat's marvelous homily on "Life in the Spirit" describing the power available to all by intentionally living in the Spirit day in and day out. Recipients of the Priest of Integrity Award are chosen for their courage in speaking out boldly the Gospel truths and confronting injustice in systems and institutions, whether in the world or in the Church itself.

Father Brennan has paid dearly for his courage, especially for speaking out against the mishandling of the clergy sexual abuse scandal and challenging the Church to accountability without regard for his own security. As a result of his courage, his request to remain as pastor of Holy Family until his retirement in two years was denied. Instead, he must leave the Archdiocese of Chicago after serving as a priest of integrity 36 years, to serve in the Joliet diocese.

Following presentation of the award, Father Brennan received a standing ovation from the entire congregation, many of whom were seen weeping in gratitude for Father's gifts and courage and in sadness for the enormous loss for Holy Family parishioners. The entire congregation raised their hands in blessing Father Pat. In a few brief comments following the award presentation, Fr. Brennan said, "In striving to be a person of integrity, I have found freedom. I am now free."

For the text of Father Brennan's homily and the text of the Award, please visit the Holy Family Parish web site at www.holyfamilyparish.org. For more information about Voice of the Faithful, go to www.votf.org or locally slstillsee@aol.com.

An Update from VOTF North Shore – Seacoast Affiliate

Submitted by Eleanora Paciulan

The North Shore and Seacoast Affiliates in Massachusetts decided to merge in May 2008. Members of the two affiliates and the Lynn Affiliate had worked collaboratively on the very successful Adult Education and Faith Formation Series for six years and at a joint meeting of the Steering Committee and Faith Formation Working Group (FFWG) the previous May, dialogue was initiated to see how members could grow together in addressing the three goals of VOTF more effectively.

An Update from VOTF North Shore – Seacoast Affiliate

Submitted by Eleanora Paciulan on the merger of the North Shore and Seacoast affiliates in Massachusetts

Following initial discussions about how members of the North Shore, Seacoast, and Lynn affiliates could better serve VOTF's goals, the North Shore and Seacoast groups chose to merge. The Lynn members indicated a desire to continue being involved with the Faith Formation program; however, their members were too involved in other Lynn activities to commit to a merger. They decided to offer four Faith Formation Presentations for the 2008-09 season and focus on other programs related to the VOTF goals.

The theme of the 2008-09 Faith Formation Program is *The Liturgical Year: Seasons for Spiritual Growth*. The Steering Committee also sponsored two additional presentations that addressed Goals 1 and 2.

- In November 2008, a panel of area pastors spoke on the topic, *What is it like to be a priest?* The dialogue between the priests and attendees was very open, honest, and frank.
- In March 2009, a survivor and a survivors' advocate discussed *Truth and Justice: A journey of Survival*.

Meanwhile, the Faith Formation Working Group has been planning for the 2009-10 program, *Alive in the Holy Spirit*. The Steering Committee is sponsoring a presentation, *Catholic Common Ground Initiative and the Challenge of Dialogue* on October 21, 2009.

Members of our Affiliate have found that through our experience in VOTF, we have been blessed with friendships that have both challenged and enriched our personal faith. In addition to the educational programs mentioned above, we begin each season worshipping together at Mass and socializing afterwards. We close the season with a Pot Luck supper.

A Plea for Honesty and An End to Secrecy

By Joe O'Callaghan

Everyone who believes that justice must be served will welcome the decision of the Connecticut Supreme Court to release court documents relating to sexual abuse by priests of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Depositions and other documents detail the efforts of Bishops Walter W. Curtis and Edward M. Egan and their subordinates to cover up the cruel exploitation of children by pedophile priests.
Continued

A Plea for Honesty and An End to Secrecy

By Joe O'Callaghan

Without warning pastors or people, the bishops in the Diocese of Bridgeport

routinely transferred dangerous child predators from parish to parish. From 1993 when the first lawsuit was filed, the Diocese engaged in a pattern of stonewalling to avoid compensating the survivors. Turning away from the concept of the Church as Christ's Body, Bishop Egan disclaimed any responsibility by declaring that a priest is a self-employed independent contractor. Realizing the absurdity of that claim, he later wrote a letter to all the faithful explaining that he didn't really mean it. In 2001 and 2003 the Diocese paid \$37,700,000 to settle cases of sexual abuse against 32 priests from 1953 to 2003. Since then additional sums have been paid. Fifty years of shame!

In reflecting on this tragic chapter in the history of the Church, one must ask: Where is the outrage? Why did so many priests shamefully mistreat innocent little boys and girls, causing them untold psychological and spiritual harm? Why did the bishops allow this to happen? Why did they not expel such predators from the priesthood? Why did they place the interests of the institutional church above those of the little ones whom Jesus welcomed to his side?

Did they not hear Jesus when he said: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Mt 18:6)? Why did priests who knew about predators in their company not expose them? Why were the Catholic faithful guilty bystanders allowing this disaster to happen?

How many countless dollars has the Diocese expended in litigation over the years since 2002 to prevent the truth from coming to light? How much of the Bishop's Annual Appeal is used for this purpose? What good works of Christian charity might have been accomplished with that money?

The Diocese's latest appeal to the Supreme Court rested on a flimsy claim that Judge Jon Alander of the Superior Court who ruled in favor of unsealing the documents was not impartial because he was serving on a commission to improve the judicial system. Although the Supreme Court rejected that argument, the Diocese is now considering further options.

Why not opt for honesty? Open the documents and allow the truth to be heard and read. In their conferences at Dallas and Washington in 2002 the bishops spoke about the need for accountability and transparency. While paying lip service to transparency, they have steadfastly resisted publication of court documents and church records that will reveal the extent of their complicity and that of their subordinates in the crime of sexual abuse of children. Their massive failure of moral leadership has destroyed the implicit trust of the faithful, who, not surprisingly, greet every pronouncement of the bishops with skepticism.

A study by the Pew Forum in 2008 reported that an ever-increasing number of Catholics, especially young people, are abandoning the Church. The efforts of the bishops of Bridgeport to conceal the truth about priestly sexual abuse of

children surely contribute to that loss. When bishops threaten to withhold the Eucharist from Catholic politicians whom they accuse of not adhering to Church teaching, one might ask why the bishops should even celebrate Eucharist until they admit to their culpability in abetting priest predators?

For too long the Diocese has used delay, denial, deceit, and dishonesty to avoid accepting responsibility for the greatest sin that has afflicted the Church in many centuries. The time for honesty and transparency is at hand. Until every stone is lifted and the light shines brightly on every dark spot concealing some secret, this crisis will not be over and the bishops will not regain the trust of the people that they so foolishly cast aside.

<http://votfbpt.wordpress.com/>

Site Seeing

National Catholic Reporter has come out with another installment in their fascinating series "*In Search of the Emerging Church.*"

<http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/rebuilding-parish-pastor-comes-love-people-more>

Midland Daily News -- *Transparency called for in priest sexual abuse cases*
http://ourmidland.com/articles/2009/06/10/local_news/doc4a300f10cb9be722324027.txt

The Voice of the Faithful chapter of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport heard a riveting account of priestly sexual abuse during its meeting this week.

<http://www.thehour.com/story/470467>

VOTF's Sean O'Conaill is quoted in this article and takes the Church to task for refusing to accept any responsibility in the "culture of cruelty" in the Church.

<http://www.independent.ie/national-news/martin-reveals-personal-disgust-at-abuse-1774646.html>

The Irish Times also covered Archbishop Martin's response at the abuse scandal in the Irish Catholic Church.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2009/0616/1224248900337.html>

Buying something online for Father's Day? Please go to the VOTF.com website and access amazon.com.

Book Review

Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire

By William T. Cavanaugh, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. \$12.00 pb. ISBN-13 978-0-8028-4561-0.

Reviewed by [Benjamin Brown](#), Lourdes College, Sylvania, OH 43560

Cavanaugh's short and clear little book could not have come at a better time. As the United States and the world struggle with the current economic downturn, we are forced to face fundamental questions of the meaning and purpose of economic life. Dueling temptations exist, on the one hand to throw capitalism out as defunct; on the other to cling all the more tightly to the plethora of goods it has produced as we struggle to maintain our comfortable ways of life. Christians have long suggested a middle path, grounded in a deeper philosophical and theological worldview, and Cavanaugh reminds us of that wisdom.

Cavanaugh begins by questioning a commonly accepted notion that freedom exists wherever there are no intervening laws or parties directing someone's actions. This is a negative view of freedom, what Servais Pinckaers calls "freedom from." Cavanaugh suggests with the help of Augustine that true freedom is teleological, directed towards a goal, an end, without which we are largely pushed and pulled about by mostly false desires. True freedom exists only when the real purpose for which we act is being achieved, that is, when all people find fulfillment through such actions. This means that economy must be founded in objective goods, not in a relativistic view which crowns the individual consumer's desire. Thus, economic philosophy needs theology to point to that which is the ultimate fulfillment for human beings, God.

More immediately, one's relationship with God is lived out in relationship with others, in community. Therefore, any economic system which fails to ensure the flourishing of all (insofar as a system by itself can insure such a thing), fails precisely as an economy. When you remove objective goods from the picture, the landscape quickly blanches and freedom itself disappears. Instead, 1) freedom itself atrophies into the following of desire (though where desire comes from is anyone's guess), 2) the many workers are subjected to the economic power of the few and 3) the desires of all are subjected to the conscious manipulation of advertising.

In his second chapter, Cavanaugh makes the counterintuitive claim that the problem with consumerism is not so much over-attachment to things as lack of attachment to anything in particular. The problem is not that we buy things that we want and need, but that in our buying we restlessly shift from one thing to another, aimlessly pursuing no aim (*telos*) at all. Not only is having touted over being, but having itself wanes in the rise of getting. The subsequent analysis of consumerism is filled with insights as Cavanaugh describes it as a state of moral and spiritual formation. He contrasts such consumption with that of the Eucharist, in which the consumer is consumed in a sea of abundance which grounds one in

real, particular goods and thus empowers the consumer to reach out in self-sacrificial action for others. This is exactly the opposite of the disengagement fostered by a consumeristic culture. The key to Cavanaugh's analysis once again lies in a rich view of human flourishing.

Cavanaugh next turns his attention toward globalization, pointing out a variety of concerns, particularly the loss of particularity even in the midst of its proliferation. We are saturated with diversity and variety – products, holidays and people from all over the world – while yet a definite flavor is given to them all as they are “Americanized” and thus lose their particularity. Once again, the solution to this problem lies in being grounded in a center around which the abundance of particulars can be gathered cohesively without being cramped into uniformity. Cavanaugh draws upon von Balthasar's theological insight that Jesus is the “concrete universal,” that catholic center that enables each to be its own in the other.

Finally, Cavanaugh tackles another basic of introductory economics: scarcity drives economic activity. Unless we can find a way of acting out of abundance instead of the fear and greed that lies behind the assumption of scarcity, then our economic life will continue to be self-centered and individualistic. The Eucharist opens up such a possibility, for it tells a story of the overflowing of God's own life given freely to all, of the greatest giving to the “least” because in the end there is no least. Thus, because the Eucharist grounds us in a superabundance of the one thing necessary, as opposed to the economic “war of all against all,” it enables us to act out of that secure center in generous self-giving.

Cavanaugh's treatment of a complex subject is filled with insights, careful analysis, and helpful suggestions. His examination is grounded in sociological research illustrated by dozens of real stories. The writing is clear even when the ideas are complex. He does not stop with analysis; practical suggestions are offered and examples of successful endeavors and communities are provided, however briefly. This book is a must for Catholic and Christian college libraries and might be used well in moral theology courses, particularly in the area of Catholic social teaching.

This review first appeared in *Catholic Books Review*.