

The Prophetic Voices of Our Church

When we first called for greater lay participation in the Church to address needed reforms, many lay people and some clergy welcomed the message and added their own voices. Most of the hierarchy ignored the call or actively opposed our efforts. But as evidence of systemic failures mounts month by month and country by country, we see more and more voices joining our calls for transparency, accountability and meaningful reform. These pages highlight some of those prophetic voices.

Here is a perspective on how and why lay voices over the centuries have become so marginalized within the Church:

“Clericalism by definition is a form of elitism. This sense of elitism is cultivated and reinforced by the distinctive education and formation, dress and titles that priests and religious receive, as well as the reservation of particular offices and roles... Elitism can lead to a distorted sense of entitlement, the assumption that one is not bound by the rules that govern everyone else, and that other people (even the vulnerable) exist to serve one’s own needs. It can lead to a whole range of abuses, including sexual abuse. Our church needs a strong and committed laity to push back against clericalism and demand higher degrees of accountability from priests and religious, especially those of us who are in authority.”

— From *A Work of Mercy: Developing a Different Paradigm for Addressing the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church*, delivered by John Celichowski, OFM Cap., at Marquette University Law School’s International Dialogue on the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal, April 2011

“We recommend that Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia resign. His management of the archdiocese has been both ineffectual and incompetent on the matter of handling the sex abuse crisis. It appears he has intentionally designed a system where, according to the district attorney's report, 'the procedures implemented by the archdiocese to help victims are in fact designed to help the abusers, and the archdiocese itself.

“This is a shameful record.

“On April 19, Rigali turns 76, which means he should have submitted his mandatory letter of resignation last year and his retirement is imminent anyway. His resignation now would be symbolic, but powerfully symbolic.”

— Editorial, *National Catholic Reporter*, April 11, 2011

“We want to be part of a church that puts survivors, the victims of abuse, first—ahead of self-interest, reputation, and institutional needs... On behalf of the Holy Father, I ask forgiveness, for the sexual abuse of children perpetrated by priests, and the past failures of the church's hierarchy, here and in Rome—the failure to respond appropriately to the problem of sexual abuse.”

— Cardinal Sean O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, during the Feb. 20, 2011, *Liturgy of Lament & Repentance*, St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Dublin. O’Malley was in Dublin at the request of Pope Benedict XVI to review the response to sexual abuse by the Archdiocese of Dublin. He was quoted in “Words of pain, contrition in O’Malley’s Irish service” by Lisa Wangsness, *Boston Globe*.

“The heartbreak is that nobody in the Vatican seems to be in the dot-connecting business. No matter how many official reports or media exposés, no matter how many *ad limina* visits or episcopal memoirs, the bureaucracy just does not get it ... A wide married priesthood—one not restricted to a few disaffected Anglican clergy—would be a giant step toward regaining the confidence of the huge percentages of Catholics watching, waiting, hoping for some meaningful renewal of what is rapidly becoming a moribund church.”

— Phyllis Zagano in her Just Catholic *National Catholic Reporter* column “Repairing the broken church.” Zagano is a senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University and the author of several books in Catholic studies. Her latest, *Women & Catholicism*, will be published in 2011.

“With a heavy heart, I have recently made a difficult decision concerning the new English missal. I have decided to withdraw from all my upcoming speaking engagements on the Roman Missal in dioceses across the United States. After talking with my confessor and much prayer, I have concluded that I cannot promote the new missal translation with integrity. I’m sure bishops want a speaker who can put the new missal in a positive light, and that would require me to say things I do not believe.”

— Fr. Anthony Ruff, OSB, in an open letter to U.S. bishops published in *America* magazine. Fr. Ruff, a professor of liturgy and Gregorian chant, was on the committee that prepared a draft document for the USCCB in 2007 on the use of music during worship services.

“What happened there (at Vatican II) was a monumental conversion of consciousness among the world’s 2,500 Catholic bishops, and one key area of that was recognition of the role of the laity, by virtue of their baptism, in the Church’s mission of ministry and spreading the gospel in the world ... [laity must] take responsibility for where the Church goes in the years to come.”

— Dolores R. Lecky (former head of USCCB Secretariat for Laity, Family, Women and Youth) at “The Future of the Church: A Woodstock Forum on Sources of Hope,” December 2010, as reported by Jerry Filteau, *National Catholic Reporter*, Jan. 6, 2011

“Many people, from victim/survivors to parishioners in the pews, have left the Church because of the priest sexual abuse crisis, and that is true scandal. Moreover, some of these people who are disconnected from the Church would like to be reconnected, but the absence of truthfulness and accountability stops them ...

“A prevailing question is why is it so difficult for the Church to reveal the truth ...

“The truth would complete the puzzle so that the picture can be seen clearly, both validating the stories of the victim/survivors while also clearing the names of the innocent.”

— Reverend James Connell, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Open Letter excerpted from *Commonweal Magazine* blog dotCommonweal, December 6, 2010

"And then there is the sexual abuse crisis. This challenges our Catholic faith – and perhaps causes us to lose it. Many of us who are bishops, as leaders in the church, often have been blind, ignorant, and clearly wrong in this crisis. At times we have focused more on the perceived needs of the institutional church than on the needs of the victims. For this we apologize.

“I pray that out of this crisis, the church will become better. The church is not the priests and the bishops. The church is the people. And most of all the church is Jesus Christ.”

— Bishop Francis A. Quinn, bishop emeritus of Sacramento, *US Catholic*, August 2010

“What I am looking forward to is the church in Ireland seriously taking on that agenda [for reform], committing itself to a process that will develop us into a Church that is transparent, that is open and accountable.”

— Bishop Donal McKeown, Auxiliary Bishop of Down and Connor, *National Catholic Reporter*, August 13, 2010

“One of the first things we might consider doing in terms of challenging the dysfunctions of the church is to try to make the commitment not to be an enabler....There’s something about the structure of the Church that keeps adult men like ourselves less than adult.”

— Fr. Donald Cozzens at the Australian Council of Priests conference, July 2010

“Most bishops would be in favour of bishops electing the cardinals ... What happens at the moment is the pope appoints the cardinals who then elect the pope who then appoints more cardinals and on and on it goes ... So it’s a vicious circle. And it is deliberately designed to ensure we do not have another Pope John XXIII.”

— Bishop Geoffrey Robinson at the Australian Council of Priests conference, July 2010

“No one can deny the scale of the problem and the urgent task. In the case of clerical abuse of the young, we are dealing with crime. And the church has struggled to find the point of convergence between sin and forgiveness on the one hand, and crime and punishment on the other.

“What’s clear is there will be no quick fix to this problem, the roots of which go deep and wide. We’re in for the long haul.”

— Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Canberra and Goulburn during his pastoral address

“The abuse scandals have not only destroyed many innocent lives, they have also undermined the good work of so many church people at home and throughout the world. In this season of Christmas, we pray that this dark period will lead to a new birth for our church, so that its systems and structures and practices will always point towards—and never away from—Christ.”

— Gerard Moloney, CSsR, editor of *Reality Magazine*, January 2010

“Somehow I have grown up but the church has not ... [The sexual abuse scandals] horrified me. I find I belong to an organisation that seems caught in a time warp, run by old celibate men divorced

from the realities of life, with a lonely priesthood struggling with the burden of celibacy where rules and regulations have more weight than the original message of community and love.”

— Jennifer Sleeman, 80 years old, when calling for women in Ireland to boycott Mass on Sept. 26, 2010, as reported in the *Irish Times* Aug. 11, 2010

[Excerpts from a speech to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)]

“... faithful Catholics who struggle with abuses in ecclesiastical authority on many fronts. They know well of certain bishops who chose the protection of abusing priests over the protection of victims. They see young clerics who emerge from the seminary more preoccupied with their own ontological uniqueness, clerical garb and proper title than with the genuine pastoral needs of God’s people. They suffer under an enforced Eucharistic fast necessitated by a decision to place the weight of longstanding practice above the sacramental needs of the people of God. ... We are now veering dangerously close to an instance of ecclesial dysfunction. ... The increasingly dysfunctional character of the current tensions,” he said, “appears more likely to be the result of a failure (by the bishops) to recognize the distinct and complementary role of professed religious life within the life of the church ...”

— Richard Gaillardetz, Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo, Aug. 12, 2010, as reported in *National Catholic Reporter* on Aug. 13.

“[Voice of the Faithful and National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management], still in their infancy, are valuable assets in the church. Both should be supported as ways of enabling the laity to fulfill the charge clearly given it by Vatican II practices” in management throughout the church in the United States, drawing on the expertise of the laity.”

— The Editors in Current Comment of *America* magazine, July 19, 2010

“In responding to sexual and other forms of abuse within the Church it is not enough to concentrate on the sinfulness and failure of those guilty of abuse. It is not just a question of individual repentance but a total systemic reform of Church structures which is needed.”

— Bishop Pat Power is an auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of Canberra--Goulburn. His remarks were first published in *Canberra Times*.

“The climate in the church, which allowed abusers to go unpunished, will only change once there is a renewal, a willingness to publicly accept responsibility for one’s actions and greater involvement by lay people in all areas of Church life.”

— Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, as reported in the *Irish Independent* by John Cooney

“If the feminine had been given greater importance and a much larger voice, the church would not have seen anything like the same level of abuse and would most certainly have responded far better.”

— Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, former auxiliary bishop of Sydney reported in *The Australian*
