

Columnists

Keep perspective on Church scandal

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

From a scandalized friend:

"I am thinking of giving up the Church. I'm beyond 50, and have endured with difficulty the many mad changes in the Church, in liturgy and discipline and doctrine. And now the awful scandals within the Church, which the TV media have revealed for so long, especially in the "Phil Donahue" show and most recently in a sickening show on "Geraldo" about young boys molested in a southern diocese, and a big lawsuit against the diocese for hiding the affair.

"If the Church is 'one, holy catholic and apostolic' as the catechism of my school days taught, the oneness seems to be crumbling and the holiness dissipating through priests who have betrayed the trust which we laity have traditionally placed in them.

"My problem is a bit like St. Peter's in John, (Chapter) Six, when Jesus said to the Twelve: 'Will you too go away?' With Peter, I am left with the dilemma of where to go."

Reply: God knows you have my sympathy and my understanding. But I do not see any dilemma. Do what Peter did when he said to the Lord: "Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life." The Church has that and gives it to us.

Now to your problem. Regarding the scandals on the Donahue show, have you ever seen even one show regarding Catholicism that does not attack the Church? Donahue gets on his show funny, anti-male nuns, bitter ex-Catholics, dissident Catholics who remain within the Church to undermine it, troubled ex-priests. The only show I ever saw of his that wasn't dishonest was an interview with Father Theodore Hesburgh when he was still president of Notre Dame University. Toward Father Hesburgh, he was respectful throughout the show. This was thoroughly out of the Donahue character.

I have never seen a "Geraldo" show, but am told a shocker was on in early November. Can we excuse depravity within the Church? No. But it would keep things in focus to remember Father Bruce Ritter, even now suffering

On the Right Side

from cancer yet mightily caring for runaway youngsters caught in depravity. We might remember Mother Teresa's community, the Missionaries of Charity, caring for AIDS patients at St. Clare's Hospital in New York City. We might remember the thousands of good sisters and priests and brothers serving youths and the aged and sick and disadvantaged.

As I remember you, you always were a reader of good books, and you will remember how greatly I esteem Cardinal John Henry Newman. When he became a Catholic at the age of 45, he went through years of shameful treatment from many of the clergy; some mean-spirited, others misunderstanding, and others still, I believe, a bit shaky in the upper story. Though he suffered greatly from bad treatment, he never faltered in his devotion to the Church, which he recognized as from Christ. Replying to one who was shocked by some Catholics who were a bad lot, Newman replied: "If a doctor prescribes a medicine and the patient dumps it into the drain, do we blame the doctor when the patient does not recover?" The Church gives the right prescriptions. Why blame the Church for those who reject them?

Scandals have been in the Church from the beginning. Read the Acts of the Apostles. But for the number who go off the deep end, how much greater are those who are faithful — not always successful, but who pick up after a tumble and strive on to do the will of the Lord. If a man just keeps his eyes all the time on a stinking mud-hole, he'll never see the beauty of the world and the universe. Why not turn your eyes to the beauty and holiness and stability which is eminently in Christ's Holy Church and ours?

How 'tough' is it to be a Catholic?

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Catholics unsympathetic with many of the changes wrought by Vatican II often complain that the Church has become soft.

Rarely, however, do these complainers ever spell out exactly what they mean by "sacrifice" and "discipline."

A recent column in the student newspaper at a major Catholic university began in this fashion: "Church teaching is tough. To comply with it demands effort, struggle, self-sacrifice, and pain. Christ called it the narrow way."

The author, a graduate student in philosophy and a member of Opus Dei, chastises his fellow students who readily make sacrifices to achieve academic or athletic success, but who are not willing to do what's necessary for success in their spiritual lives.

"Being a faithful Catholic is tough; so is anything worthwhile," he insists. He tells us that "to be a real Catholic requires certain elementary acts of self-discipline and self-sacrifice."

What are those "elementary acts"? In the opinion of our Opus Dei friend, they are: "getting to Mass weekly, going to confession every once in a while, exercising restraint in things sexual, obeying certain eminently reasonable laws concerning our conduct toward others, praying daily, obeying our due superiors, sacrificing time and money to help the less fortunate, and so on."

This list is revealing on several counts. First, "getting to Mass weekly" is considered a matter of sacrifice and discipline. It's part of the "toughness" of being a Catholic. Although the student probably wasn't even alive before Vatican II, he reproduces here the worst of pre-Vatican II attitudes toward the liturgy.

Liturgy used to be seen by many Catholics as a private obligation rather than a voluntary, communal act of worship. They dared not miss Mass lest they commit a mortal sin. But at least our student places the Mass at the top of his list. One is less impressed by his choice for second place: "confession every once in a while."

Jesus said not a word about confession as we know it, and for about six centuries, auricular — or one-on-one — confession did not even exist in the Church.

Item #3 is especially revealing. Sex. Always sex. And isn't that what "confession every once in a while" is really for? You don't expect our self-sacrificing, self-disciplined Catholic to be

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worrying about racism, indifference to the poor, abuse of authority, self-righteousness, greed, or vindictiveness, do you?

And what on earth is meant by "obeying certain eminently reasonable laws concerning our conduct toward others"? Is this a reference to some code of civil behavior, to the sorts of standards one might want to see observed at the country club, for example? Is there any room here for love of enemies? For treating one another as brother and sister, regardless of race or social status?

"Praying daily" makes #5. Why? Is there really much sweat and pain required for that? Or are we talking here about hair shirts and self-flagellation?

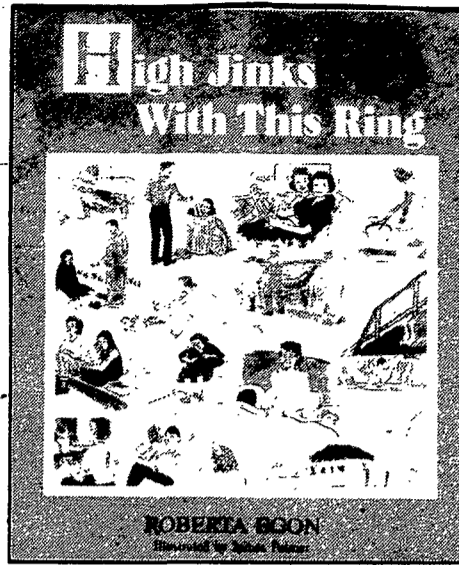
"Obeying our due superiors" is #6. What makes obeying superiors such a mark of Christian discipleship, and why the adjective "due"? Are we perhaps protecting ourselves against superiors like the U.S. bishops when they teach us about capital punishment, aid to the Contras, the MX missile, poverty programs, and the nuclear arms race?

"Sacrificing time and money to help the less fortunate" squeezes onto the list just before "and so on."

If you're already a devotionally traditional Catholic, is there anything really so "tough" about a Catholicism of this sort? Could it possibly require more than a pinch of "self-discipline and self-sacrifice"?

On the other hand, if you're willing to try the real thing, you'll have to go back to Jesus. He got crucified not only for preaching it, but for practicing it. And "it" had nothing to do with "obeying due superiors" or "exercising restraint in things sexual" or "obeying certain eminently reasonable laws concerning our conduct toward others."

No one would have even bothered to crucify Jesus for preaching something so "soft" as that.



Father Cuddy's Christmas newsletter reported "High Jinks: With This Ring" is "family-oriented informative, suspenseful, humorous with positive directions."

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