

# Crisis requires both renewal, reform

The intensity of the sexual-abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church subsided a bit after the bishops' meeting in Dallas last June, when they adopted a national policy to deal with the problem. The media's interest perked up again in recent weeks as speculation circulated about the Vatican's likely response to that policy.

The Vatican focused its criticism on the so-called zero-tolerance clause, which called for the laicization (or "defrocking") of priests against whom there was at least one substantial allegation of sexual abuse of a minor, no matter how far back in time the offense and regardless of the priest's subsequent record in the ministry. Canon lawyers, associations of priests, leaders of religious communities, and some bishops themselves expressed serious reservations about that provision.

Since the Dallas meeting, Catholic groups and institutions, especially colleges and universities, began sponsoring lectures, conferences and workshops to address the deeper causes and longer-term effects of the crisis. It seems evident that Catholics are looking now not so much for others to blame, but for solutions — and for hope.

The University of Notre Dame held one such conference last month: "Restoring Trust: Perspectives after Dallas." The first panel consisted of my colleague, Scott Appleby, professor of history; Margaret O'Brien Stein-



Father Richard McBrien

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fels, editor of *Commonweal*; and myself. Both Appleby and Steinfels had addressed the bishops in Dallas.

The focus of the conference was on the future. Where do we go from here? How can the laity's trust in the bishops, and the bishops' trust in the laity, be restored? What steps need to be taken?

Although each panelist had her or his own take on these questions, there was a considerable measure of agreement in the approaches. Scott Appleby's three-word slogan, directed at wavering lay persons wondering whether they should remain in the church, may have summed it up well: "pray, stay and inveigh."

Following the presentations, the floor was opened for questions. The first one — from a third-year law student — was also the most predictable. He noted that all three speakers had stressed the need for structural reform — more accountability on the bishops' part, greater participation of the laity in the governance of the church, broader input into the selection of bishops and pastors.

The student claimed to have heard nothing from the panel about prayer and the need for sanctity. Are they not, he insisted, the only real solution to the crisis, and the only effective way to restore trust in the church?

I pointed out that, just as members of an audience can be frustrated because not everything they wanted to hear was said, so members of a panel, limited in this instance to a 20-minute presentation, can be similarly frustrated for not being able to say all that they wanted to say. Of course, prayer and the quest for sanctity must be an integral part of any renewal and reform.

But spiritual renewal and structural reform are not mutually exclusive. Structural changes without a deeper spiritual renewal may only produce a new bureaucratic scaffolding. The building of the church may look sparkling clean and grandly refurbished on the outside, but there would be no real improvement within.

Conversely, neither can spiritual renewal achieve the intended effect without attention to the structural aspects of the crisis.

As the Catholic Church continues to address its own terrible crisis, it must remember that the solution is not a matter of either/or, but of both/and — spiritual renewal and structural reform.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## New Courier format serves readers well

To the editor:

As a faithful reader of the *Catholic Courier* since, eons ago, it became the official diocesan newspaper, I commend you upon its new look.

Initially, I must confess, I had my misgivings. But when *Courier* No. 2 (Oct. 10) reached me and I saw the bright cover, with that superb color photo of Sacred Heart Cathedral, my doubts disappeared. If, as etymology tells us, a photographer is one who "writes with light," never has the cathedral looked more imposing, and seldom, I suspect, has such resplendence marked Rochester's dour climate.

I commend you and Bishop Matthew Clark, the publisher, for charting the course of the paper during parlous times, when some others have faltered or, lacking your professionalism, become poor excuses for journals.

I marvel at your equanimity in facing the criticisms of those readers who berate your coverage of newsworthy accounts, or fault your choice of columnists. They forget that the *Courier* reflects the diversity of the Church itself.

A few years ago, you will recall, the paper embraced personalities as varied as Father Henry Atwell and Father Paul Cuddy, now happily together, we pray, where time is irrelevant. Today again there are columnists similarly diverse, such as Father Albert Shamon and Father Richard Mc-

Brien, faith-filled writers whose words are eagerly awaited.

Thank you, then, for giving us, in such a timely, bright and colorful manner, writers like these and others of Christian hope, and thank you for offering us each week such valuable insights into the meanings of today's events.

E. Leo McMannus  
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## New songs uplifting

To the Editor:

As a musician who plays every Sunday at Mass I felt a need to respond to Bill Kehoe's letter regarding "Elders refrain from singing 'pub tunes'" (Nov. 7). I play the guitar and while many of the "traditional" hymns are quite nice, they are written for the organ or piano and do not translate well to the guitar. A reliance on these "older" songs would prevent me from using my gifts for the glory of God at Sunday Mass in song. Further, I find many of the songs we play very uplifting and they have deep meaning for both myself and the congregation.

Our group has had many comments on how wonderful the music sounds both from younger members of our congregation and those born before 1950. I feel it is not the song itself that is important but the feeling behind the music that makes the congregation feel the Spirit. Our group genuinely enjoys playing the songs on Sunday and it shows to the congregation. While no single type of music can appeal to all persons, I have found that the majority of our congregation, especially the youth, sing with the group because of the style of the music as well as the Spirit moving the musicians. I think a return to the old styles of music and Mass would result in more people simply staying home than staying home watching EWTN.

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