

Thank you to Fr. Chuck for this reflection based on Richard Rohr's *The Cosmic Christ*.

The Focus of our Faith: Jesus or Christ?

The three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are largely about the historical Jesus who worked miracles, who taught, who promised us a new way of seeing, a new way of life in this world.

It is seldom pointed out, however, that *Paul* is not talking about Jesus; Paul is almost always talking about "Christ." Paul hardly ever quotes the historical Jesus and never knew him in the flesh. Really rather shocking when you realize that his letters are one third of the New Testament! The phrase "in Christ" is his most common usage—over 100 times.

We take Paul as a touchstone of orthodoxy, the central, foundational teacher of Christianity—and yet he hardly quotes Jesus! Something else is going on here, which has largely been off of the Christian radar. Paul has largely fallen in love with "the Christ" and it was Jesus who pointed him there. Most Christians still need to make the same movement, and to believe in both Jesus AND Christ. They are two distinct faith affirmations.

Veronika Oleksyn (Austria) wrote this article for the Associated Press.

Austrian bishop questions celibacy

An Austrian bishop who has pushed the Vatican for reforms said in an interview published Wednesday that the Catholic church should drop its celibacy requirement for priests.

Eisenstadt Bishop Paul Iby told the *Die Presse* daily that it should be up to priests to decide whether they want to live a celibate life and that he would welcome it if married men could be ordained.

"It should be at the discretion of every priest whether to live in voluntary celibacy or in a family," *Die Presse* quoted Iby as saying.

Iby, who offered to retire when he turned 75 in January, also said that eventually the ordination of women should be considered.

The following op-ed piece appeared in the New York Times on May 2.

Who Can Mock This Church?

By Nicholas Kristoff

Maybe the Catholic Church should be turned upside down.

Jesus wasn't known for pontificating from palaces, covering up scandals, or issuing Paleolithic edicts on social issues. Does anyone think he would have protected clergymen who raped children?

Yet if the top of the church has strayed from its roots, much of its base is still deeply inspiring. I came here to impoverished southern Sudan to write about Sudanese problems, not the Catholic Church's. Yet once again, I am awed that so many of the selfless people serving the world's neediest are lowly nuns and priests — notable not for the grandeur of their vestments but for the grandness of their compassion. As I've noted before, there seem to be two Catholic Churches, the old boys' club of the Vatican and the grass-roots network of humble priests, nuns and laity in places like Sudan. The Vatican certainly supports many charitable efforts, and some bishops and cardinals are exemplary, but overwhelmingly it's at the grass roots that I find the great soul of the Catholic Church.

The Vatican believes that this newspaper and other news organizations have been unfair and overzealous in excavating the church's cover-ups of child rape. I see the opposite. No organization has done more to elevate the moral stature of the Catholic Church in the United States than The Boston Globe. Its groundbreaking 2002 coverage of abuse by priests led to reforms and by most accounts a significant reduction in abuse. Catholic kids are safer today not because of the cardinals' leadership, but because of The Boston Globe's.

Yet the church leaders are right about one thing: there is often a liberal and secular snobbishness toward the church as a whole — and that is unfair.

It may be easy at a New York cocktail party to sniff derisively at a church whose apex is male chauvinist, homophobic and so out of touch that it bars the use of condoms even to curb AIDS. But what about Father Michael Barton, a Catholic priest from Indianapolis? I met Father Michael in the remote village of Nyamllell, 150 miles from any paved road here in southern Sudan. He runs four schools for children who would otherwise go without an education, and his graduates score at the top of statewide examinations.

Father Michael came to southern Sudan in 1978 and chatters fluently in Dinka and other local languages. To keep his schools alive, he persevered through civil war, imprisonment and beatings, and a smorgasbord of disease. "It's very normal to have malaria," he said. "Intestinal parasites — that's just normal."

Father Michael may be the worst-dressed priest I've ever seen — and the noblest. Anybody scorn him? Anybody think he's a self-righteous hypocrite?

On the contrary, he would make a great pope.

In the city of Juba, I met Cathy Arata, a nun from New Jersey who spent years working with battered women in Appalachia. Then she moved to El Salvador during the brutal civil war there, putting her life on the line to protect peasants. Two years ago, she came here on behalf of a terrific Catholic project called Solidarity With Southern Sudan.

Sister Cathy and the others in the project have trained 600 schoolteachers. They are fighting hunger not with handouts but with help for villagers to improve agricultural techniques. They are also establishing a school for health workers, with a special focus on midwifery to reduce deaths in childbirth.

At the hospital attached to that school, the surgeon is a nun from Italy. The other doctor is a 72-year-old nun from Rhode Island. Nuns rock.

Sister Cathy would like to see more decentralization in the church, a greater role for women, and more emphasis on public service. She says she worries sometimes that if Jesus returned he would say, “Oh, they got it all wrong!”

She would make a great pope, too.

There are so many more like them. There’s Father Mario Falconi, an Italian priest who refused to leave Rwanda during the genocide and bravely saved 3,000 people from being massacred. There’s Father Mario Benedetti, a 72-year-old Italian priest based in Congo who fled with his congregation when their town was attacked by a brutal militia. Now Father Mario lives side by side with his Congolese congregants in the squalor of a refugee camp in southern Sudan, struggling to get schooling for their children.

It’s because of brave souls like these that I honor the Catholic Church. I understand why many Americans disdain a church whose leaders are linked to cover-ups and antediluvian stances on women, gays and condoms — but the Catholic Church is far larger than the Vatican.

And unless we’re willing to endure beatings alongside Father Michael, unless we’re willing to stand up to warlords with Sister Cathy, we have no right to disparage them or their true church.

Doubt is part of the journey, as explained in the following article from the May 7 New York Times.

For Priest, Intersection of Faith and Doubt

by Katharine Seelye

BOSTON — The questions were heartfelt, especially for women of faith, especially so late in life.

The Rev. Robert J. Bowers, in charge of outreach and reconciliation at a center in Boston, hugged Julia Sullivan, a former parishioner.

“You can still love your God and not go to church,” Mary Jo Keating, 71, asserted forcefully to her friends gathered around a table the other day.

And yet a nagging thought poked at her conscience. “Do you have to be a good Catholic or a true Catholic?” Ms. Keating asked. “Can’t you just be a Catholic?”

The Rev. Robert J. Bowers, his open, puckish face capped by his gray buzz cut, offered solace, if not a solution. “You are redefining what it means to be Catholic, to be Christian, a religious person, a believer at all,” he told Ms. Keating. “The litmus test used to be: Do you go to church every Sunday? Yes. Do you support your pastor? Yes. Do you go to Mass and Communion and confession?”

But now, he said, “there is no litmus test.”

As he listens to Catholics discussing the fallout from the clergy sexual abuse scandal, Mr. Bowers finds himself at the intersection of faith and doubt, of lifelong loyalty and a deep sense of betrayal. A former parish priest, he works at the Paulist Center, a Catholic community in downtown Boston that is dedicated to social justice and service to the poor.

To follow him for a day is to glimpse the ripple effect that the upheaval in the Roman Catholic Church has had on his own spiritual journey — and to appreciate how much some American Catholics have come to rely on their local religious leaders instead of Rome.

Mr. Bowers, 50, who was ordained as a diocesan priest in 1987, lends a sympathetic ear; he has questions of his own about the church hierarchy.

“Obedience is a two-way street — it involves a great deal of trust, and the trust part is very, very low for me right now,” he said. “You can’t promise obedience when you feel like you can’t trust the person you’re supposed to obey.”

In the latest *New York Times*/CBS News Poll, released last week, 58 percent of American Catholics said the pope and the Vatican had done a poor job in responding to the reports of abuse. And 77 percent said someone who did not believe in the authority of the pope could still be a good Catholic.

Many more expressed faith in their local priest, and 77 percent said they were just as involved in their local church’s activities as they had been before the latest reports of abuse.

Mr. Bowers and his former parish, St. Catherine of Siena, were collateral damage in the abusive priest scandal, which is now in its third wave after an initial round in the 1980s and a second in 2002.

In 2004, the Archdiocese of Boston faced reduced attendance at Mass and \$120 million in legal bills from settlements in the abuse cases. As a result, it shuttered more than 60 parishes, including St. Catherine’s. Mr. Bowers, who had been a vocal critic of the church leadership and was exhausted from the fight to keep his parish open, took a sabbatical. He also began to reconsider whether to remain in the priesthood.

In 2005, he took an official leave of absence from the diocese and joined the Paulist Center.

Today, he devotes himself to outreach and reconciliation and once a month serves as head chef for a weekly supper for 200 homeless people (his specialty: macaroni and cheese). But it is not the same as ministering to a parish. “This is a death for me,” he said bluntly, “and there seems to be no resurrection.”

He finds considerable solace in painting, and he began a recent Wednesday taking a class in suburban Newton. There, his colorful canvases of serene scenes — a beach, a cafe, a sun-splashed home — belie his angst.

Chatting with fellow students, Mr. Bowers lamented that the Vatican was made up of “very, very old men who can’t grasp what’s happening.” Nonetheless, he said, he does not necessarily want Pope Benedict XVI, who is facing accusations that he helped protect abusive priests when he was archbishop of Munich, to resign, unless, of course, he is guilty. He would prefer that the pope stay in place and help Catholics heal.

His own way of healing, Mr. Bowers said later, is to “help people deal with conflict better, help them realize that forgiveness sets them free and that letting go can make them whole again.”

“These things,” he added, “worked for me — are working for me. It is not settled yet.” Shortly after noon, Mr. Bowers was steering his black Sebring convertible to his downtown office, where lush plants fill his window. He met with Paula Cuzzo, 54, a volunteer at the center and an analyst for an insurance firm, whose faith is also being tested.

“I’m feeling less Roman Catholic, and it’s bothering me because I appreciate the idea of the Vatican, Rome and the pope representing the best parts of our tradition,” Ms. Cuzzo said.

Mr. Bowers told her that he, too, was learning to distinguish between his Catholic faith and the Catholic leadership, and he encouraged her to articulate her thoughts. It was advice he would dispense throughout the day, telling those who sought his counsel that expressing feelings “out loud” can help them develop the language to find their way. He helps, he said, by listening, a lesson that he said church leaders had yet to learn.

“We’re learning about the truth because people are talking about the truth,” he said. He next spent 45 minutes with a professor and a student from Harvard Law School who specialize in conflict resolution. They discussed a South Shore parish that the archdiocese has been trying to close for several years, a move the parishioners have blocked by occupying the church.

Mr. Bowers then met with five women who had been his parishioners at St. Catherine’s. Three are still devoted churchgoers, now in different parishes.

“I have very great faith in the Catholic religion,” said Julia Sullivan, 89. “It keeps me going.”

Still, the women openly criticized the church hierarchy in ways that they said they never would have 10 years ago, directing particular wrath toward Cardinal Bernard F. Law. He was forced to resign as archbishop of Boston in 2002 for covering up cases of sexually abusive priests, but he was never prosecuted and now serves in Rome.

At the end of the day, Mr. Bowers sat with Stephen Clifford, 42, who told Mr. Bowers long ago that he had been sexually assaulted by his parish priest when he was 14 and by his campus priest when he was 23. He had kept the assaults secret for years, but Mr. Bowers has helped him discuss them.

“I felt that what happened to me proved I was not lovable, and as a result of hiding it, I wasn’t allowing myself to be loved,” said Mr. Clifford, who works in organizational development.

He has turned away from Catholicism and said he was not interested in returning. When a reporter asked Mr. Bowers if he was trying to bring Mr. Clifford back to the church, he said, “No, God will do that.”

Mr. Clifford laughed. “I totally respect that you still believe it,” he said, but suggested that this was an unlikely outcome. “Good luck with that God thing,” he said.

In the fading light of day in the center’s chapel, Mr. Bowers said he remained torn about his future. Some of his family and friends are encouraging him to rejoin the active ministry.

“I have proposed that in different ways to the leadership in the archdiocese, but they say I’d have to leave my reconciliation work,” he said. And he does not want to go back to the ministry the way it was.

He chuckled as he recalled certain aspects of his old life as a parish priest. “In almost 20 years, I never paid a bill, I never vacuumed,” he said. “Now I do all these things. There’s something very humanizing about cleaning the toilet.”

With that, he was off to the theater, to see “Young Frankenstein.”

Stress leads to tension within the hierarchy.

Church in the World

Schönborn attacks Sodano and urges reform

By Christa Pongratz-Lippitt

The head of the Austrian Church has launched an attack of one of the most senior cardinals in the Vatican, saying that Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, “deeply wronged” the victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy when he

dismissed media reports of the scandal. In a meeting with editors of the main Austrian daily newspapers last week, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna, also said the Roman Curia was “urgently in need of reform”, and that lasting gay relationships deserved respect. He reiterated his view that the Church needs to reconsider its position on re-married divorcees.

On Easter Day, Cardinal Sodano called the mounting reports of clerical sex abuse “petty gossip”. This had “deeply wronged the victims”, Cardinal Schönborn said, and he recalled that it was Cardinal Sodano who had prevented Joseph Ratzinger, then a cardinal, from investigating allegations of abuse made against Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer, the previous Archbishop of Vienna, who resigned in disgrace in 1995.

Cardinal Schönborn said that Pope Benedict was “gently” working on reforming the Curia but he had the whole world on his desk, as the cardinal put it, and his way of working and his style of communication did not make it easy to advise him quickly from outside.

Cardinal Schönborn studied under Joseph Ratzinger at Regensburg University and is known to be close to him.

Questioned on the Church’s attitude to homosexuals, the cardinal said: “We should give more consideration to the quality of homosexual relationships,” adding: “A stable relationship is certainly better than if someone chooses to be promiscuous.”

The cardinal also said the Church needed to reconsider its view of re-married divorcees “as many people don’t even marry at all any longer”.

The primary thing to consider should not be the sin, but people’s striving to live according to the commandments, he said. Instead of a morality based on duty, we should work towards a morality based on happiness, he continued.

Cardinal Schönborn said clergy had often primarily protected perpetrators of abuse instead of the victims. “It was said in the Church that we must be able to forgive, but that was a false understanding of compassion,” the cardinal insisted. Since the Groer affair 15 years ago, however, the Austrian Church had appointed an ever-increasing number of lay people, especially women, to investigate abuse cases. However this new openness on the part of the Church was not shared by everyone in the Vatican, he said.

Asked if he thought celibacy was one of the causes of clerical sex abuse, Cardinal Schönborn said he had no answer and psychotherapists were divided on the issue.

Asked how he would rate the Church’s loss of credibility due to the abuse “tsunami” on a scale of 1 to 5, the cardinal said, “In Ireland the situation is catastrophic – almost a 5. In Austria it is dramatic – I’d say a 3.”

The Vatican press spokesman, Fr Federico Lombardi, praised the Austrian Church for its openness in dealing with the clerical abuse crisis and told the Austrian daily

Kurier on Monday that Cardinal Sodano's words at Easter were "certainly not the wisest".

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AMERICA
Pilgrim People, Part I
MAY 10, 2010

As a church we are a pilgrim people making our way together through history. Like Chaucer's companions on the road to Canterbury, we have a variety of tales to tell and not all are edifying. The latest waves of the crisis of clerical sexual abuse of minors have made Catholics keenly aware that even in high places we are a company of sinners as well as saints, of fallible human beings as well as faithful followers of Jesus—everyone in need of the forgiveness Jesus proclaimed. That forgiveness is one of the religious experiences that binds us to one another along our pilgrim way.

The rituals of confession and repentance remain among the most identifiable practices of Catholic life. Their centrality to the Catholic imagination has made the reluctance of the hierarchy to acknowledge successive revelations of molestation all the more painful for us all. The church's identity as a community of forgiven sinners makes particularly credible the demands by victims for public confession and open reconciliation. Even the church's most bitter critics have been unwitting witnesses to that Christian duty. That same Catholic sensibility made the recent encounter between Pope Benedict and the victims of abuse in Malta both necessary and affecting.

The church has known dark times: domination by emperors, co-optation by feudal militarism and modern colonialism, gangland struggles by Roman families for control of the papacy, coercion of heretics and wars of religion. Still, we members of the church make pilgrimage together in hope that the church may be the visible expression in history of humanity's new life in Christ. To us Jesus is the embodiment of fullest humanity and the model of its most appealing morality. Pope Benedict's planned visit on July 4 to the tomb of St. Celestine V, a hermit who was elected pope and then resigned the papacy, will hold up for view a penitent form of Christian life marked by meekness, prayer and self-sacrifice, close to the pattern of Jesus that Christians strive to imitate.

One reason Catholics love the church is that it fosters just that sort of holiness. Even as the secular world exposes the hypocrisy of church officials, it acknowledges implicitly that the followers of Christ hold themselves to a "higher law" and try to practice a more demanding love. Some believe that calling is humanly impossible; others, even if they allow the Gospel little direct claim on their own lives, are disappointed upon failing to find holiness where they always presumed it might be found in a moment of need. But Catholics love the church because here we have

companions who do strain, in their stumbling ways, to lead their lives by the light of the Sermon on the Mount.

We love the church because here we keep the company of men and women who have lived the Gospel even as they challenged both secular and religious rulers to reform. Among them are figures like Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Thomas More, Ignatius Loyola, Mary McKillop, Mother Théodore Guérin, Dorothy Day, Franz Jägerstätter and Oscar Romero. Their witness to the Gospel brought them into conflict with the church authorities of their day. Yet attachment to the visible, hierarchical church was intrinsic to their own path to holiness. In an age that experiences mostly opportunistic, transitory relationships, the church fosters high ideals and lifelong commitments. In a culture deprived of depth and transcendence, it encourages searching self-examination, ever more inclusive sympathies and attentive receptivity to the mystery of God. Some of the pain of the present crisis comes from the apparent loss of those practices and sensitivities when they were most needed among those from whom they were most expected.

We love the church, too, because, as can be seen in local parishes everywhere, it embraces the full diversity of humanity: the affluent and the poor, the native-born and the undocumented, conservatives and liberals, the simple and the learned. We also love the church because in every age, but particularly since the Second Vatican Council, it is dedicated to the service of the poor and defense of their human rights. Even non-Catholics see in the unselfish service of the poor the palpable holiness of the church. Asked once how he went from being a promoter of the free market to an advocate of the world's poor, the economist Jeffrey Sachs answered, "The sisters—who, in so many places, took me to the back country to meet the very poor."

Chief among the inexhaustible reasons that lead us to love the church is the Eucharist. For when we gather around the table of the Lord, the whole body of Christ in which we partake is made real. We are united with the risen Lord for whom we live, and with one another, not only those around the table but also those around every altar in the world, along with those who have preceded us in faith and those who will follow us, one great communion prefiguring the unity of the one human family in God.

Is it better to keep perpetrators in the priesthood so that they can be suitably secluded and supervised?

US Catholics weigh whether kicking child molesters out of priesthood is best form of justice

By Eric Gorski, AP Religion Writer, *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2010

Much of the recent scrutiny of the Roman Catholic Church's response to clergy sexual abuse has focused on whether the Vatican — and the man who is now pope — acted quickly enough to kick perpetrators out of the priesthood.

But church officials, experts in abuse prevention and even some victims' advocates question whether the time-consuming church process known as laicization, often called defrocking, is the right benchmark in abuse cases.

The question — to defrock or not? — is complicated by the fact that most abuse allegations date back decades and cannot be prosecuted criminally, leaving decisions about how to deal with abusers largely in the hands of church authorities. Some Catholics say laicizing a perpetrator, which only the Vatican can do, is just and fair — an unambiguous verdict that validates victims and punishes child molesters with the clerical equivalent of the death penalty.

But laicizing a priest can take years, while a local bishop can swiftly yank perpetrators from working with children and continue to keep tabs on them. Because of that, others say the focus should be on holding church officials accountable for taking action short of that: permanently removing perpetrators from ministry and keeping them away from children.

One knock on laicization is that the church and former priest cut ties, meaning an abuser would be free of all church supervision.

"People get so mad at perpetrators — which is understandable — and the bishops," said Monsignor Stephen Rossetti, a psychologist and former head of St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Md., which treats molester priests. "But they forget what the goal is. The goal is to protect minors."

Laicization is in the spotlight now because of recently publicized documents calling into question how a powerful Vatican office headed by the future Pope Benedict XVI handled abuse cases.

In two U.S. cases, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger from 1981 to his papal election in 2005, either slowed down or resisted steps toward the laicization of two abuser priests.

One involved a Wisconsin priest, never laicized, accused of molesting as many as 200 deaf boys. The other concerned an Oakland, Calif., priest who sought to leave the priesthood after being convicted of child molestation — a request that eventually was granted. The Vatican has defended its response, citing the circumstances involved.

In the United States, the so-called zero tolerance policy adopted by bishops in 2002 bars priests with any credible abuse allegation from public ministry — meaning no clerical garb, celebrating Mass publicly or access to children.

Most abuser priests in the U.S. do not face the additional step of laicization, a dismissal from the clerical state that also typically lifts the celibacy obligation, said Rossetti, a professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington. He puts the figure at 20 percent.

However, it's impossible to get a full picture because the Vatican does not release data on the number of priests laicized for child sexual abuse. Anne Burke, an Illinois judge who served from 2002 to 2005 on the National Review Board, an advisory panel established by U.S. bishops to monitor their response to the scandal, supports laicizing perpetrators as a matter of justice.

"You don't find someone guilty of assault and then decide not to punish them," said Burke, who complained that some U.S. bishops obstructed the board's work. "You must finish the penance. You must finish the sentence."

The problem with only removing abuser priests from ministry, Burke said, is that church leaders have a spotty record of overseeing such priests.

Teresa Kettelkamp, a former Illinois police colonel and executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Children and Young People, said to laicize or not is a tough call and dioceses are feeling their way through the issue.

But she warned against viewing laicization as a step to safeguard children and prevent future abuse.

"It seems a quick answer — 'We'll laicize him and kick him out of the church,'" Kettlekamp said. "Well, they're going to be in the neighborhoods. Then there'll be no controls whatsoever."

Men's religious orders generally view laicization as a last resort. The Jesuits, for example, place abuser priests in Jesuit communities away from schools and parishes, where they typically cannot leave without another priest, said the Rev. Thomas Gaunt, executive secretary of the Jesuit Conference, the order's U.S. office.

Only after a man rejects that arrangement is he dismissed from the order and is laicization sought.

Laicization can take years because of due-process rights for priests and other factors. The Vatican streamlined the process for sex offenders in 2001 when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith became the central Vatican office handling all abuse cases.

Those cases generally involve bishops or superiors moving against a priest. But traditionally, most laicizations have been requested by men who want to leave the priesthood to marry or for other reasons. A mass exodus in the 1960s and 1970s caused Pope John Paul II to put the brakes on granting them, a position that eased up later in his papacy.

Numerous lawsuits have exposed failed church efforts to rehabilitate abuser priests.

In 1986, the Rev. Andrew Christian Andersen was convicted in Orange County, Calif., on 26 counts of felony molestation and sentenced to a New Mexico treatment center run by a religious order instead of prison.

He was arrested in New Mexico in 1990 on suspicion of trying to sodomize a 14-year-old boy and was ordered to serve six years in prison for violating his parole in the earlier case. He was laicized in the mid-1990s.

More recently, outside auditors faulted the Chicago archdiocese for its handling of the case of the Rev. Daniel McCormack, an algebra teacher and basketball coach at a parish school in a poor neighborhood.

The investigation found the archdiocese failed to properly investigate molestation allegations against McCormack, remove him from ministry after they became known or adequately monitor him. McCormack pleaded guilty in July 2007 to five felony counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse and was sentenced to five years in prison. He was laicized in 2007.

Among victims' advocates, opinions on laicization as a form of justice vary.

Anne Barrett Doyle of BishopAccountability.org said laicization is a strong statement against the priest and a validation of victims, which is important because most cases are too old to go to civil or criminal court. But she said that too often, laicizations are carried out in secret and the public is kept in the dark.

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said the ideal punishment is jail or — short of that — placement in a remote, secure treatment center run independently of the church. If a predator is genuinely kept away from kids, Clohessy said, whether he is a priest or not "matters much less to us."

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