

A SAFE CHURCH – LESSONS FROM THE CHILD ABUSE EVENTS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN HANDLED

Some years ago, the American playwright Arthur Miller published an astonishing and searing play set in the women's section of Auschwitz. He called it "Playing for Time," and in it he used the true story of the orchestra set up within Auschwitz for the entertainment of the guards, and led by the niece of the great composer Gustav Mahler. In the play, one of the leading characters looks at the death-camp around her, accelerating its work in the face of the approaching Allied armies, and says: "We know a little something about the human race we didn't know before, and it is not good news."

That must sound echoes in many people struggling to come to terms with the realities of child sexual abuse, and in particular those looking at the ways in which the Church has been involved in abuse. If I may paraphrase Miller's words: "We know a little something about the *Church* we didn't know before, and it is not good news."

But Miller's play is at root a celebration of the human spirit, not a lament for its extinguishing, and the Church is at root the gathering of the followers of Jesus, who is the Good News of God, and the sacrament of his presence.

I think that the good news to be heard at this time in the life of the Church is rooted, as the good news is always rooted at any time in the life of the Church, in the truth.

*To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said;
"If you make my word your home
you will indeed be my disciples,
you will learn the truth
and the truth will make you free. John 8: 31-32.*

But learning the truth is not a matter simply of hearing and sitting back, or even simply of working hard to understand something that is hard to grapple with: learning the truth in the way of which Jesus speaks is

allowing the truth so to touch us that we are changed, and the way in which we behave is changed. The freedom that the truth brings is the freedom to build the Kingdom of God, and that is always a challenging freedom, and at times it is a costly freedom.

The lessons that are there to be learned are not comfortable ones, but I think that they are great opportunities for renewal, moments of grace in our life as Church.

I want to suggest that we will find that there are aspects of our life where we have failed to see the truth - or rather, where we have seen partial truths. That is inevitable, because we are limited human beings face-to-face with the truths of God, the truths of who we are before God. But what is not inevitable is that we have taken these partial truths and treated them as though they were the completeness of the truth. Most of the great heresies are examples of that process, (though demonstrating that would be the work of a whole series of lectures, all of them way beyond my competence), but that same habit of mistaking the part for the whole - or at least treating some inevitably limited truth as though it were complete - seems to me to be endemic in the life of the Church.

But I want to suggest, too, that if we do look with honesty at these very aspects of our life as Church where we have failed to understand what God offers us in God's truth, then we will indeed be set free.

Bernard Häring, one of the great moral theologians in the modern history of the Church, spoke, in the last years of his life, of "the critical need to prevent the development of all ecclesiological pathologies." He was clear that some aspects of Church teaching and practice were detrimental to the life of the Church as a community and to the lives of the members of the Church, that there were indeed pathologies which had been generated by the Church.

At this point I would like to make a distinction which will, I hope, be helpful. It will prevent me from sounding as though I am questioning central aspects of our life as Church, and so prevent you from being so scandalised that we together are unable to grapple with the truth. One version of the distinction will be well-known to some of us: when this

distinction was made as part of an address at the Second Vatican Council, the editors of *Osservatore Romano* were so shocked that they edited it out of their reporting of the day's events, until the author caught up with them. The author was Pope John XXIII, and the passage of the pope's speech that had been censored was that where he made the distinction between the faith that we hold as Church and the ways in which we express that faith.

Another version of the same distinction - or maybe it is a slightly different distinction - has been formulated by my American Jesuit brother, the Boston psychoanalyst William Meissner, who died earlier this year. He distinguishes between the beliefs which we hold as Church and the ways in which those beliefs may be taken up in the service and support of different psychopathologies.

I would ask you to hold one or other of those distinctions in mind as we look at scripture, at moral teaching, and at ways of living our understanding of the Church-as-Church (roughly what theologians call "ecclesiology"). I think we have lessons to learn in each of these areas: concerning what we have done with scripture, how we have understood the moral implications of the gospel, and how we have lived as Church. But the word of God in scripture, the challenge of the Gospel, and the life of the gathered followers of Jesus in what we call Church - each offers us lessons, each calls us to a deeper and more human life characterised by integrity in our own lives and respect for the lives of others.

Let me start with the scriptures - or rather with what we have done with the scriptures. At a child protection conference in England some years ago Mgr Charles Scicluna, a Vatican official who does very valuable work in this area, gave the conference three scriptural quotations. From the book of Deuteronomy came the Sixth of the Ten Commandments, "Do not commit adultery". Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians spelt out the incompatibility of various forms of immoral behaviour, sexual and non-sexual, and the inheriting of the kingdom of God. Jesus, as described in Matthew's Gospel, laid it on the line where abusive behaviour to children was concerned:

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea."¹

Obviously, here is a set of injunctions which is unquestionable. It is not just that how we exercise our sexuality is crucially bound up with our relationship with God and with the community of believers: Jesus uses what is surely the harshest language in the gospels to describe those who harm a child. "End of story" as far as the scriptures are concerned - or is it?

Not that long ago a prominent academic published an article commenting on child abuse in the Church under a title which borrowed its shape from a current advertising slogan. The title was deliberately shocking: "Religion and Child Abuse: Perfect Together." At this point, you may well be thinking *"Not Another Dawkins Diatribe!"* but the academic in question was not the former Professor of the Public Understanding of Science in the University of Oxford, but Donald Capps, who is Professor of Pastoral Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and a devout and highly committed Lutheran. His argument is that various aspects of our Christian tradition, including passages of the scriptures themselves, can be and have been used to justify abusive behaviour towards children.

He takes as one example the twelfth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, where God is portrayed as punishing God's children. Those of us who have become used to the Jerusalem Bible may not quite get the point:

"Suffering is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him? If you were not getting this training, as all of you are, then you would not be sons but bastards."²

¹ Matthew 8:6

² Hebrews 12: 7-8

But the punch line (if you will pardon what is, in hindsight, something between a pun and a Freudian slip) is in the footnote to this text, where the word the Jerusalem Bible translates as "training" turns out to be better rendered as "teaching through hitting, punishment." The New International Version is more direct in its translation, "If you are not punished... it means you are not real sons," while the RSV has "disciplines" and "chastises".

Capps asks why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews chose that image of a father dealing with an errant son, given the existence of an alternative in what is almost certainly the most popular of the teaching stories Jesus told. As Luke's gospel puts it:

"We are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and is found."³

Donald Capps has an answer to his question about the choice that was made there, one that explores the possibly damaged childhood of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. But his wider point is that for much of the Christian era, when the ways in which parents and children relate have been considered, it has been the punishing God of the 12th chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, rather than the protective God of the Gospel of Matthew or the reconciling God of the Gospel of Luke, that has been primary. As Capps himself puts it, reflecting on the community which was the context of the letter to the Hebrews:

"Hebrews implies that whatever changes in the ways of human relating were envisaged by Jesus' followers, ones involving parents and their children were not among them."⁴

It is over 15 centuries since the death of St. Augustine, but the impact of his life, and in particular of his great autobiography "The Confessions", continues to be immense in the life of the Christian community. It has become something of a field-sport among theologians to blame him for much of what Christianity has got wrong in its theology of

³ Luke 15: 23 - 24

⁴ Donald Capps (1998) "End Things," Princeton Theological Seminary website, URL www.ptsem.edu/read/inspire/3.2.endthings.htm

the body, and among psychologists to speculate on what happened in his life that affected his thinking in this way - and we shall return to this later - but it is to a section of the "Confessions" dealing with a very early aspect of Augustine's life that Capps draws our attention, because it builds on that passage from the letter to the Hebrews.

Augustine the schoolboy is beaten for failing to learn. When he tells his parents, they laugh at him and tell him it is for his own good. Years later Augustine is still struggling with this - he finds a justification for his parents' response in the idea that in a sinful and imperfect world, children are going to suffer - that's just how it is. But, says Capps, there is a level at which what is happening can be seen as something much more profound:

"A boy cried out to his Father in heaven for deliverance from the pain that was crushing his spirit, but his Father in heaven did not respond."⁵

Augustine contributes to a view of childhood that has been widespread in the Christian tradition - that children are wayward and need to be trained with physical punishment. Centuries after Augustine, John Wesley wrote:

*JESU, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.
O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
To those who fall how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!*

But this is the same man who also wrote:

"This, therefore, I cannot but earnestly repeat, -- break their wills betimes; begin this great work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, or perhaps speak at all. Whatever pains it cost, conquer their stubbornness: break the will, if you would not damn the

⁵ Donald Capps, *The Child's Song*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY 1995, ix-xi

*child. I conjure you not to neglect, not to delay this! Therefore, (1.) Let a child, from a year old, be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly. In order to this, (2.) Let him have nothing he cries for; absolutely nothing, great or small; else you undo your own work. (3.) At all events, from that age, make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it. Let none persuade you it is cruelty to do this; it is cruelty not to do it. Break his will now, and his soul will live, and he will probably bless you to all eternity.*⁶

I have to say that I find that last "probably" both revealing and touching. This is not the context for getting into a debate about under what circumstances corporal punishment might or might not be appropriate. I want to make a simple (perhaps simplistic) point: a Christian belief system - in the sense of a way of responding to the Gospel - in which one of the greatest reformers of Christian life in the history of the United Kingdom could preach what I have just shared with you is a belief system with built-in risks, to say the least⁷.

A more extended history of the ways in which the Christian west has valued children - or, more correctly, how little it has valued children - would be the topic for yet another series of lectures. But I cannot resist making one last point by referring to my own Order, the Jesuits. When the early Jesuits founded their schools in the 17th Century, their stress on the care of the boys, and the measures they took to respect their dignity and value, were seen as not just exemplary but totally extraordinary. It is clear that the same valuing of children was also part of the inspiration for the founding of many of the 'teaching orders', and there is a terrible irony involved, given how many children have been abused while in the care of religious, including Jesuits. But it is also true that the Church on the one hand both shared-in and helped to form a view of children which devalued them - and thus, we now understand more fully, put them at risk of abuse - and on the other challenged this devaluing in countless ways.

⁶ John Wesley, On Obedience to Parents, Sermon 96 (from website of United Methodist Church, <http://gbgm-umc.org/>)

⁷ Perhaps a "Christian Community Health Warning" would be advisable.

I suggested three areas at which I wanted us to look - areas which might fit Bernard Häring's notion of "ecclesiological pathology" - and this has been the first: What we have done with scripture. I now want to move on to the second area: How we have understood the moral implications of the gospel, before turning to the final one: How we have lived as Church.

Of all the areas of the Church's moral teaching, the area of sexual moral teaching has, in the recent life of the Church, undoubtedly generated most heat, and equally undoubtedly in the minds of many, least light. Like many people, I was struck by the tone of Pope Benedict's Encyclical *Deus est Caritas* : as even the secular press noted, here was a Pope talking about love and the erotic, and NOT talking in a condemning way. While this was undoubtedly good news in itself, it pointed to the perception of Church teaching around sex and sexuality as not being good news. I do not want to argue any particular point of teaching - yet another set of lectures looms there - but to look at the overall pattern of teaching, and, crucially, at the overall pattern of how the teaching has been received.

The formal moral teaching of the Church is that *every* sexual thought, word, desire and action outside marriage is gravely sinful; and that each and every marital act must remain ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life: all else is mortally sinful. In sexual matters the formal teaching of the Church is that there is no "paucity of matter" - i.e. every sin is serious sin. Just typing or reading that takes me back to being an adolescent, not struggling simply with puberty, emerging sexuality, and the discovery of masturbation, but with a teaching that taught me that I was moving in and out of a state of grace on an almost daily (or perhaps I should say 'nightly') basis. I was, if I bought into what I was being taught, positively bouncing in and out of mortal sin and the risk of damnation on a 24-hour cycle.

I use that as an example because I think it illustrates, in one relatively small aspect of the sexual dimension of being human, a conflict that is found across a number of areas of teaching and experience. The formal teaching of the Church says one thing, but this teaching is simply

not agreed with by many lay members of the Church, who draw on their experience of the presence and activity of grace in situations which do not match the teaching, nor is it agreed with by many priests and bishops, who modify the teaching in pastoral settings.

Richard Sipe, the American psychiatrist and former Benedictine, suggests that much of the Church's teaching on sexuality is

"...based on a patently false anthropology that renders magisterial pronouncements non-credible. ... The Church is at a pre-Copernican stage of understanding regarding human sexuality. It is using scripture as a basis for explaining the science of human sexuality. That is no more valid than using the Bible to explain cosmology."⁸

Again, I do not intend to get into a debate on what should be understood and taught about human sexuality. My point is, yet again, a simple one, yet again perhaps to the point of simplicity: in the area of human sexuality there are clear gaps between what is proclaimed as formal teaching, what is believed by many committed members of the Church, and what is used as a "pastoral baseline" in e.g. confessional settings. Formal teaching does not fit with lived experience, but this is neither adverted to nor responded to in the life of the community, creating a classic example of "an elephant in the living room." Everyone knows it is there, but no-one talks about it.

We need a credible theology of sexuality rather than teaching which is unbelievable and unliveable. Without this, priests and people are at sea: priests (including those ordained to the fullness of priesthood - i.e. bishops) because they find themselves proclaiming a teaching they do not find convincing, and people (including those members of the people who have particular ministries - i.e. deacons, priests and bishops) because they find that there are gaps between what the Church is teaching them about their sexuality and about their very selves as sexual beings, and their own experience of themselves as living sexual lives of honesty, commitment, integrity and grace, whether in celibacy or marriage and partnership.

⁸ Richard Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 2003.

Despite the cheap media tag of "Catholic Guilt", this is not a Catholic problem as such:

*"In 2,000 years no Christian Church has developed an adequate theology of sexuality - that is, no-one has worked out an overarching, comprehensive, and integrative understanding of the nature and place of sexuality within the scheme of salvation and theological system."*⁹

We have some pointers on the map: by looking at where we have come from, we might be able to see a little of where we need to go.

We can usefully start with the scriptures once again - this time in the Hebrew Bible - the Old Testament. Here we find an intriguing mix: a naturalistic rather than dualistic approach to sexuality, but a view of the relative status of men and women that we might want to question. Another set of lectures would be required to deal with all this, but let me just point us to the two creation stories at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, with their celebration of God's creating us, male and female, in the image of God, and to the lyrical wonder we can find in the Song of Songs.

When we turn to the New Testament, we can note first of all that, unlike some of his followers, Jesus says very little about sex. But we can also note that in how he lives and in how he relates to others, he teaches us very clearly about how we can live and relate to others. We can note three principles of Jesus' teaching: a concern for inner motive rather than simply outward conformity, in other words, a concern for **integrity**; the love of God for each man and woman, virtuous or sinful; the importance of the individual: 'the Sabbath was made for man...'

The Gospels present a whole series of pictures of his encounters with men and women from various walks of life, in various kinds of need. The rich young ruler, the woman taken in adultery, Bartimaeus the blind beggar, the ten lepers, Zaccheus the tax collector, Mary Magdalen; Jesus met each one as an individual person, speaking the word that needed to be said... He spoke to the occasion, to a unique

⁹ Richard Sipe, as note 8 above.

*individual with a unique problem, with the intent of redemption and restoration.*¹⁰

Let's catch up with Augustine again, living and working in the second half of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth. For a crucial period of his life he was a Manichee, a member of a religion which emerged in 3rd century Persia, and which had as one of its central beliefs a profound dualism - the very existence of the material world as we see it is a consequence of the struggle between immaterial realms of good and evil, while desire, lust and procreation all serve to entrap more and more of the spiritual within the corrupt physical world.

Augustine breaks free of Manichaeism, and converts to Christianity, with its more naturalistic, Jewish-inspired understanding of the body, but he never quite shakes free from his past, nor from the prevailing belief of his time, that the life of reflection and contemplation, the life of the philosopher as well as of the professionally holy man, was superior to the life of the flesh.

There is still something of this assumption of the priority of reason, essentially "classical" rather than biblical, when we get to the time of Thomas Aquinas, nine centuries later. The life of reason and contemplation was to be fostered: anything that was out of harmony with reason was unwelcome. So it was the intrinsic impetuosity of sexual desire that led to sin. But what we should notice also is that Aquinas was basing his theology on what he understood to be the best biology available to him: faith and reason should meet and agree. That what Thomas derived from this "natural law" approach is in our eyes undermined by the inadequacy of the biology involved should not distract us from the importance of what Thomas was attempting. Our developing scientific understanding of ourselves and our sexuality cannot be ignored in our attempts to develop our understanding of what is and what is not an appropriate response to the challenge of the gospel.

¹⁰ W.G. Cole, *Sex in Christianity and Psychoanalysis*, OUP New York, 1966, p.16

The Reformation did not really touch Christian teaching about sex and sexuality. The Reformers' theology of sexuality was based not so much on the Jewish/naturalistic insight that sex was good as on the (ultimately dualistic) belief that sex was inevitable. Luther and Calvin both felt that celibacy was the better course for those who could manage it.

When we get into the 20th Century we find some progress, perhaps most easily marked by glances at papal documents. Pius XI in his 1930 Encyclical *Casti Connubii* speaks of "the cultivating of mutual love" as one of the "ends" of sexual expression - but a secondary end, with the primary end being procreation. It takes Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* to set 'conjugal love' and the 'responsible transmission of life' on level pegging, and we may need to remind ourselves that in *Humanae Vitae* Paul VI did the same. Pope John Paul contributed the understandings of human life and human relationship deriving from personalist philosophy, and as we have seen, Pope Benedict has provided a very positive and challenging treatment of love, human and divine, in *Deus Caritas Est*. Again, a lecture or two would be required to do justice to this last, but let me just note one theme that Pope Benedict treated in a truly radical way - radical in both sense of the word - as reaching back into the roots of Christianity, on the one hand, and as powerfully challenging and unexpected, on the other. The theme is that of *eros*.

To my mind what was radical in Pope Benedict's reflections was not that, to be truly human, *eros* needs to be complemented by *agape* - desiring love complemented by self-giving love. I think that, once we had got into the particular language used here, most of us would agree with Papa Benedetto that genuine love includes both *agape* and *eros*, giving and desiring, woven together inextricably. Those with a lived experience of sexually expressed love would probably add that good sex, loving sex, literally embodies this mysterious conjunction of desire and self-gift. So I don't think the Pope was being radical here, even if it was this element of the Encyclical which got the (slightly puzzled) headlines. What I do think was radical was that the Pope then said that what is true of us is true of God: so God's love for us - God's love for **each one of us** - is both *agape*

and *eros*, both gifting love and desiring love. Put that the other way round, and we find that in our desiring love - in our experience of *eros* - we experience something of God's desiring love.

So maybe we are heading in the right direction - we just have some way to go before we have that "overarching, comprehensive, and integrative understanding of the nature and place of sexuality within the scheme of salvation", the need for which is pointed out by Richard Sipe among others. And, crucially, we still have a formal moral teaching around sex and sexuality that reflects a very restricted understanding of this dimension of being human.

What is the lesson to be learned here? My sense is that in the Church at the present time we are in a dangerous situation, one in which there are three distinct problems: the absence of any coherent and positive body of teaching, including moral teaching, about sexuality; the gap between what is taught and what is actually believed and lived by many members of the Church; and, most dangerous of all, a situation in which the existence of these problems is not to be spoken of.

That brings us to the third of our considerations. We have looked at the way in which we have taken a less-than-complete understanding from scripture of the value and dignity of children. We have looked at the less-than-complete teaching around sexuality that has developed in the Church. We now turn our attention, more briefly, to the way we live as Church. In each instance, facing the truth enables us to find the Good News that is always there to be found.

One of the themes which has emerged in the Church in recent years has been that of participation. The need for a fuller, more participative way of being Church has been spelt out in formal documents from a variety of sources, including bishops' conferences and diocesan consultations. (I acknowledge that there are also areas of our life as church where consultation has been less apparent than it might have been).

Allow me, for a few moments, to do what none of these documents do: allow me to be a little melodramatic, perhaps to overstate my case in order to make it more clear. In the Church today we are living through a time of

transition so profound that it might be called a time of crisis or of collapse. But what is collapsing is not the Church, but a model of Church - and of office within the Church - that fits uncomfortably with today's world and, I suggest, has little relationship to the Gospel as the Gospel speaks to today's world. A complex and largely unarticulated structure of thinking about, and so attempting to live, the respective contributions of people, priests and bishops is folding-in on itself.

In some places in the Church - just as in some dimensions throughout the Church - this is more obvious than in other places and in other dimensions. But that change is taking place, and what drives or powers that change is our common experience of eucharist.

Sunday by Sunday, day by day, in our parishes and communities, we gather for a liturgy that brings together and celebrates the various contributions of the various ministries and various vocations within the people of God. We enact - a psychologist is inevitably tempted to say we 'act out' - our way of believing in our way of celebrating the liturgy. But, crucially, we also shape our way of believing - we shape our beliefs about being church - by how we celebrate the Eucharist. Archbishop Lefebvre, strongly opposed to many of the developments in understanding what it is to be church that were expressed at Vatican II, was utterly consistent in targeting the renewed liturgy as a focus of his resistance. Henri de Lubac, the great Jesuit theologian whose work set the scene for so much of what was renewed at the Second Vatican Council, speaks of the insight that "the Eucharist makes the Church" as a crucial insight of the early centuries of Christianity.¹¹

I want to suggest that the Church is being made new - being renewed - by our experience of Eucharist. There is a great logic behind the development of the way of celebrating Eucharist that was eventually codified in the form we call the Tridentine Rite, but it inevitably stressed the role of some members of the people of God to the exclusion,

¹¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 134. This is a translation of the *Méditation sur l'Église*, 1953. De Lubac explores the same theme at greater length in his *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'église au Moyen-Âge* (1944).

distancing, or alienation of others. The renewed liturgy is both expressing and renewing the Church-as-*koinonia*, as communion, and from the point of view of our concern in this lecture, that is an essential move.

I think we are moving away - am I still in melodramatic mode? - from a model of priesthood that, all unintentionally, made available to men unsuitable for ministry the twin keys to abusive behaviour by creating a culture of power and of secrecy.

Let's look at each of those in turn: 'men unsuitable for ministry', 'a culture of power', and 'a culture of secrecy'.

A quick inspection of the figures available from the United States National Review makes it clear that many of the men involved in child abuse were formed in seminaries that operated under pre-Vatican II systems.

The seminary system as we have seen it in the recent history of the Church is a product of two major events in the life of the Church: the Council of Trent, and the Modernist crisis: each had strong elements of the defensive which have left their mark.

The establishment of seminaries by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was to some extent a major step forward, attempting to ensure minimum standards of education and formation at a time when ill-educated and unformed priests were the norm rather than the exception. It was also to some extent a defensive system, trying to protect individuals in an increasingly complex and no longer entirely Catholic world, and trying to defend a Catholicism perceived as everywhere under attack. That defensiveness was amplified at the start of the 20th Century by the response of the Church to what was labelled the Modernist Crisis, and the publication of the Encyclical "Pascendi" by Pope Pius X in 1907. Two contemporary theologians spell out the damage:

The paranoia the encyclical ignited spread rapidly. Seminary curriculum was often reduced to a series of questions and answers, questions that had not been asked in centuries. Students were expected to simply memorise everything. 'Catholic philosophy alone has the truth,' one professor wrote. He echoed what others thought

or practised. Students developed the weakest of all attitudes towards adversaries - one of contempt.¹²

This meant that theology floated in an ahistorical stratosphere, handing on Scripture, tradition, and the scholastic synthesis, with the argument from authority being the absolute, isolated from its social context.¹³

The classical seminary horarium (timetable) was modelled very much on that of the monastery: designated times of communal prayers, meals, study, recreation, silence, and sleep. Almost the entire day was so structured. The Benedictine axiom of "Keep the Rule and the Rule will keep you" lay behind this approach. The Rule of St Benedict was embedded in a way of life and prayer that formed the whole person within the setting of the community of the monastery and the guidance of the Abbot. By contrast, the worst of the seminary system gave rise to settings where authority was the absolute - "this is true because of who says it" - where questioning was unacceptable, and approval for ordination came through keeping the rules. "Keep the Rule and the Rule will keep you" became debased to "Keep the rules of this seminary and you will get ordained."

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of all this was the belief that this was the best system in the world, and that priests educated within it were fully-educated in theology and fully prepared for priesthood. Within such a system, it should be no surprise that personal formation for a celibate life was practically non-existent. One quotation illustrates well what many priests recall of their formation for celibacy:

"The extent of my formal training about celibacy in the seminary was a statement by the rector: 'Celibacy means no sex, hetero, homo, auto, basta cosi!'"¹⁴

The assumption was that celibacy was learned by living the life - regulated hours, spiritual direction, and confession, though this was challenged:

¹² John Tracy Ellis, quoted in Donald Cozzens 'Sacred Silence'

¹³ Kilian McDonnell in Cozzens ut sup

¹⁴ reference not to hand but probably Sipe

"We take promising young men from 13 to 25 years of age, feed them well, educate them diligently, and 8 to 12 years later we ordain them, healthy bright, emotional 13-year-olds."¹⁵

One study in 1972 reports 68% of Catholic clergy agreeing with the statement that the traditional way of presenting the vow of chastity during their religious training often allowed for the development of impersonalism and false spirituality¹⁶. With such a system of formation in place, it is clear that men were not being prepared to live healthy celibate lives - nor being screened for signs of their capacity so to live.

Unfortunately, the impact of the seminary system at its worst is more widespread than that, because the experience of being dominated (within a structure that demands or appears to demand unthinking obedience), on the part of a subservient and docile priest, can lead to a domineering and uncompromising approach when placed in authority. Or, in simpler words: If I haven't learned to live with good authority, I will not be able to exercise good authority.¹⁷

Positions of ministry in the Church involve responsibility and power - that linkage is a given in any human organisation. The key question for us is "How is that power mediated?" Even a cursory exploration of the characteristics of dysfunctional families and organisations is un-nerving reading for anyone acquainted with the recent history of the Church: too many of the qualities of dysfunctional groups are too familiar: power reserved only to a few; a no-talk rule; dependent relationships, jealousy and suspicion, to name but five.

Similarly, the recent history of the Church has shown us too many examples of how a culture of secrecy has operated at many levels. To give ourselves some distance, I quote from the USA Review Board report:

"Some witnesses likened the clerical culture to a feudal or military culture and said that priests and bishops who "rocked the boat" were less likely to advance...Clericalism also contributed to an culture of

¹⁵ reference not to hand but probably Sipe

¹⁶ reference not to hand but probably Sipe

¹⁷ c.f. Loss of the Good Authority, Tom Pitt-Aikens & Alice Thomas Ellis, Penguin 1990, ISBN: 0140125302

*secrecy. In many instances, Church leaders valued confidentiality and a priest's right to privacy above the prevention of further harm to victims and the vindication of their rights.*¹⁸

To put it bluntly: if I know that I live and function in a Church where there is clericalism and clerical secrecy, then I know that I live and function in a Church where I need not be accountable.

My brief is to help us reflect on lessons to be learned: tempted though I am to enlarge on those last two observations, that would be both to stray from my brief and to prolong these reflections up to and perhaps beyond the pain threshold. Let me, before concluding, point to how I think we are changing in the way we live as Church. I start with some challenging and encouraging words:

"With you I am a Christian; for you I am a bishop." (Augustine)¹⁹

"A bishop should be ever a minister, not a master ... one who attempts to subdue himself, not his brethren" (Gregory the Great)

Let's go back to our renewed liturgy, and what it enacts and shapes in the life of the Church. First of all, and perhaps so obvious as to be a little startling: it is "our" liturgy. We may be more comfortable at the back of the church, like an agoraphobic friend of mine, now with God, or we may be coping with irrepressible small children, like a great number of people in the parishes where I have helped out on Sundays as across all the parishes of the Church. Or we might be a reader, or a minister of the Eucharist, or engaged in one or other group active within the parish. No matter: it is our liturgy. In more formal language, it expresses and builds up the co-responsibility of all the baptised. (If we want a visible sign of the good news, we could do worse than simply look at how, in so many parishes, the children feel so much at home, and provide visible and audible evidence of that).

And the liturgy is expressing the whole of the life and ministry of the parish, as we move more and more from "the lone-ranger" style to

¹⁸ USA National Review Board Report 2004

¹⁹ "While I am frightened by what I am to you, I am also consoled by what I share with you. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The first is the title of the office I received, the second is by grace; the first implies danger, the second salvation."
Sermon 46

collaborative ministry, that is, from focussing on the particular role of the priest to focussing on the ministerial gifts of the community. I used to live in a large Jesuit parish. One of the liturgical moments of the year to which I most looked forward was during the Mass of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, when the Ministers of the Eucharist were invited to stand and be confirmed in their ministry. Across the church dozens of people stood: men and women, young and old, spanning all the varieties of life-experience and life-style that can be found within the Church, the gathered people of God.

Look, too, at what has happened to the sermon as it has become the homily. Maybe should I say "listen to what is happening" rather than "look at what has happened", because what I am describing here is "a work in progress" rather than something already in place in every parish. We are moving from the priest "teaching the ignorant what they should know and do", to the priest or deacon enabling people to become more aware of Emmanuel, God-in-our-midst.

And now, I promise, we are heading into the conclusion of our reflections. Because what the liturgy enacts and builds up is a Church where increasingly we recognise that ministry and responsibility are charisms of the whole community - gifts distributed by the Spirit among the gathered followers of Jesus, for the building up of the community of believers as a community that preaches the Good News. While ordained for ministry, the priest and the bishop each remain a member of the faithful in need of ministry and community: "with you I am a Christian". If true to their calling, both priest and bishop evoke in those among whom they have particular and essential ministries the awareness of *their* priestly character as baptised believers: "for you I am priest and bishop".

To the extent that this is happening, we take responsibility for each other and become accountable to each other. To the extent that this is happening we enable each other to become aware of the limitations of how we have read the scriptures, the limitations of how we have articulated the challenges and demands of the Gospel as the Gospel touches our loving and our desiring, the limitations of how we have understood what we are called

to live and to be as Church. And it is as we become aware of these limitations that we become open to grace.

The Chassidim have a proverb: *In the one who is full of themselves there is no room for God.* As a Church confronting the abuse of children and vulnerable adults we know we have no cause to be full of ourselves, and, if we are honest, we know enough not to 'duck out' by speaking as if there were a "real" and perfect Church-as-Church, spotless and faultless, untouched by all this. That particular defensive move makes the Church something other than the living gathered pilgrim community of God's people - which is, in reality, always the living gathered graced pilgrim community of God's people.

What we are facing in the church is both crisis and Kairos: a time of great vulnerability and risk and a time of great grace.

Crisis, because countless lives have been damaged, because we have failed to understand fully that to which we are called by the Spirit, because an old model of priesthood and church is broken and beyond repair, because like all organisations, the church contains elements that are in denial over these truths.

But also Kairos - a special time, a time out of time, a time of grace, a time for decision, a time for repentance, a time for growth - because the possibility for growth and renewal is present, because the Spirit is with the Church, and can be seen to be at work, "because you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free."

So we know a little something about the Church we didn't know before, and it leads us to the Good News.

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