

VOTF

LEARNING FROM HISTORY HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST ABUSERS

RULE 1. Remember Your Goals:

To support those sexually abused by Catholic bishops and priests.
To support priests and bishops of integrity.
To help shape the structural integrity of the Church.

Your mission statement reads: “to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.”

I have spent my life trying to understand one aspect of Church discipline and doctrine—celibacy. But celibacy is only one way to come to grips with human sexuality. Sex and celibacy are central and indispensable to the tasks you have set yourselves.

Quite simply you have set yourselves a goal that involves human sexual behavior of Catholic bishops and priests—and of us all.

You have set for yourselves a goal to support the sexual honesty and integrity of bishops and priests—and us all.

You are the church and you have set yourselves the task to shape the structural integrity of who you are. That is to be honest and consistent—integral—about the teaching and practice of the community of which you are a part.

All of your goals were hammered out and set down—all of your efforts are inspired by the sexual violation of the people of God by offending clergy swaddled in the cloak that they wore to proclaim that they are sexually safe, inviolable.

All of your concerns about the integrity of the Church have been fueled by the knowledge that bishops deny, deceive, delay intervention, and in fact, aid

and abet other bishops and priests who have been abusing children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults—boys and girls, men and women—hundreds of thousands of God’s people.

You are aware of the *Scarlet Bond* that unites the power structure of the Church—the cardinal’s vow to “keep secret anything [they hold] in confidence that if revealed would cause harm or scandal to the Church.”

This is precisely expressed in the words of bishops: “I only lie when I have to.”

Deception, especially about sex, is woven into the power structure of the Church. It is not merely an accident.

This factor—the right to secrecy—is based on a clerical error that presumes that clergy are ontologically above other human beings. (Higher than angels according to the Council of Trent) Clerics claim to live by a higher law—one that supercedes merely human expectations. Bishops speak for God. His “ends”—preserving the *Bella Figura* of the Church, that is avoiding scandal and protecting finances—justify the use of any means. Bishops use this factor to justify speaking in ways that you and I call lying and deceptive. Depositions of many bishops and cardinals who simply “forgot” or were “never aware” of facts recorded in their files amply and dramatically demonstrate this reality. (Bishops and cardinals are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to keep the true dimensions of sexual abuse secret.)

The *Scarlet Bond* demands the concealment of the sexual lives of its clergy of every rank. It demands that the myth of celibacy be preserved and that no one, including civil authorities, have any right to question the sexual purity—the perfect and perpetual celibacy—of any cleric.

Remember you founded The Voice of the Faithful because of a sexual crisis in the church. Your focus is SEX.

RULE 2. Find Your Place in History:

You are not expending your energy and voicing your convictions because you have nothing better to do or just to annoy cowering and recalcitrant bishops. None of you intend to be the “spiritual hoola hoop” of the 21st

Century—a harmless distraction and entertainment—a passing fad. You are serious. You are dedicated. If I am correct in that assessment we must find a parallel phase of history to help us think about our issue (sexual integrity) in a broad context of the Church’s evolution of doctrine and discipline.

There is one period that stands out as a model for what you are all about. VOTF exists in a Copernican Moment. You have chosen an issue that casts you into a contest between reason and blind loyalty. Your struggle squares off between science and the Bible.

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was a Catholic cleric in Krakow Poland during the time of the Protestant Reformation. “Few other persons have exerted a comparable influence on human culture in general and on science in particular.”

He formulated a thesis that you and I take so for granted that it seems unremarkable. He said that the earth moves—it revolves around the sun annually and it rotates on its axis every 24 hours. He worried about the conflicts he anticipated with religion and published his seminal book only as he died.

His intuition was correct. The church powers ranted and fumed. They interpreted such an idea as a direct assault on their power and teaching. The heliocentric theory was held in such disdain by the Magisterium that the Vatican declared that anyone who held or taught that the earth moved was to be held *anathema*—condemned. It was a dangerous idea.

A Dominican priest who defended the Copernican theory as proven fact—was to find out just how dangerous the Vatican considered the idea. To church power the idea seemed to destroy their worldview, their power over right and wrong, and their credibility. Bruno could not be correct because he defied what the bible and tradition taught. He defended what we today call modern science. Fr. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome in 1600.

Thirty-three years later Galileo (1564-1642) found himself in the same bind as Bruno over the same set of facts. “Although he tried to remain loyal to the Catholic Church, Galileo's adherence to experimental results, and their most honest interpretation, led to his rejection of blind allegiance to authority, both philosophical and religious.” He had to trust science because that’s where he found the facts. Albert Einstein, called Galileo the “father of modern science”.

The separation of science from philosophy and religion marked a major development in human thought.

According to Stephen Hawking, Galileo probably contributed more to the creation of the modern natural sciences than anybody else. Nonetheless Galileo was ordered to stand trial on suspicion of heresy in 1633. He was already in trouble in 1616 when some of the Vatican officials wanted him condemned. At his trial for heresy he was required to recant his heliocentric ideas: he was put under house arrest for the rest of his life and the court (Inquisition) ordered his books banned. This was an alternative to burning at the stake.

The arguments against Galileo were posited from scripture that states: "the world is firmly established, it cannot be moved." (Psalm 93:1, Psalm 96:10, and Chronicles 16:30) Another Psalm (104:5) says, "[the LORD] set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved." The book of Ecclesiastes (1:5) states that "the sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises."

He did not reject his faith in God, but neither could he reject reason. There remains a tradition that as Galileo left the court he mumbled, "It still moves." In 1992 Pope John Paul II admitted that the Inquisition had been wrong (although well intentioned) and Galileo was right.

If you think you are in a lesser conflict with Church authority than Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo you are mistaken.

What is at stake in your charter—at the center of the conflict—is the Catholic Church's teaching about human sexuality.

You are dedicated to help and heal the hundreds of thousands of victims of clergy sexual abuse. Certainly you are dedicated to bring to justice the 9 percent of Catholic priests and bishops who have abused minors and the vulnerable. You are dedicated to prevent further abuse by fostering sexual integrity in clergy and in the structure of the Church.

Central to all these issues, practical and theoretical, is the question of the nature of human sexuality. Is the **nature** of human sexuality determined by biblical statements or is it fundamentally a question for science?

This is the Copernican Moment that faces you and your work.

It is the basic challenge. It holds for you all the stresses and dangers that faced others who have labored to find the balance between faith and science. A priest friend who was a major superior in Rome encouraged me to publish

my writings, but added, "It is a good thing that the Vatican no longer has the power to castrate or burn people at the stake, or you would be in trouble." You have already tasted the disappointment and danger of rejection and dismissal. As you grow and clarify your position vis-à-vis clerical authority you can anticipate more, not less resistance and opposition, if you are faithful to your mission. Your task is to speak truth to power.

RULE 3: Tell the Truth:

It is with a good deal of trepidation for me to say the church is wrong. But it is not Catholic bashing, priest bashing, or anti-religion to point out false teaching and erroneous assumptions.

The mistake the church has made is to misinterpret natural law as it applies to human sexuality. Natural law is a law whose content is set by nature, and therefore has validity everywhere. It is an inherent human ability to determine right and wrong. Pope John Paul II said "**It always has been the conviction of the church that God gave man the ability to arrive, with the light of his reason, at an understanding of the fundamental truths about his life and his destiny and, concretely, at the norms of correct action.**"

The church has not respected that conviction when it comes to sexuality. Instead, it has narrowly looked at the act of intercourse and its natural potential and substituted that as the one and only norm for sexual development and behavior. Procreation is not the singular limit of sex; sexual consolation in marriage is not the only variant for legitimate sexual behavior and pleasure.

In this is the Church's mistake: (its heresy if you will) it has arrogated for itself the nature of sexuality by its claim that every sexual thought, word, desire, and action outside a valid marriage is mortally sinful. This simply is not true. This is not the nature of human sexuality. (I can say that with full confidence even as I know that the fullness of human sexuality has not yet been established scientifically.)

It is in the denial of sexual human nature (or rather the assumption that it understands sex completely and correctly) that the church has conditioned so many of its clergy to violate others sexually. **If everything is a sin, violation looses all meaning.** (This is one factor in the formation of predatory priests.)

Make your own examination of conscience:

- Do you believe that every act of masturbation is mortally sinful and in the words of the church inherently evil—contrary to the natural law? (CCC #2352 has softened its opinion about the inherent evil of masturbation

by the addition—"affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability")

- Do you believe that every couple that experiments sexually even having intercourse before marriage is committing mortal sin—forever damned?
- What of a widowed or divorced person?
- Do you believe that the use of birth control is inherently evil and sinful?
- Do you believe that the use of a condom to prevent infection is sinful and inherently evil?
- Do you believe that every woman who loves a woman, every man who loves a man and express love in sex, is inherently disordered and doing something evil?
- Do you believe that every question about abortion is settled?
- Do you oppose a married priesthood?
- Do you think women are excluded from ordination because “their sex does not conform to the image of Christ?”
- Do you believe that bishops and priests who claim they are celibate should live celibately?

Certainly one is free to believe as he or she wishes. Honesty makes it incumbent to live according to those beliefs.

None of the judgments implied in the above are based on the actual nature of human sexuality. Scripture and the Magisterium have a great deal to say about moral values and inspiration for human relationships, but the Bible has no more authority about the nature of human sexuality than about the nature of astronomy.

To establish the integrity you espouse you must be honest with yourself. You cannot depend on any organization to tell you what the nature of human sexuality is. You cannot absolve yourself from the responsibility by parroting what the church teaches or hiding behind a doctrine in which you do not believe—or worse by involving yourself in a cycle of sin-guilt-repentance-forgiveness and reoccurrence. This is a cycle of clerical control that places the judgment of all sex in its power.

I have said that the crisis of Catholic clergy sexual abuse exists because church teaching is false. By declaring every sex act sinful it renders priests vulnerable to serious compromise. They consecrate the secrecy of behavior (their own and others) over the truth of dialogue and discovery. Because their behavior and belief does not conform to their teaching and preaching clergy

become non-credible in the whole area of human sexuality. Hypocrisy corrupts.

RULE 4: Intervene Effectively:

What can members do to support victims of clergy abuse? What can VOTF do about sexual integrity? What will lead to structural change? Everything depends on your dedication and honesty.

Look at the state of the Church. Certainly there are priests of integrity. It is not church bashing to point out that some of those priests (like Fr. Michael Crosby) have said the church is dysfunctional. It is. Other priests have pointed out the church in America is corrupt. One does not have to stretch very far to realize how corrupt the church is. Diocese after Archdiocese has been exposed for fostering, protecting, and conspiring to conceal and minimize the reality and extent of priests and bishops who abuse the vulnerable.

Five thousand plus clergy have been involved in criminal sexual activity. And this number reflects only those reported to superiors. It is a bit like judging the extent of drivers who speed solely by the number of traffic tickets written.

Related to the number of clergy who abuse minors are the number of bishops and priests who have active sexual lives either periodically or for long stretches of their ministry. Some very good priests fall into this category. But our church today is every bit as corrupt (sexually and financially) as it was at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

How do you keep the faith and shape the structural integrity of the church? That after all is one of your goals.

1. Do not be overwhelmed by the corruption, but do not deny it. If you try to overlook it you will become an accomplice with it.
2. Know yourself. Do not hide in the crowd. Take responsibility for yourself.
3. Dialogue. The first rule of dialogue is to listen. Hear the church spokespeople not as children, but as the educated adults you are.

4. Speak—Dialogue from your base of integrity. That may mean that you will have to be a voice in the desert. Your validation will not be measured by acceptance. The clarity and honesty of your voice is the measure of your mission. Tom Doyle has said that the bureaucratic church as it exists today is “a narcissistic sink hole.” That is a strong metaphor. Unfortunately it is apt.

5. Refuse to be a victim of the church. You are the church. The hierarchy are neither higher nor lower than you. They deserve the same respect as every one. They have a job of service and will be judged according to the honesty with which render it. Just as you and I will be. “Whatever you do to one of these little ones you do unto me.”

6. The Gospel message of love and honesty is a guide for all of us.

7. The transformation of the church will not come from above. Transformation depends on individuals being transformed, reformed, and renewed with the Gospel spirit.

8. The bureaucratic Roman Catholic Church as it exists now in the United States is hopeless.

9. You have dedicated yourselves together with bishops and priests of integrity to be the voice of hope.

HOPE