

Fr. Perozich comments —

As a priest who was told by my bishop that I could not publish teaching in the church bulletin because my teaching, in his opinion, was “not catholic” since it did not reflect the modernism, worldly values, and did not support homosexuality and Islam, I am pleased to see lay people responding like Amy Welborn

Lay people cannot be removed from an office by allegations, or be punished canonically for promoting the truth. May the rest of you follow her lead.

Regarding the church’s credibility, who would look to her for credibility if she does not preach the truth from scripture and tradition? She already is rejected by society which demands Holy Church conform to worldly values and definition of rights, equality, justice, and fairness with abortion, all religions the same, sexual license, and so forth. Some of the leaders’ statements seem to echo this rather than leading the faithful away from sin to Jesus in the timeless truth of faith and morals in worship and conduct.

Now the faithful, while respecting the bishops including the bishop of Rome because of their office, no longer listen to their words.

After listening sessions, bishops are still using the organized party line from activist homosexual/homosexual activists (AH/HA) in Rome and in conferences that clericalism is the cause of the crisis.

HOMOSEXUAL SIN IS THE CAUSE OF THE CRISIS, primarily homosexual acts on the part of bishops and priests who commit these sins and promote this as normal against the Bible’s teaching and Jesus’ affirmation of it saying that not one iota of the law is changed (Mt.5). What is changed is that we who are baptized in him now have the grace and truth that come from Jesus Christ (John 1) to give us POWER to live God’s law.

CLERICALISM IS THE AMBIENCE IN WHICH THIS SIN THRIVES. Clericalism is the status and material support given to priests, bishops, deacons so that we can promote the gospel and not be worried about making a living. It also is a force unto itself to protect itself, and thus has been used to deny the existence of the sins of the clerics, lest this privileged way of life be taken away from us: salary, car, housing, utilities, cell phone, food, internet, retirement, health and car insurance, conferences, travel benefits, and on and on.

The very privileges that we receive can become the new life of the priest and bishop at the expense of the gospel.

Unless the Spirit that spoke through recently deceased bishop Robert Morlino of Madison WI naming the crisis as homosexual sin enter into the souls of the bishops in Mundelein, nothing will change.

Too many are infected with sin in their minds, hearts, or wills, refusing to call sin sin as Jesus did, and loving their clerical state with all its privileges that we clergy take from you lay faithful.

While I am not tempted strongly by each and every sin, if a bishop or a church does not preach salvation from all of them, then such men have no credibility or power to help me.

*May Jesus frustrate the evil that exists in our hearts and replace it with true conversion for the lay faithful, all priests, and in particular our leaders the bishops who **MUST** return to preaching Jesus as the one Savior of the world from sin and death, the only name in heaven or on earth by which man can be saved, Him in whom we live, move and have our being.*

THE PROBLEM WITH POPE FRANCIS' LETTER TO THE U.S. BISHOPS

The framework and assumption that what's most at stake here is institutional credibility is exactly what led to cover-ups and protection of clerical perpetrators. Exactly.



U.S. bishops attend a prayer service in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Mundelein Seminary Jan. 2 at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois, near Chicago. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Pope Francis **has written a letter to the American bishops**, who are on retreat at Mundelein Seminary this week.

It is, honestly, the usual strange/not-strange message from Pope Francis. Strange in that he goes all over the place except to the specific place where the problem resides, and not-strange in that, well, this is what he usually does, and there's always a reason for that.

Your experience of reading the letter might be like mine: I read it and nodded and thought, *Well, not bad, that's true, sure, it's good for these things to be said, nice*

point there—and then I finished, thought about it for a minute, and realized that none of the specific problematic issues had actually been addressed.

Further, the spiritual context which Pope Francis recommends for going forward, it could be argued, actually *enables* the original problematic actions. *Many* problematic actions.

To begin with:

At times of great confusion and uncertainty, we need to be attentive and discerning, to free our hearts of compromises and false certainties, in order to hear what the Lord asks of us in the mission he has given us. Many actions can be helpful, good and necessary, and may even seem correct, but not all of them have the “flavor” of the Gospel. To put it colloquially, we have to be careful that “the cure does not become worse than the disease”. And this requires of us wisdom, prayer, much listening and fraternal communion.

Quite true, of course.

The first consequence that Pope Francis raises, the first issue that seems to require addressing, is that of credibility:

The Church’s credibility has been seriously undercut and diminished by these sins and crimes, but even more by the efforts made to

deny or conceal them. This has led to a growing sense of uncertainty, distrust and vulnerability among the faithful. As we know, the mentality that would cover things up, far from helping to resolve conflicts, enabled them to fester and cause even greater harm to the network of relationships that today we are called to heal and restore.

We know that the sins and crimes that were committed, and their repercussions on the ecclesial, social and cultural levels, have deeply affected the faithful. They have caused great perplexity, upset and confusion...

This is institutional thinking, isn't it? It is, in fact, one of the core attitudes that led to the level of this scandal over the past decades (and probably always): *This makes us look bad.*

One could say that this is really nothing more than the traditional Catholic understanding of scandal—a true and valid way of entering into this situation and its consequences. But it's actually a little different. Traditionally, scandal is seen as a negative because it works to obfuscate the power and truth of the Gospel—people can't see Jesus because you, the one supposedly representing it, have gotten completely in the way. There's a hint of this here, but the entire passage is really more about the problem of people seeing the institution in a negative light being a problem simply because it's better that they see it in a positive light.

The loss of credibility also raises painful questions about the way we relate to one another. Clearly, a living fabric has come undone, and we, like weavers, are called to repair it. This involves our ability, or inability, as a community to forge bonds and create spaces that are healthy, mature and respectful of the integrity and privacy of each person. It involves our ability to bring people together and to get them enthused and confident about a broad, shared project that is at once unassuming, solid, sober and transparent.

And so on. The rest of the letter expresses Francis' usual themes—listen, dialogue, make space for the new, prioritize unity, don't impose abstractions:

This approach demands of us the decision to abandon a modus operandi of disparaging, discrediting, playing the victim or the scold in our relationships, and instead to make room for the gentle breeze that the Gospel alone can offer. Let us not forget that “the collegial lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and

genuine journey of growth”. [6] Let us try to break the vicious circle of recrimination, undercutting and discrediting, by avoiding gossip and slander in the pursuit of a path of prayerful and contrite acceptance of our limitations and sins, and the promotion of dialogue, discussion and discernment.

And so I wonder: Is this situation a problem because it diminished the institution’s credibility and threatens bonds of communion, or because people committed all sorts of sins of commission and omission, used other human beings, did great harm to God’s children, and offended and disobeyed the Lord who created us for good, not evil?

The framework and assumption that what’s most at stake here is institutional credibility is exactly what led to cover-ups and protection of clerical perpetrators. *Exactly*. That, of course, is nothing the Holy Father would defend and is what his letter is presented in opposition to, but until you shake that framework that privileges the horizontal over the vertical, you’re stuck in the same rut. It’s subtle, but is at the core of so many problems in the contemporary Church, including this one.

Understanding human actions and choices as fundamentally, basically a response to God’s call and yes, law, keeps everything else in context, since, of course, God’s fundamental call is to love.

Understanding human actions as fundamentally, basically oriented towards keeping some sort of peace with

others or creating a certain environment without our obligation to God at the center—absolute, unmoving center, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us—makes it really easy for us to create our own reality, including our own definitions for sin and forgiveness.

It's the difference between living inside the Garden—or outside. That's really the whole point of Genesis 1-3. In short, it just seems to me that a week of reflection on this needs to not start with metaphors of jars and pebbles or concerns about credibility, but rather something more along the lines of **Psalm 32**.

Which it probably did, outside the official public communications.

Anyway, I haven't even remarked on what struck me as the most problematic aspect of this letter: the deep, repeated call to work together, be unified, be in communion and so on.

Wait, what? Why is that a problem? I mean...isn't dialogue and communion the point?

No. Truth is.

And the reason the harping on unity and scolding about “recrimination” is problematic *in this context* is that one of the crucial issues leading to this crisis was precisely that: prioritizing of the external bonds between clerics above telling the truth and the privileging of protecting image over allowing consequences to be borne.

Who's against dialogue and a mature search for answers and new ways forward? Hey, not me! But nothing at all will change if that dialogue is conducted in a context in which we are focused on how we think we should make

each other feel and how the world sees us, rather than on how all of this looks to God—or if we're more invested in saying things that make us seem open-minded and unified rather than saying true things, no matter how harsh they may be.

Is the culture of church leadership in desperate need of encouragement to be more gently tolerant of all points of view and less critical of each other? It seems to me it is pretty much the opposite.

We don't create the bonds of Christian unity. God does this. Jesus Christ does, through Baptism. Our call is to recognize those bonds, strengthen them and then do the harder thing: be willing to recognize when those bonds have been broken by sin—and courageously say it out loud, no matter what the price.

*(Editor's note: This essay originally appeared on **the "Charlotte Was Both" blog** in a slightly different form and is posted here by kind permission of the author. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CWR staff or Ignatius Press staff.)*