

*This is an update of the original below with a link to Patrick Coffin's show and article, "Is It Time To Cancel the USCCB?"*

*The original by Leila Marie Lawler is below in black following the comments.*

<https://www.coffinnation.com/is-it-time-to-cancel-the-usccb/>

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*When I was an active pastor for 25 years summoned to convocations, assemblies, and meetings, very little was spoken about teaching, guiding or sanctifying. The name of Jesus and the need to spread it for salvation was not, to my memory, made a priority.*

*Once a bigger bureaucracy is established such as in the Vatican or a national conference, the local diocese mimics it in its own structure and responds to it rather than responding to Jesus to teach, to guide, to sanctify.*

*Bishops may not be the ones who set the agenda for their work as a conference. Bureaucrats may be the tail wagging the dog here.*

*While a national conference may be helpful for the bishops themselves, the bureaucracies need trimming or abolition to allow the bishops to exercise their sacred office, and not to provide some of them with a socialist, government agenda to foist on the faithful.*

*Here are some quotes from the article.*

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**bishops' moral authority with legislative trivialities, that has undoubtedly been the effect.**

**But, of course, watering down clear authority is the intent.**

**From fiscal years 2017 through 2019, the U.S. government had \$375 million in contracts to the USCCB.**

**It's obvious that the bishops themselves cannot oversee such an operation. One needs professionals. And that professionalization makes the Church a very different institution from what most of us suppose it to be.**

**Bishops have responsibility for the spiritual needs of every person in their diocese, not only the Catholics.** This means that they oversee evangelization. And yet, as Vatican II made clear, the task of spreading the faith is given by God primarily to the laity. **This reality throws the bishop right back to teaching and governing; for, without the nourishment of the liturgy and the truths of faith, the lay Catholic is unable to carry out his mission to transform the world.**

Third, individual bishops would be free to hear the Holy Spirit and do their duty on such matters as **reverent worship, reform of the liturgy**, and provision of the sacraments to their people. They wouldn't have to bother with onerous and self-defeating programs handed down from USCCB HQ—all of which require professional development and administration.

**Text of the article follows below. It can be heard by clicking onto the link to Amazon Polly, if you prefer to listen rather than to read.**

SEPTEMBER 16, 2019

# Is It Time to Abolish the USCCB?

LEILA MARIE LAWLER



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*“If I must speak the truth, I feel disposed to shun every conference of Bishops: for never saw I Synod brought to a happy issue, and remedying, and not rather aggravating, existing evils...”*

— *St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 382 A.D.*

**Heedless of St. Gregory’s warning**—or perhaps unaccountably ready to entertain openness to “existing evils”—Vatican II and Pope Paul VI called for national conferences of bishops.

The charitable association that had been the bishops’ conference (called the National Catholic War Council) in the United States early in the 20th century became, in the Sixties, a force for social and religious change under the suave and ambitious leadership of then-Bishop Joseph Bernardin. The conference ultimately became known as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bernardin cloaked his autocratic rule beneath a veneer of consultation and collegiality. In the most urgent doctrinal crisis of his era, he ensured that bishops would refrain from taking disciplinary action against those who dissented from *Humanae Vitae*’s teaching against birth control. He was also the architect of the [Alinsky-inspired](#) Campaign for Human Development, a centerpiece of the USCCB, which funds activism directly contrary to the moral law—abortion, LGBT politics, contraception, feminism, et al.

Bernardin’s reign was characterized by what George Weigel aptly calls “the sting of authoritarian Catholic liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s.” Those faithful who sought recourse for abuses of doctrine and liturgy through the usual channels of authority never really understood how little hope

they had. The body of bishops in their conference was pitted against them. As Weigel [writes in \*First Things\*](#):

Bishops who condoned “faithful dissent” were unlikely to be vigorous in enforcing catechetical standards or liturgical discipline. Their approach to problems of clerical indiscipline and malfeasance also helped shape the ecclesiastical culture in which bishops turned to psychology rather than moral and sacramental theology in dealing with cases of the sexual abuse of the young.

This activist, morally insidious, and worldly culture is propagated in the greenhouse that is the USCCB. **Priests and obscure bishops rise in its ranks and gain positions of influence over its workings, which in turn affect the direction that the body as a whole takes.** The closing of the ranks around Theodore McCarrick and the ongoing shielding of his protégés exemplify the toxic atmosphere of this institution. Unity is its only value.

For as long as there have been reasons for grievance in matters of politics, faith, and morals in the Church, there have been bishops who plead the excuse of unity with the other bishops in the conference. Even those bishops in whom faithful Catholics place their desperate trust resort to that excuse regularly; their hands, they insist, are tied. They do little in the face of threats against the Church, even if some occasionally say something. They seem to be waiting for guidance, yet a bishop is the highest authority in his own diocese, which is left unmanned.

**This facile unity to which bishops are so preoccupied requires disbanding the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops immediately.**

**I say this notwithstanding the efforts** of some of the more conservative bishops to combat the liberals' instrumentalization of religion. Under John Paul II, well-meaning prelates, surveying the force of liberal "experts" serving the episcopacy, determined to foster an opposing array of professionals schooled in more orthodox theology and dedicated to halting the vanguard of progressivism.

The result of their efforts is an uneven division of turf, skewed perennially to the Left. The USCCB boasts at least 200 staff members in 16 committees duking it out—in the most genial way possible of course, as all their jobs are too important for any real disruption—on what is still an overwhelmingly worldly playing field. Mischief is the only possible result.

Statement after statement issues forth from the guts of the operation, firmly entrenched in the lair of power in Washington, D.C. As Phil Lawler has pointed out, **the sheer number of statements dilutes the really urgent ones (about abortion, religious freedom, or gay marriage, for instance). Even if the intent wasn't actually to vitiate the bishops' moral authority with legislative trivialities, that has undoubtedly been the effect.** Some statements, like pronouncements on chicken farming, would boggle the mind of the average parishioner, were he ever to pay attention to them.

**But, of course, watering down clear authority is the intent.** Generating activity is the bread and butter of any bureaucracy. The further the bishops drift away from their spiritual goals towards worldly affairs, the more control these staffers can exercise.

The professional mode is hard to resist. The USCCB's biannual meetings in posh hotel venues (with bare-bones



Masses that demonstrate the priorities of the participants) display the vacuity of the proceedings, with no man daring to break ranks over the decisions—which run the gamut of banal to destructive—of others.

At their last convocation in Baltimore, in the wake of revelations of episcopal cover-ups, one bishop stood up to offer a timorous semblance of rebuke to his confreres when one of their endless statements proved too much for him. “No mention of Jesus,” he half-whispered. Resorting to mild sarcasm—the room seemed to get uncomfortable—he weakly offered his opinion that “it might be a good idea.”

The ghost of Bernardin haunts us to this day.

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**Let’s be honest. What’s one measly mention** of Jesus Christ compared to the hundreds of millions of tax dollars on the line for the bishops’ role as the religious wing of the social welfare state? **From fiscal years 2017 through 2019, the U.S. government had \$375 million in contracts to the USCCB.** In 2014, the Office of Migration and Refugee Services alone listed \$79 million in government contracts against a budget of \$85 million.

**It’s obvious that the bishops themselves cannot oversee such an operation. One needs professionals. And that professionalization makes the Church a very different institution from what most of us suppose it to be.** Today, the man in the pew gains nothing from this conference and loses a great deal.

So, if the USCCB disappeared tomorrow, what would be the result? Here are some things, in no particular order, that might happen:

**First**, we would be able to revisit the lawyer-driven approach to the abuse crisis. The USCCB’s [Planned](#)

Parenthood-endorsed safe environment curricula ignore the root cause of unsafe Church spaces. **In fact, they require assent to propositions that deny those root causes—e.g., homosexuality isn't responsible for the crisis or its cover-up.**

Second, we would have a fighting chance at freedom from the liberal agenda infecting our Church. **No more bishops inappropriately involved with, and beholden to, political agendas rather than teaching Christian principles.** No more entanglement with government funds and requirements that distract from the true mission of the Church. **No more drowning out pressing moral issues with the vast noise of endless policy statements.**

Third, individual bishops would be free to hear the Holy Spirit and do their duty on such matters as **reverent worship, reform of the liturgy,** and provision of the sacraments to their people. They wouldn't have to bother with onerous and self-defeating programs handed down from USCCB HQ—all of which require professional development and administration.

Fourth, managerial church-craft could be confronted. We now operate with a parish-as-country club model overlain with the social justice agenda. The only beneficiaries of this system are those with higher degrees from universities who are exploiting the market for “experts.” The *Bernardine ecclesiology*—the Church as aggressive center-left political operative—has been replaced with the *bureaucratic ecclesiology*: the model of dedicated support teams, sustainable operational foundations, shared journeys of renewal, mission imperatives, etc. etc. (Of course, this machinery *still* serves progressive politics.)



Fifth, bishops' consciences might awaken. By being able (or required) to refer decisions to the conference, a bishop loses his faith, for he fails to exercise his office. The less he exercises it, the less he is *able* to exercise it. Like any physical or mental power, the conscience atrophies when unused. But what is a man without his conscience?

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**All of the above applies to the local chancery as well, with its bloated structure and inaccessible ordinary.** Bishops have limited duties. They are responsible for governing and teaching. We need our bishops to confirm our children and to ordain our priests. **We need them to guard the faith and its rites. We need them to censure and discipline those who err if they refuse to be taught. We need help in rebuilding true Christian education.**

**Bishops have responsibility for the spiritual needs of every person in their diocese, not only the Catholics.** This means that they oversee evangelization. And yet, as Vatican II made clear, the task of spreading the faith is given by God primarily to the laity. **This reality throws the bishop right back to teaching and governing; for, without the nourishment of the liturgy and the truths of faith, the lay Catholic is unable to carry out his mission to transform the world.**

St. Gregory continues, in the quote that begins this article:

For rivalry and ambition are stronger than reason—do not think me extravagant for saying so—and a mediator is more likely to incur some imputation himself than to clear up the imputations which others lie under.

“Rivalry and ambition,” masquerading as collegiality and fraternity, are indeed the fruits of the USCCB, revealed in our day as the invidious corruption of homosexual activity and cover-ups.

In the current doctrinal, moral, and disciplinary crisis in the Church—perhaps even worse than those defects identified by St. Gregory—are deadened consciences and human respect, two vices that infect our bishops today. These evils are due to or exacerbated by their conference. The USCCB should cease to exist forthwith.