

BISHOPS LISTEN TO THE LAITY

William A. Donohue

Over the summer, five bishops from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) met in closed-door session with prominent Catholic men and women from the business community. Also in attendance were a number of distinguished Catholic scholars and leaders. Regarding the latter, all were aligned with the more “progressive” wing of the Church.

This meeting did not sit too well with Catholics of a more orthodox stripe. Deal Hudson, editor of the Catholic monthly, *Crisis*, was so upset that he, along with veteran Catholic writer Russell Shaw, decided to ask the bishops for a meeting with more orthodox Catholics. The meeting took place in Washington, D.C. on September 8.

Bishop Wilton Gregory, who heads the USCCB, was joined by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Bishop William Friend, Bishop William Skylstad and Bishop Robert Lynch. Frank Hanna, III, an Atlanta CEO, opened the discussion; Professor Robert George of Princeton spoke next; author Peggy Noonan was the third speaker. Bishop Gregory did most of the talking for the bishops’ group. There were a few dozen distinguished Catholics in the room (mostly lay people) who asked questions of Bishop Gregory; I was there as well.

“Meeting in Support of the Church” was the official title of the event. While it is true that everyone there was in support of the Church, it is also true that many were openly dismayed by the scandal. Many of the comments were directed at the issue of dissent. For example, we wanted to know what, if anything, was done about the 70 Georgetown professors who signed a letter of protest last spring complaining about the commencement address of Cardinal Arinze; the African cardinal

simply restated the Church's teachings on sexuality.

And what about Father James Keenan, the Jesuit priest who teaches at the Weston School of Theology? Father Keenan testified before a committee of the Massachusetts legislature saying that official Catholic teaching sanctions marriage between two men! That the bishops in attendance claimed never to have heard about this was troubling.

Another person in the audience wanted to know why AFL-CIO director John Sweeney is given awards by senior Catholic officials; Sweeney is unrelenting in his pro-abortion convictions. Many in the audience took great exception to naming pro-abortion advocate Leon Panetta (former congressman and aide to President Clinton) to the national Catholic oversight committee dealing with episcopal reforms. And so on.

Aside from issues of dissent, there was a discussion on how Catholics can impact public policy issues. The nation is going to have to face the issue of whether anything less than a constitutional amendment can save marriage from gay activists bent on pushing same-sex legislation. Bioethics, especially embryonic stem cell research and cloning, is an area that Catholics must be actively engaged in if disaster is to be thwarted. While there are other issues of importance, too, it was the consensus that these two were paramount.

If there was one thing everyone agreed on, it was the recognition that nothing so damaging has ever happened to the Catholic Church in the U.S. than the recent scandal. We are at a crossroads and something must be done to assure that this never happens again.

It has been my position for some time now that there are two components to the scandal: molesting priests and enabling bishops. The proximate cause of the former is homosexuality and the proximate cause of the latter is clericalism.

USA Today found that 91 percent of the cases of priestly

sexual abuse involve male-on-male sex. There is a word for that in the English language and it is called homosexuality. Does this mean that all gay priests are molesters? Of course not, but it does mean that most of the molesters are gay.

Nothing angers me more than to hear pundits say there is a pedophilia crisis in the Church. Nonsense: almost all the cases involve post-pubescent males. In other words, the John Geoghans who preyed on kids were the exception—homosexual priests who preyed on young men were the rule. Unfortunately, millions are in denial over this elementary truth.

As for the bishops, their tendency to secretly handle these problems, while acting as if they are accountable to no one, is a condition that must end. Elitism in any form is not only not helpful, it can actively work to subvert whole institutions. Fortunately, we have a good man like Bishop Gregory at the helm.

Which road we choose at the crossroad will decide our fate. If we turn left, as the dissidents want, the Church will go south. A return to orthodoxy, prudently approached, makes more sense. That, however, will require some tough decisions. But it is folly to think there is another way.