

BISHOPS BEWARE OF SOME LAY CATHOLICS

The week before the U.S. bishops convened in Baltimore, I wrote an article warning the bishops to be careful when listening to the laity for advice. Some are responsible, I said, and some are an utter disgrace. After the conference ended on November 14, I issued another statement, detailing the irresponsible ones.

Should the bishops listen to the laity? Of course. Should the laity govern? No. They should know their place: Their role is advisory. If the bishops want to extend greater authority to them, they can, but it smacks of arrogance for the laity to think that they are better equipped to run the Church than the bishops. Many of them can't even run their own lives without crashing on a daily basis.

Who among the laity should the bishops listen to? The ones who know their place. The first time I sat down with Cardinal John O'Connor was in December 1993. I started working at the Catholic League—our office was in the Catholic Center (the same building where O'Connor worked) on July 1, 1993. I had made some media splashes, motivating O'Connor to write about me. We had met briefly at a public event in the fall, but now he wanted to have a meeting.

Within five minutes, O'Connor asked me, "What do you need?" "Nothing," I said. A few minutes later, he asked the same question, pressing me to respond. I said, "I want nothing from you. I came to serve you. I came to inherit your problems." He turned to his assistant, an attorney, and said he could count on one hand the number of times this has happened to him over the years.

That's why O'Connor listened to me. So have some other

bishops. I don't have a hidden agenda—the Catholic League is here to defend the Church against wrongdoing. I hasten to add that we are not here to defend wrongdoing committed by the clergy.

Any lay person who wants to help the bishops deal with the issue of sexual abuse should be as committed to the rights of the accused as he is to the welfare of victims. Unfortunately, we hear a great deal about the latter these days, but little about the former.

In today's environment it takes courage to insist on the due process rights of priests and bishops who are accused of sexual misconduct. However, not to do so is a grave injustice. All of the accused must be considered innocent until proven otherwise, and there should be no exception for anyone who works for the Catholic Church.

Bishops looking for guidance on which lay groups and individuals they should listen to should keep in mind the content of the proposed reforms and the tone of those making them. They should sniff out lay clericalism whenever it arises.

Beware of those on the right and the left who are proposing a mountain of reforms. Some are so intrusive as to be a menace. As a corollary, beware of those who pledge to "fix" everything. It should never be assumed that everything the bishops have done is in need of repair.

Indeed, the bishops need to be more vocal in touting their successes: the fact that in the last two years for which we have data, only .005 percent of the clergy have had a credible accusation made against them is testimony to the success of the Dallas reforms.

Tone matters. When the laity become lordly, look out. The most recent example is the condescending editorial posted on November 9 by the *National Catholic Reporter*. It does not

advise the bishops—it lectures them. That this is coming from the same people who reject the Church's teachings on sexuality, and who have long promoted a libertine vision—one that was adopted by many seminaries in the late 1960s and the 1970s, causing the sexual abuse scandal—makes the editorial all the more despicable.

After the conference ended, I wrote about agenda-ridden Catholics who want to turn the Catholic Church into a mainline Protestant denomination. They want married priests, women priests (and cardinals), a greater acceptance of the gay clergy, and a radical overhaul of the Church's teachings on sexuality.

These people are oblivious to the fact that many of the mainline Protestant denominations adopted the changes they are promoting, and with disastrous results: they have been in free-fall for decades. Indeed, the decline in membership was driven by these reforms! Why is it seen as "progressive" to adopt strictures that cause a regression?

The fact is that most of the sexual abuse by the clergy has been committed by homosexuals—more than 80 percent. Not to acknowledge this verity is delinquent.

It is no more Irish bashing to note that the Irish are disproportionately represented among alcoholics than it is gay bashing to say that homosexual priests are disproportionately represented (to put it mildly) among those who sexually abuse minors. It is simply a fact of life.

As I have said before, it is not the teachings of the Church that need to change; it is the teachers (priests) who refuse to abide by them.

Merry Christmas!