

WE HAD TWO CHOICES: SHUT UP OR SPEAK UP

William A. Donohue

The Catholic League had two choices in dealing with the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church: shut up or speak up. I decided we should speak up.

To shut up would have been to throw the floor open to every dissident voice in the Church. Moreover, bigots would have gone unanswered. So I decided it was better to jump into the ring so as not to allow the adversaries of the Church to carry the day. Fortunately, the overwhelming response from our members has been to approve of this stance.

It hasn't been easy. Indeed, this has been the most difficult chapter in my professional life. But it's worth it. This is, after all, the Church that I love. And by running from TV studio to TV studio, I have been able to reach millions of Americans, and not just Catholics. That's the great advantage of having an office in mid-town Manhattan.

Our role in the scandal is twofold: a) to emphasize the good work done by most priests while refusing to defend how the Church has handled this matter and b) to fight those who seek to exploit this issue for partisan purposes. At times it can be taxing, but I believe we have carved out the right path. The credibility of the Catholic League would be nil if we made the mistake of being defensive and apologetic about the scandal. No, some in the Church dropped the ball big time.

There are something like 46,000 priests in this country and most are outstanding men who give their life to the Church. But as no less than Cardinal O'Connor himself once wrote, "some priests are evil." Yes, that was his wording. It is important to acknowledge this because some Catholics still

think it is a sign of disloyalty to criticize the Church for any reason. I love my country and my religion and it is precisely because I do so that I jump on leaders who mess up. Disloyalty suggests putting a knife in the back of those whom we purportedly serve. That is not what is going on in this instance.

Those with their agendas love what's going on. I have confronted several of the dissidents on TV and every time I do I go right at them, charging that they don't believe a word the Church teaches on sexuality. So why should anyone be surprised that they are now asking for married priests, women priests and a complete overhaul of Church teachings on abortion, homosexuality, etc.?

Ending celibacy and allowing women to become priests would solve absolutely nothing. The problem, deep down, is a fundamental lack of discipline and accountability coupled with an astonishing lack of courage. It does not exaggerate to say there is more insubordination with impunity tolerated in the Catholic Church than at the New York Times. It is high time a giant STOP sign were placed in seminaries, parishes, Catholic campuses and diocesan offices.

It is not comforting to ask someone to find another job. But sometimes it must be done. Saying "no" does not come easy, especially to those ensconced in a culture of casualness. And that would include many in the Church. The therapeutic culture that we live in has done far more damage than it has good and it is about time everyone recognized it.

In the 1980s, I was speaking to a woman professor of psychology about a misbehaving student of mine. I told her how I handled him—I laid it on the line and told him to shape up or ship out. "Oh, that's great, Bill," she said. "Tough love." "Tough love?" I answered. "Gee, and I just thought it was common sense."

The problem with common sense is that it isn't a common property these days. It used to be that it was caught: it was part of catching norms, values and sensibilities that are a natural part of growing up. Nowadays, I guess, it has to be taught. Unfortunately, those teaching it too often lack the faculty themselves.

Over and over again, I have said to the media that what is needed to reform the Catholic Church is not a blue ribbon commission, nor further reliance on lawyers and psychologists. What we need is more common sense and the courage to act on our convictions.

This issue of Catalyst is different from any other. Instead of using our news releases as a basis upon which to write a story for Catalyst, I decided to present them just the way the media receives them. This way you get a chance to view the raw copy. Now you know how we entice the media to respond. Our news releases are informative, timely, short and provocative. That's what the media wants and that's what we deliver.

To those who despair, I remind them that now is not the time to throw the towel in. Now is the time to clean house and start anew.