

Heaven is the goal, but righteousness is required.

The Catholic Church shows the way and encourages all to persevere to the end, but our destiny is in our own hands. It is safe to say that if all Catholics lived up to the standards set by Christ and promulgated by His Church, the world could not hold out against conversion. It is not easy to be a good Catholic. It calls for the restraint of passion and the exercise of virtue. Individual Catholics under strong temptation have fallen.

Lust, ambition, power, wealth, have led many astray. But they all knew they were doing wrong, they knew they were going against the Church's teaching. They never attempted to justify wrongdoing. There have been, even among high churchmen, men who lived evil lives, but the Church never condoned their actions. The Catholic Church never led anyone to sin. It never taught that wrong was right or right was wrong. The Church has always stood forth as a beacon of righteousness, always protesting when it could not prevent evil.

The Church of England would still be in the fold if it were not for the successful attempt to introduce divorce into Christianity. When two individuals come together before God and pledge an oath to this commitment, it is a valid marriage and cannot be set aside for any reason. While the Catholic Church lost England for upholding God's law of marriage, the reformers in Germany also set aside the prohibition against divorce and polygamy in order to win over to their side a small principality. Today, the Catholic Church alone supports the indissolubility of marriage.

Prior to the Lambeth Conference held in England in 1930, every Christian body condemned the practice of artificial birth control. On this issue, the Catholic Church once again stands alone. God alone is the author of life. The most dramatic example is the holocaust of abortion. God commands that we shall not kill (murder) the innocent for any reason. Is a child's life any less worthwhile because he or she was conceived by rape or incest? Why condemn the child for the sin of the parents? Only the Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from birth to natural death. History may be distorted, but facts cannot be set aside by capricious whim.

The Catholic Church cannot and will not equivocate when it comes to the teachings of Christ. She alone is the voice of Christ in the world. Her voice will always ring out in protest of the violations of God's commandments. Does this not demonstrate the character of the Church?

From the beginning, the Catholic Church has held up the highest standards. When we run across things in history, which seem incompatible with God's Church, how are we to regard them? In every instance they are the result not of the teaching of the Church, but of the violation of those teachings. They show the passion and weakness of individuals, not the doctrine of the Church.

The treason of one American does not mean that all Americans are treasonous. The actions of one traitor are not a reflection on American patriotism. If we find a crooked politician, does it mean that we should abolish our democratic form of government? Neither does evil perpetrated by one member of the Church prove that the Church is corrupt.

The Evangelization Station

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: evangelization@earthlink.net

www.evangelizationstation.com

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Accusations Against the Church

Victor R. Claveau, MJ

Not long ago, I was invited to be a guest on a local radio program to speak about the issues confronting the Catholic Church today. Listeners were able to telephone the program host to offer comments or ask questions. A number of callers attacked the reputation of the Church, saying that her past record of abuses disqualified her as being the true Church of Christ.

I responded that we should not judge any church by its membership, as every congregation is made up of sinners. We should judge a church by its teachings and whether or not those teachings can be traced back to Jesus and the Apostles. The Catholic Church is a divine institution as she was, founded by Jesus, the Messiah. It is truly unfortunate that some members of the Church have not lived up to the call to holiness that the Church presents. It is also unfortunate that many sincere people reject the Catholic Church as the true Church because they believe she has a record, which disqualifies her. They point out instances in history, which seem incompatible with an organization, which represents Christ.

If the Catholic Church were what she is represented to be by her opponents, there would not be over 1,147,000,000 worldwide members. The Church would have died out long ago. If the Church is a hundredth part as bad as her enemies picture her, she cannot be the Church of Christ.

I do not say that there were no abuses in the Church. But they were the abuses, which more or less had been part of her from the beginning, and which Christ foretold.

Jesus guaranteed His Church against error, not against scandal. Did not the savior dine with the social outcasts of His day? Did not Peter's denial and Judas' theft, ultimate betrayal and suicide also cause grave scandal? Human weakness has always been part of the Church. But apart from this, the Church's enemies accuse her of crimes and teachings, when

there is no evidence to support these charges, let alone the verdicts.

Converts to Catholicism soon recognize that the Catholic Church is "fair game" for those who wish to attack her. They quickly become sensitized to the anti-Catholic bias found in the secular media.

Many Hollywood and Television productions go out of their way to ridicule the teachings and/or practices of the Church. No other religious group in America is as unjustly vilified as the Church. For example, The Academy Award Movie "The Departed," directed by Martin Scorsese was described by one critic as "exciting, preposterous, dazzling, occasionally outrageous -- a police thriller with never a slow moment and with plenty of reasons for displaying all that star power.

I too, found the movie outrageous and vulgar as well. Interspersed in the dialogue were attacks on the Knights of Columbus, as being a corrupt political organization, and the Catholic Church, specifically in scenes where one priest is accused of molesting altar boys and another is accused of having sexual relations with a nun. The priest's hang their heads and refuse to answer back; in effect admitting guilt. These scenes were simply gratuitous as they had nothing to do with the story line. They are just cheap-shots at the Church. This movie is typical of the anti-Catholic misrepresentation of the Catholic Church and the numerous devout priests and religious, who sacrifice everything in the service of God.

Christians everywhere should not only boycott this film but should demand an apology from Director/Producer Martin Scorsese, who, while supposedly was raised in a devout Catholic home, produced the 1988 film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which was based on Nikos Kazantzakis' 1955 novel in which Jesus appears as a tormented, fearful young man confused by sex and uncertain of his path in life. The film was condemned by virtually every Christian denomination, both here and abroad, was protested, picketed, subject to boycotts and bomb threats, and excluded from the titles carried by the huge Blockbuster Video chain.

Anti-Catholicism is the last acceptable prejudice. Hollywood would not dare to disparage any ethnic group, race, or other religious group the way they

attack Catholicism. As a result, there are millions of people who rarely, if ever, receive favorable information about the Catholic Church.

I would be willing to bet that there will not be a similar outcry against "The Departed" as it simply bashes Catholicism, rather than Christianity in general.

Many a scholar who investigated the supposed history of abuses of the Catholic Church has ended by becoming Catholic. Can we not trust history? Yes, history that is really accurate history, but you cannot trust the history of an adversary.

History is now being rewritten. Scholars who go deeply into the matter are unanimous in their verdict that the Catholic Church has been consistently maligned during the past five hundred years. History has been distorted in order to uphold groups opposed to the Church.

Certainly, there have been abuses in the Church, enough to destroy her, if she were not divine. Jesus foretold that there would be scandals and warned His followers against them. Our Lord did not guarantee that His Church would not have sinful members, but He did guarantee against false doctrine. The parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew's Gospel is a prime example (13:2-9). Jesus plainly states that the wheat and tares will grow together until the harvest. He established His Church for sinners. He established the sacraments to provide avenues of grace, to reclaim the sinner and sanctify the just. His mission on earth was among sinners as well as saints. Even among the chosen twelve there was a thief and traitor.

In the course of ages, the Church spread to every continent, every nation and molded the populace into Christians. This was an extraordinary undertaking. It is understandable that, in this work of transformation, things happened which might shock our modern sensibilities.

You might agree that among the flock there were bound to be some black sheep, but how about the shepherds? What about the "Bad Popes"? To this I say that in the history of the world there is no body of men that can at all compare with the pastors of the Church for virtue and learning. Having said this, I now add that it is only too true that during certain

periods there were shepherds unworthy of the name. Even this Christ foretold when He said: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice" (Mt. 23:2-3).

It is just as hard for a priest, bishop or pope to be holy as it is for a layperson. We all have feet of clay. Christ never said that those in authority would be saints. Thank God, for the most part, they were good men, but not because they were in positions of authority, but because they make good use of the graces given them. If and when the sacraments are neglected, popes too, will fall into sin just as any other person. Sinful behavior affects the sinner. The only way it can affect the Church is by reason of the bad example, but no Catholic thinks any the less of his Church because one of its members falls into sinful behavior.

God can and does use even a sinful person to do His work. King David was guilty of murder and adultery. Solomon fell into idolatry and lust. Yet both were the anointed leaders of God's people.

Members of the military salute Commissioned Officers, not necessarily because they are worthy of honor or respect, but because of the position they hold. A judge may not live a perfect life and yet be a good judge, whose decisions are respected. In other words, we must separate the individual from the office or organization. So in the Church, those in authority may occasionally sin, some may be utterly unworthy of their place, yet, as ministers of the Gospel they have God's power behind them. Above all there is one who, no matter what his moral fiber, has the guarantee of Christ that he will never teach false doctrine as head of the Church and that is Peter and his successors, the popes. There is a great difference between knowing what is right and doing it. St. Paul exclaimed that while he was preaching to others he feared he himself might become disqualified (1 Cor. 9:26). When Christ Himself was on earth, He had to frequently upbraid His followers for their delinquencies. He even said: "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jn 6:70).

The Catholic Church is made up of human beings and they are not coerced into being good.