

The exposure of child abuse, cover ups and the sexual abuse of nuns within the Catholic Church has long been something that I have hesitated to comment on. As a Protestant minister I associate with many clergy of the Catholic Church, and I accept that there are good people in all communities and institutions, just as I accept that sexual abuse is not just a problem confined to the Catholic Church. But that does not mean that the type of corruption we have seen coming from the Church can be overlooked or excused, and I feel that, as a minister of an organized religion, something needs to be said addressing the abuse of power and faith we have seen recently.

First, I completely condemn the conduct that has been exposed in the Pennsylvania diocese as well as other diocese in the Catholic Church where sexual abuse has occurred. In this particular case, over a thousand allegations of child abuse have been reported over years, added to a cover up, suggesting that this was condoned and supported within the church. This is an unimaginable violation of trust, not only against the worshipers who came to their churches seeking guidance in their faith, it is a violation to God.

I could never fully imagine what the victims of these priests are going through, but as a person of faith who did not attend church for over twenty years, I feel I can speak to some extent to the damage this revelation has inflicted upon worshipers who put their faith in the institution of the churches all over our nation.

Allegations of corruption in the Church have a different impact on us than such allegations in other institutions of our society. We hear about sexual violence in politics, sports, music and schools and, while this is horrible, we do not seem to fixate on those institutions in the same way we do when this happens in a religious setting. I think this is because we expect religious institutions to live up to the morals of love they preach. The hypocrisy does not go unnoticed to us. If the institutions of faith we rely on to help us live good lives and find God are now turning us into victims, what is the point of religion? What is the point of God?

My answer is that the point of religion as an institution was never to turn people of faith into victims. The reason religions institutionalized was because people of faith realized that in order to live good and loving lives it helps to do so together. The Church was built by human hands and the problem with that is, like any other human institution, the Church is subject to the type of corruption we are seeing exposed in all corners of our society.

Institutionalized religions like the Christian Church are supposed to help us live good and loving lives. If the Church is not able to do this then, as a minister of the Church, my suggestion is to let the Church fall. The Church, like any other institution in our society has a role to play. If it cannot function as a loving institution, then the Church has no purpose.

But that is not the end of the story. Because if we are to allow the Church to fall, we must ask the question, “Are we going to pick it back up again?”

I feel a lot of people are content to just let the Church go, but I am not. As a moral institution that is supposed to set an example, it seems to me that if we are willing to let the Church lose to corruption, then we are giving consent for all of our other institutions to be corrupted as well.

We have become too accustomed to corruption in our society, yet I see that, at least in government, a concerted effort is growing to free our institutions from the shackles of corruption and abuse so that they can once again be used to serve the people they represent.

The institution of Church was created to help us find the love of God, and if the Church has failed you, it helps me to remember that this does not mean God loves you any less. Rather it means we need to change the way we do Church. When those things we rely on in faith crumble, we do not need to let our faith crumble with it. We can find another church, or a new denomination, we can seek a different direction of faith or start a new faith community. At least in this we are fighting against those who would use abuse faith with those who truly want to bring something good out of it.

My heart goes out to the unimaginable pain of all the people of faith who were abused as children, as nuns or as church goers; for the Church in this form has failed you. But my hope is that you will not allow this imperfect expression of the Church to prevent you from finding a more perfect model of God’s goodness in life.

It is my hope that from the ashes of bad religious behavior we can build a new Church that truly lives into its call to love.

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