



Fishers of Men

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By the Honorable Senator Rick Santorum

Like most American Catholics, I have followed the recent sex scandals in the Church with profound sympathy for victims, revulsion over priests who prey on minors and frustration at the absence of hierarchical leadership. Unlike most, I have been visited by the gift of hope; for I see in this fall an opportunity for ecclesial rebirth and a new evangelization of America. This "new evangelization," advocated strenuously by Pope John Paul II, has the potential for restoring confidence in the priesthood while empowering all American Catholics.

The most obvious change must occur within American seminaries, many of which demonstrate the same brand of cultural liberalism plaguing our secular universities. My hope was rekindled last week as our American Cardinals proposed from Rome an "apostolic visitation" of seminaries emphasizing "the need for fidelity to the Church's teaching, especially in the area of morality." It is an arduous task. However, the Pope made it clear last week that he expects the strong appeal of the Cardinals to be followed by decisive Episcopal action.

It is startling that those in the media and academia appear most disturbed by this aberrant behavior, since they have zealously promoted moral relativism by sanctioning "private" moral matters such as alternative lifestyles. Priests, like all of us, are affected by culture. When the culture is sick, every element in it becomes infected. While it is no excuse for this scandal, it is no surprise that Boston, a seat of academic, political and cultural liberalism in America, lies at the center of the storm.

The cultural change needed cannot end with our seminaries. Most of the American Cardinals, while strong defenders of the faith, are from a different era with only a few responding to the new demands our decaying culture has place upon them. With God's grace, a new hierarchy must emerge that will be both faithful in thought and courageous in confronting all infidelity within the Church. Such Church leaders have a great example in Pope John Paul II's battle with communism's attempt to destroy the Church and human dignity. A new hierarchy must similarly fight against an array of "isms"-moral relativism, cultural liberalism-inside and outside of the Church.

Most importantly, I hope this crisis in the clergy will remind the laity of the call of Vatican II, a call the Pope has re-echoed throughout his incredible papacy. This is not just the hierarchy's church; it belongs to all the baptized. Pope John Paul II reminds us time and again of Luke's Gospel: "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." We are all called to be "fishers of men." Both clergy and laity have mutually supportive and indispensable roles in the "new evangelization" through administration of the sacraments and proclamation of the Gospel and all Church teachings.

Even now we witness this "new evangelization" through many ecclesial lay movements such as Opus Dei, the Neocatechumenate, Focolare, Regnum Christi, Communion and Liberation. The laity across America is also demanding faithful Catholic schools and colleges. The key to success, as the Pope stated in his 1999 exhortation, *The Church in America*, is to be "formed in the truths and values of the Church's social teaching and in the basic notions of a theology of the laity." A renewed, united effort of clergy and laity will transform the Church. That this does not already occur belies the greatest systemic failure of the Church in America where so many cradle Catholics have left the Church or go "unchurched" because of exposure to uninspired, watered down versions of our faith by those with deficient seminary training. In light of recent events, the laity must guide them back.

We as the Church, the people of God, cannot and should not leave the mission of the Church to the clergy alone, nor should our role be limited to overseeing priestly training and conduct. The laity must assist the whole Church in America reclaim our nominally Catholic colleges, schools, hospitals and social welfare agencies for the sake of our souls. The Pope reminds us that Catholic educational institutions make possible "a wide-ranging evangelizing effort as long as there is a clear will to impart truly Christian education. Many Catholic social service agencies, while serving the human needs, have been co-opted by a secular culture. The Pope calls them also to "faithfully reflect the attitude of Jesus who came to proclaim good news to the poor."

As a Catholic U.S. Senator, I am proud to see the Church, often alone, take one courageous stand after another on the great moral issues of the day: abortion, cloning, third world debt relief, AIDS and the breakdown of the family to name a few. The Catholic Church remains true to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the dictates of the natural law. Through 2000 years, the Church, built upon rock, has survived every arrow sinful man has shot at her from within and without. Another arrow has been loosed from within, piercing the Body of Christ. The time is now for the laity to come to her aid. We must heed the call of Christ through his Vicar on earth: Climb into Peter's boat and go into the deep!

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