

Catholic hierarchy in denial

Still recovering from the unfathomable, unconscionable and inexcusable American sexual abuse scandal of eight years ago, the Catholic church is now in the midst of a global sexual abuse crisis that seemingly rises all the way to the Vatican. This is a far cry from the days a transformative Pope John Paul II inspired the nation of Poland and helped to crush the scourge of communism in the late '80s.

As a Catholic who reveres my faith's theology, I am pained to watch the Catholic hierarchy almost completely lose its moral authority. This was never more apparent than in the run-up to the passage of the health care bill. You had the Catholic bishops opposing reform on one side and Catholic health care institutions — who had a *huge* financial interest in the bill's approval — on the other. The media accepted the church's open invitation to give equal weight to the Catholic bishops and a Catholic bureaucracy with an opposing view. This gave viewers a distinct impression: There really was no clear Catholic position on the issue.

I believe the vast majority of the church's hierarchy are good and holy men. But I thought the only way for it to restore its credibility eight years ago would have been for every U.S. bishop to resign in an act of contrition and humility, regardless of whether or not they were personally complicit in the sexual abuse scandal. The most stunning aspect of this sad chapter is that a strict adherence to church teaching would have not tolerated any of this.

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gized, redoubled its efforts to prevent abuse and paid settlements, the root problem still has not been addressed. What needs to be addressed — and is most distressing — is the church hierarchy operates within a completely dysfunctional culture. They are in denial.

That denial stretches far beyond the cover given to despicable, predatory priests. What's in denial is that many of the best, brightest and balanced of today's Catholics are excluded from the Catholic hierarchy.

The church has been its own worst enemy. This wave of sexual abuse would not have been hidden — let alone tolerated — if the hierarchy contained balanced men and women (married and unmarried) who actually possessed common sense and a real-world perspective as practicing Catholics.

The Catholic faithful in the pews deserve better. They should not have to resort to watching 1950s Bishop Sheen reruns on YouTube for moral clarity, as I sometimes find myself doing. We deserve

a hierarchy that not only recognizes its responsibility to be the best witness possible to Catholics and to the world, but a willingness to makes the changes this requires.

As a Catholic happily married to a committed Presbyterian who can call an Orthodox priest and Baptist minister valued friends, I know very well there is no more historically divisive issue to Christian unity than church authority. Right now, that authority in the Catholic church appears anemic. Fairly or unfairly, the pope is under attack. While the media are all too eager to add fuel to the fire, the church has only itself to blame.

During Vatican II, a group of Arabic-speaking Greek Catholics from the Middle East known as the Melkites had a profound influence in bringing about changes that resulted in the church as we know it today, including the use of English instead of Latin in the U.S.

The Melkites, who had a married clergy, shook the Vatican culture that existed in the '60s. They held strong views on the role of church authority. They viewed Christian disunity not as something unfortunate, but as an evil that needed to be overcome.

Today, the Catholic church hierarchy needs another hard shake of its culture or it will render itself utterly irrelevant. It doesn't need to divert from any of its positions on faith and morals, but it does need to turn to the next page in the Melkite handbook.

It needs to include the best, brightest and balanced men and women to lead the way.

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