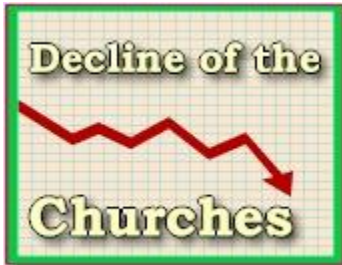


## The Decline of the Churches

Commentary for May 22, 2002 — Scandals, Payouts,



The Roman Catholic Church has undergone exposure in the world's press because of blunders by the heads of the denomination in handling what appears to be a large-scale sexual scandal involving children and male clergy. The scandal is widespread in the United States and appears to be worldwide in scope. Due to the nature of such practices, worse revelations may yet come in the near future.

### *The Scandal*

The scandal has become front-page news because of investigations following from several criminal convictions of Roman Catholic clergy for sexual abuse on minors — an act otherwise termed as rape. Because those convicted were from one large organization (although many clergy from all denominations have been charged and convicted of similar crimes) pressure is on Roman Catholic leadership and the Vatican to respond to these issues.

These investigations revealed an implicit but hard-line policy of the Roman Catholic leadership to minimize and avoid the problem. When clergy were accused with criminal behavior of a sexual nature, all too often the victims and families were advised to drop the matter, and the accused was either retained in their pastoral position or moved to another position where other children were similarly exposed to their actions.

Documents have become public that indicate the Roman Catholic leadership knew that crimes had been committed but rarely informed law enforcement officials. Extraordinary meetings have taken place in the Vatican, within weeks of the widespread public exposure of these scandals. Why is the Vatican concerned about this crisis? Individually, many of the leaders in the Vatican are concerned about the victims of this large-scale problem. Organizationally the Roman Catholic Church views this problem long-term as something to be endured with as little change as possible in policy. In a written public statement following the meeting of the Pope with American Cardinals one of the purposes was,

**"on the part of the American bishops, to inform the Holy See about the difficulties which they have faced in recent months, on the part of the Roman Dicasteries, to hear directly from the American cardinals and the chief officials of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops a general evaluation of the situation, and together to develop ways to move forward in addressing these issues."**

In a letter to priests in America by the Cardinals (from the Vatican) on April 23, 2002, they wrote,

**"We regret that episcopal oversight has not been able to preserve the church from this scandal."**

Pope John Paul II said in a public statement of April 23, 2002 (from the Vatican website),

**“Because of the great harm done by some priests and religious, the church herself is viewed with distrust, and many are offended at the way in which the church’s leaders are perceived to have acted in this matter. The abuse which has caused this crisis is by every standard wrong and rightly considered a crime by society; it is also an appalling sin in the eyes of God.”**

For anyone familiar with the enormity of the acts perpetrated, the Pope understated the situation.

### ***The Money Flow***

The Roman Catholic Church in the United States and around the world is structured legally and financially so that each Bishop largely controls all finances from all church organizations in his geographical area of responsibility. They are like small semi-independent fiefdoms that independently handle their own financial budgets, fundraising and sub-corporations. Of course, considerable funds (billions of dollars) go to the Vatican for the operation of the headquarters with its own worldwide operations. In fact, the aggregate United States Roman Catholic Churches provide the largest single percentage of funds to the Vatican. If the flow of money dries up from the United States, the Vatican will have to suspend many of its operations around the world — very quickly. This has begun to happen.

Several stories in the *New York Times* in the last two months pointed out that the sexual scandals have severely hurt the money flow to local, regional, national and Vatican charities and corporate churches. Why? Simply because contributors naturally want their funds to go toward the good works the Church does such as charities, schools, hospitals, buildings, etc.

Several recent court settlements have been for multiple millions of dollars. Many of the victims now feel empowered and are gaining the courage to speak out, press criminal charges, and fight a long fight for justice. The long-term prospects are that court challenges will continue for many years, perhaps decades. Churchgoers simply do not want their voluntary contributions to pay for criminal fines, legal fees and multi-million dollar court settlements because of criminal activity on the part of clergy and church leaders. Local funding sources of the Bishops are drying up.

### ***Organizational Priorities***

The Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest human corporate organizations in the world. It is known for its huge bureaucratic structure, multiple offices, and for its global good works and charities.

Now for some self-evident truths. Every large organization has priorities, goals and duties. The Roman Catholic Church is no different. However, the true priorities of organizations may be different than those stated in public promotions by the organizations. In reality, every organization has these primary goals and priorities:

**(1)** The **First Priority** of *EVERY* organization — whether a government, a corporation or a religious denomination — is the continued survival, health and growth of the organization.

**(2)** The **Second Priority** is to maintain the flow of money, which is the life-blood of every human organization.

**(3)** The **Third Priority** is to serve the best interests of the citizens, customers and their members (employees and volunteers) respectively, as viewed by that organization.

**(4)** The **Fourth Priority** — is to tell the truth.

Be assured that Priorities 1 and 2 are near and dear to every leader of every organization. Such priorities create a momentum of action in every organization.

### ***The Organizational Problem***

What happens if the funds to support Priority 2 are drastically and irreversibly reduced? The result is that the organization focuses upon Priority 1, tries mightily to reestablish Priority 2, often to the detriment of Priorities 3 and 4. As a result of reduced funding, the Roman Catholic Church could literally implode like a balloon with the air let out. When that happens, the organization may react in an unpredictable manner and go in directions no one can imagine.

I apologize for being so theoretical, but organizations are *inhuman* things. Look back in your own life experience and you will see that every large organization you encountered has exercised its power according to these priorities. Only when individuals (acting on behalf of an organization) actively go above and beyond the organizational momentum and policies, and go directly to priority 3 or 4, only then do large organizations truly serve the greater good. I read a quote by Winston Churchill that he gave before Parliament during the Second World War that, **“In war the truth is so precious it must be shielded by a bodyguard of lies.”** Unfortunately most organizations consider themselves as being at war all the time.

### ***The Prospect for the Future***

For the churches of this world, first will come chaos in the churches as outlined in Dr. Martin’s various articles about church government (see below). Next will come the decline of the churches. Finally, in an organizational sense, will come the death of several and perhaps many large churches.

I believe we are seeing that process happening now, and the process will gain speed. It is beginning with the largest Christian denomination. Most denominations are successful in focusing the attention of worshippers away from the Bible. This is all too often due to the fact that the clergy does not believe the Bible, but prefer the church traditions of men to guide the actions of their organizations.

Once members of the denominations begin asking serious questions about the teachings of their denomination, and whether those teachings correspond with the Word of God, then they

will simply walk away, and the organizations will shrink and die. Remember that sexual imagery is widespread in Roman Catholic and other traditional denominations' church buildings. (See Dr. Martin's articles on the subject, listed below.)

I often wonder whether the people and church leaders realize that such imagery is on their buildings. If they know, do they approve? If they do not know, can I think of them as being ignorant? Who put such imagery there, and why? Like gang graffiti on walls, to whom does that imagery communicate? I do not know ... but I do wonder.

### ***The Victims***

I have had the situation in my life to speak with too many severely abused individuals. Most were abused in their young childhood. They are survivors of events which attack their self-identity, their self-worth, their sense of security, their childhood innocence, as well as their sexual privacy.

Such survivors need most of all an understanding friend (not a savior, that is the role of Jesus Christ) as they recover from the hurt inflicted by others. All too often that hurt is added to by inhuman organizations and institutions. I found these survivors to have a powerful self-identity, and the strongest personalities of all the people I ever met. It was these strengths that helped them emotionally survive, when most others would have curled up in a corner and wasted away.

We should grieve with those survivors as well as for those who have not survived. Less time should be spent worrying about the perpetrators convicted of such crimes and almost no time worrying about their institutions and corporations. Few perpetrators have asked for forgiveness and several have pled that they were "driven" by urges and impulses to perform such acts against the innocent. God knows the truth and will judge accordingly (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2), in addition to human justice of long sentences for those convicted.

### ***The Apostle Paul's Solution to Open Sexual Sin***

It is interesting to review the actions of the apostle Paul to severe sin, also a sexual sin, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. Paul's reaction reads like something right out of today's headlines,

**"It is reported commonly that there is fornication [*pornea* in Greek] among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you.**

**For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, you deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**

**Your glorying is not good [they were being tolerant]. Know you not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the**

**leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

**I wrote unto you in an epistle [a previous letter] not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must you needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.**

**For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not you judge them that are within? But them that are without God judges. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.**"

To "**deliver such an one to Satan**" meant to take him to the civil authorities as a public criminal. That was the responsibility of the entire church, not just the leaders. The Corinthians were being tolerant of a gross sin. Keep in mind that Corinth was the "sin city" of the Roman empire with a reputation similar to Las Vegas or New Orleans in the United States today. *Nothing* shocked them.

However, the Corinthian *ekklesia* managed to shock the pagan Gentiles by having one of their members fornicating with his father's wife (his former "stepmother"), openly living together.

Paul dealt with the problem. Compare the Lord's words in Matthew 18:15-17 and Paul's advice in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. Note that Paul's criteria for expulsion from the *ekklesia* was based on common law, never on doctrinal matters. Note also that Paul focuses on public sins such as fornication, covetousness, idolatry, railing, drunkenness and extortion. He is not concerned here with private sins that we all have.

His concern is with the well-being of the *ekklesia* at Corinth as well as its public reputation (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). Later in Second Corinthians Paul wrote that he received reports that the Corinthian church took his command and handled the problem to their credit (2 Corinthians 7:8-16).

## **The Outcome**

The outcome of these expensive scandals in the Roman Catholic Church may be the practical demise of the largest Christian denomination. This will not happen until there is a wide-spread questioning of doctrine. In other words, the scandals will continue until contributors stop contributing. When the laity ask the clergy, "How could this happen?" and answers are not given, the laity will find answers for themselves, increasingly in the pages of Scripture.

Once that begins, the avalanche will occur which will sweep several large denominations away, along with the errant teachings of men. Scripture teaches that basic right and wrong is not difficult to understand, if motivated by love. If love is not present, then right and wrong are impossible to define and even more difficult to perform. The Pharisees discovered this to their loss. The final result will be the outcome presented by Dr. Martin in several articles on the ASK website.

One excellent article shows why there is ... "[Chaos in the Churches](#)." The chaos inherent in all churches will lead to decline and death of many churches. Dr. Martin wrote in that article:

**"By understanding this Prophetic Report, it should now be obvious where the true *ekklesia* of God is located. Its Head and Headquarters are in heaven. One's prime fellowship is your personal and individual association with the Father through the mediation of Christ. There is no other go-between in that personal relationship.**

**There are, of course, other human members of that *ekklesia* on earth. They also have the same prime fellowship. They are represented in the various Christian groups on earth (or in no denominations at all). When such people who have the prime fellowship get together in buildings, in homes, at picnics, etc., they come together for horizontal fellowship or to worship God as a group. Many feel this is good and helpful, and it is. I strongly encourage it. But it is the *prime* fellowship that counts."**

The Roman Catholic Church is not an organization ordained by God. It is a human institution. A test for many things is given in Matthew 7:16, **"You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"** Yes, unfortunately men (and women) do gather such things, if their intentions are evil. Not only must truth be presented, but evil must be exposed. It is time to begin that exposure so the truth can enter into the minds of all.

In answer to the statement by Jesus in John 18:37, Pilate asked, **"What is truth?"** (John 18:38). No answer to Pilate by Jesus is told us. But the answers Jesus gave in a few places were:

- **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"** (John 14:6) and
- **"Your Word is Truth"** (John 17:17). There is no other.
- **"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:32).

Recommended Articles on the website by Ernest Martin:

[The Curse of Church Government](#)

[The Pagan Images of Christians Today](#)

[The Anatomy of a Church - Part 1](#)

[The Anatomy of a Church - Part 2](#)

[Female Sex Signs in Churches](#)

[The Folly of Tradition](#)

[The Deceptions of Satan the Devil](#)

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