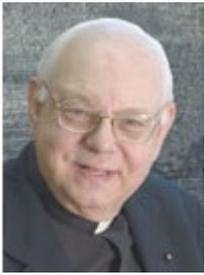


Accosting our vocation



Somebody asked me how the news about Cardinal Theodore McCarrick hit me. When I first heard it, my mind raced through the many years that I have known the cardinal.

He was unfailingly gracious, generous, considerate and proper in every respect. I was glad whenever I saw him. He impressed me as a bishop who ran an efficient operation, always in front when it came to supporting initiatives of the Church.

Put it all together, I was dismayed, revolted and heartsick when I read reports of his totally inappropriate conduct.

Then, anger set in. Reports say seminarians, the hope of the Church, were accosted. I know many, and almost inevitably they are men of the finest idealism, challenged in ways unknown to my generation back when, and ready and willing to give their lives to the Lord.

To insult their wish for holiness and choice for lifelong virginity and to tempt them to sin made me angry, and to think that a priest – representing the priesthood which they obviously admire – was the cause!

Something else came upon me: weariness. I am weary of trying to make excuses, of trying to find something to say.

I am tired of stepping away from restrooms in restaurants until a youth has emerged. I am tired of watching my every move and calculating my every word if a young person is present. I am tired of calling my diocese when I have been invited to preach in another location, asking for a letter stating that I have never been in trouble.

One excuse that I have offered with increasing lack of

enthusiasm is the Dallas Charter, a policy created by U.S. bishops to right the wrongs.

The Charter, whether it is followed or not, spoke of children, but attention must also be given to the wide sexual abuse of adults, primarily women.

Linking cases such as that involving seminarians in Cardinal McCarrick's matter and sexually exploited women was, or is, power. Again and again, women report that if they did not or do not tolerate impropriety, they lose their jobs.

A seminarian would have to be very brave to accuse an archbishop, let alone a cardinal. The seminarian, however persuasive his story, would not enjoy the benefit of the doubt. Quite likely, he could forget about being a priest.

We do not talk about it much anymore, and this in itself is not good, but from its first days of existence the Church has revered lifelong virginity, indeed even placing it on a pedestal above marriage. So, we have convents and monasteries; we have priestly celibacy.

It is a value that goes back to the Gospels and to the very words of Jesus.

Always, but surely today in these times in which anything goes, Church leaders and laity in the pew must be genuine, accepting sexual exploitation nowhere. Bishops, priests and religious are especially bound. After all, they stand before the world and declare their personal commitment to virginity.

I am tired of making this point and then of being assailed for concocting excuses, but I make it again. Sexual abuse is a vast problem in our culture. It hardly only involves clergy. Our society's insanity when it comes to satisfying erotic desires in the most selfish of circumstances, and our increasing disregard for morality in any setting, is sickening and frightening because of where it is taking us. We must face

this fact.

I may be old fashioned, but I still believe that this abuse is a sin. I am current enough, however, to know that such abuse may represent a serious psychopathology.

Through all of this. I find peace when I ask the Lord for his miraculous healing, and I cherish the undiminished belief that Christ's forgiveness heals all wounds.

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