

CONFRONTING POWER AND SEX IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

BISHOP GEOFFREY ROBINSON

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INTRODUCTION

Fran DeChant

It is my privilege to introduce our speaker, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia emeritus. Geoffrey James Robinson was born in 1937 in Richmond. He tells me that's a town in New South Wales, Australia. There are several Richmond's and there are about three, four or five dozen in the United States. The schools and the towns where he received his education have wonderful names; St. Josephs College, Hunters Hill; St. Columba's College, Springwood; and Urbaniana University. Finally, he studied in Rome.

He was ordained for the Archdiocese of Sydney in 1960. Bishop Robinson earned advanced degrees in Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law. After a time spent in parish work, he lectured and taught Canon Law at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Additionally, he served as Chief Justice of the Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal, and as Secretary, then as President of the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand.

Bishop Robinson published a book on Marriage, Divorce and Annulment in 1984. His subsequent books explore religious experiences in our everyday lives and the Gospel of St. Mark. He is hailed for his contributions to Catholic education, raising standards for ongoing education of teachers, especially in the field of biblical studies. Bishop Robinson has gained prominence in the area of his work in ecumenism.

In 1994 he was elected by the Australian bishops to the National Committee for Professional Standards. This is the committee that coordinated the Catholic Church in Australia's response to the unfolding revelation of sexual abuse by clergy. As co-chairman, Bishop Robinson became recognized for his part – a very great part – in helping and healing those who have suffered sexual abuse in his Church, our Church. I need to say that I see Bishop Robinson coming to us as a prophet for our times, and for our Church; a prophet being the one who stands in the middle of the community and calls that community to task. Bishop Robinson has written these words in his most recent book,^{1/} which was already introduced to you, "Listening to victims of sexual abuse is the most fragile gift I have received in the last twelve years." Listening to Bishop Robinson will be a very great gift to us. Please join me in welcoming Bishop Robinson. (Applause)

CONFRONTING ISSUES IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH BISHOP GEOFFREY ROBINSON

Gosh, after that introduction I can't wait to hear what I have to say. (laughter) I hope I can begin to live up to it. Thank you very much one and all for the welcome. Here it's good to have this stopover in Cleveland before continuing on tomorrow further west. The book^{1/} that I've written began its life as a response to the revelations of sexual abuse within the Church – that's the *raison d'être* of the book; that's what it's about. No matter how far away from the direct subject of abuse it seems to get, the whole book is about a response to those revelations.

During the nine years that I was on that committee, charged with developing a national response, so that we would all act together, during those nine years, I spoke with many hundreds of victims, individually and in groups. I met with offenders; I worked with bishops; and for nine years it completely dominated my life. There were many failures, but I hope, also a number of successes. It was an experience that changed me in so many ways that, even if I wanted to, I couldn't go back to being the person I was before. And out of all of that came the utter conviction that, if we are ever to look to the future with confidence, there must first be profound change within the Church.

- Firstly, there must be a study of the more immediate causes of abuse; and there I have suggested that we need to study carefully three things:
 - Unhealthy psychology in individuals, whatever it may be,
 - Unhealthy ideas concerning power and sex, and
 - Unhealthy living conditions.

I suggest that it's when these three things come together – unhealthy psychology, unhealthy ideas, unhealthy living conditions – that we are most likely to find that murky world out of which abuse arises. And I believe that in particular, we must look at all institutional factors in the Church that might contribute to any one of these three. By institutional factors, I mean factors that people are subject to simply by belonging to a particular organization, whatever it might be.

- Secondly, in addition to looking at abuse, we also need to look with equal seriousness at the inadequate response to abuse, because, as everyone knows, that created at least as much scandal as the abuse itself. Now I do not believe that in the ceremony of the ordination of a bishop there is with all that laying on of hands, a sort of microwaving of the bishops brain, (laughter) and I know that the many bishops I have worked with and known, I'm not malicious. And so it's not enough simply to blame bishops, as though that was where all the problem lay. I believe that we must rather look at why so many decent, good, intelligent people acted in a way that, well, was simply not enough – was inadequate. Why? What again were the institutional factors that caused them to act in this way?
- And thirdly, it's my belief that these two areas of inquiry into the immediate causes of abuse – those three factors of unhealthy psychology, unhealthy ideas, unhealthy living conditions – and the study of the inadequate response to abuse: these two will lead to a study of all aspects of the two subjects of power and sex.

After all, sexual abuse is about power and sex. Some would say it's more about power than it is about sex; but it's about both; and so to counter abuse, we must be free to ask serious questions about both of them.

Now you're all aware that there's been criticism of my book^{1/} from various places; and I believe that the fundamental difference between myself and those who are criticizing me lies precisely here. They are starting from the teachings of the Church; and they're saying these teachings have been proclaimed. You may not question them, not even in responding to abuse. I'm starting from the other end. I'm starting from the effect of abuse; and I'm saying we must investigate the causes. And in doing that, we must be free to follow the argument wherever it leads; and if it causes us to ask questions about teachings on either power or sex, then we must be free to ask those questions. If we don't, then we're attempting to respond to abuse while handcuffed and blindfolded.

So I'm going to talk now, briefly – I can't cover the whole of the book; I won't try to – I'm going to talk about those two subjects, power and then sex.

POWER

Well the issue of power is complex, but I'll point to two factors.

The first can be summed up in a misunderstanding of a sentence in the letter to the Hebrews, where it talks about priesthood and says, "Every high priest chosen from among human beings is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf." Now the Greek text says simply: "*taken*." So you've got a hundred people here; you take one of them, and you give them this job of the things pertaining to God on behalf of other people. You might take another one, and give that person the job of a doctor. You might take another, and give them the job of teacher. All the Greek says is: *taken*; but 1700 years ago, St. Jerome translated the Greek into Latin, and that word, the Greek word *lambano*, taken, he translated by the Latin word *assumptus*, which means *taken out, assumed*; and from that developed a whole mystique of the priesthood as in some manner, taken out – above other peoples. So you have the one-hundred, one taken up, above the others; and so the idea of the priest, and to a lesser but real extent, the religious, as somehow on a pedestal, above other people, not like them, and most insidious of all, not subject to the same rules, including even the same moral rules as the others. Now that's an unhealthy idea. Remember, I spoke about unhealthy ideas and unhealthy psychology and unhealthy living conditions. This is an unhealthy idea; and it can lead to all kinds of abusive actions, not just sexual abuse. Indeed, one or two of you may even have met a priest who thought he was superior to you (much laughter). You mean you have?

It's never easy to change a mystique or an ethos but this ethos must change; firstly, because it denies the essential humanity of the priest and religious; and secondly, because it establishes a whole series of false relationships at the heart of the community. Priests and religious are ordinary human beings. Now that ought to be the most obvious of statements; but I suggest both priests and religious on the one hand and Catholic people on the other hand have a lot of work to do here. For example, I find that wherever you have a priest doing his level best to climb down from the pedestal, you've got not just religious superiors, but Catholic people telling him to get right back up there again. When I was first ordained a bishop, I had a game of golf with this very upright Catholic gentleman; and the problem started on the very first tee. "Good shot, my lord." (Much laughter) You think I'm joking? No, this happened. We got up to the green, "Oh, bad luck, my lord," when I missed a putt. And I said, "Hey, we're playing golf; my names Geoff." "Yes, my lord," – get back up on your pedestal.

There's this most dangerous insistence that the priests and religious must be perfect; and no one can be, not human beings, and if they can't be perfect, then they must at least appear to be perfect, and that's very dangerous indeed. They must be able to say, "Look, I messed up; I've all sorts of failings." Think about this a bit – I won't belabor it too much – but how often have you criticized a priest? (laughter) Don't put your hand up; just do it to yourself. How often have you criticized a priest because he's not a great preacher, or because he's not good with kids, or because he's not good at this other thing or that other thing? Who can be good at all those things? Who can? So why can't you allow someone to be, you know, well, an awful preacher; because, I mean, there's a very good priest and his sermons are actually quite excellent; but something, I don't know what it is, he gives it out in a flat monotone, and he's not capable of changing that, so everybody goes to sleep. But that's who he is, is what I'm saying to you.

Let's find other ways. I don't know about you, but I'd love to have, even, and this is a tricky one, but even play tapes on a Sunday, sometimes at least, of a really good sermon from somewhere else (much laughter). Well, would that be an improvement or not? It would take away something of course; it would take away the immediacy of a real live person; but, what I'm getting at, that each one of them is a human being. He cannot be good at everything; and yet we can demand that. So I'm saying you have work to do, as well as the priest. Well, the priest has work to do too. An extraordinary number of people believe the naïve idea that priests and religious are celibate, so they don't **really** have sexual feelings and desires the way the rest of us do. I've news for you.

The second factor I want to mention under this heading of power is that of papal authority. Now we know that the doctrine of papal infallibility states that the Pope cannot be wrong on a matter solemnly defined – the phrase is *ex cathedra*. But gradually, over centuries the protection of that *ex cathedra* level of papal authority has meant that other levels also have to be protected. For example, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, on contraception, does not use the language of infallibility; and yet, so much papal energy has been invested in that teaching on contraception, that to say now that all those Popes were wrong would be seen as a massive blow against all papal authority. Indeed, one may argue that the rejection of that teaching over the last forty years has shown exactly that: a lessening of respect for all papal authority, as more and more people have said to themselves, "I'm convinced that the Pope is wrong on this issue; so how do I know he's right on other issues?" And it led to a general weakening of papal authority.

In the same way, most popes have rejected the very idea of women priests; and to accept it now could be seen as admitting that 2000 years of popes have all been wrong. And so what happened? Think about this! When pressure arose to discuss the matter, it was instead upgraded, and the word infallibility was introduced into the discussion, so that there could be a forbidding, even of discussion of the question. To take another example, is Church teaching condemning homosexual acts infallible? No! But it would be defended as strongly as if it were. Why, because, once again, so much papal energy has been invested in the question.

What about all Church teaching on sexual morality? Well there might be room for movement on some minor matter, but not on the core teaching, because, once again, so much papal authority has been invested in that question. Well, one of the issues in my book,^{1/} I talk there about the question, "Did Jesus have divine knowledge?" Yes, he was God, that's my profound belief, but did He have divine knowledge, or did he freely give that up? Now, I first heard this idea at least forty years ago; it's been an open question, and Pope John Paul himself called it the frontier zone of Christology, the theology about Christ

today. But recently we've had a document declaring "Yes, Jesus had divine knowledge," and Australian bishops said I had doubts about the identity of Jesus because I questioned that.

What I'm getting at here is the phenomenon known as *creeping infallibility*. (Laughter) But I hope you can see what I mean. There are relatively few formally infallible statements – those given *ex cathedra*. But the mantle of infallibility comes down, until here we have it covering this question, which was considered open for the last forty years, but suddenly now it's being put under this same heading. Let's go a step lower: the law of priestly celibacy is no more than a law. It could change tomorrow; and yet to change it could imply once again that a thousand years of popes have all been wrong. Once again, so much papal energy has been invested in clerical celibacy over this thousand years that, once again, to change it could imply that all those popes were wrong. Remember, the Pope lives in the Vatican. He's got all those popes around him as he's studying in his bedroom – hundreds of them – and what's he going to do? "You were all wrong and I'm right?" You know, it would take an extraordinary person to do that. As a result of this, we've seen protectors of papal authority conclude that since all those popes cannot have been wrong, therefore, obligatory celibacy of priests cannot have been a significant cause of sexual abuse, or even contributing cause. Therefore, they had to find another cause; and that meant another scapegoat; and you know who they found. They found priests whose sexual orientation is homosexual; and they blamed them. Now, apart from being mistaken – and that is mistaken, because a homosexual is no more likely to offend against a minor than is a heterosexual; there's no evidence of that – but apart from being mistaken, it is more importantly an avoidance of the question in order to protect papal authority – and I'll say a bit more about that in a moment – this is necessity to protect, not just the infallible, but all papal teaching where this creeping infallibility is come down.

Firstly though, there's another factor that must be considered, even though it's no more than a cultural factor. One does not have to be long in Italy before hearing the two phrases: *bella figura* and *bruta figura*. Now, *bella figura* and *bruta figura* – I can see some Italians nodding – means literally beautiful figure and ugly figure. But the real translation into English is: keeping up appearances, or appearances matter, appearances are important; the figure you present is important. Now this idea was already powerful 2000 years ago in the Roman Empire; so it's an idea that runs exceedingly deep in Italian culture; and Italians will freely talk about it today. There is of course some truth in the idea: we all present appearances – I'm doing it right now – we all do it; and yet it's obvious that the idea is wide open to abuse, because it involves an instinctive tendency to deny and hide anything that does not create *bella figura*. When it is added to the need to protect all levels of papal authority, then it becomes a very dangerous idea.

Before they are ordained, all bishops are required to take a special oath of loyalty to the Pope – by the way, not to God, not to the Church, to the Pope. (Laughter) Well, think about that! Why this special oath of loyalty to the Pope? You know, I took it but it was late, and I suppose I thought, "Well just a minute. I hope I've always been loyal to God or tried to, to the Church and within that context of the Pope." Why do they need this special oath of loyalty to the Pope? Well, it's a symptom of the constant and severe pressure placed on all bishops to protect all levels of papal authority and even the *bella figura* of the Pope, at all costs and in all circumstances.

A very high value is put on a bishop being a Pope's man – and, believe me, bishops are on an extraordinary short leash, like one-half inch; (laughter) and the slightest deviation is very quickly taken on. It's a pressure from above; it's a pressure from their peers; but this very high value on a bishop being a Pope's man. Well, it was this pressure that led me to a very personal conflict between my duty of a loyalty to the Pope and my duty of loyalty to that portion of God's people that the Australian bishops had assigned to me, that is, victims of abuse. It was the conflict between being a Pope's man and a victim's man; and the conflict eventually became a genuine crisis for me. On the one hand, as I've said, I was constantly meeting large numbers of victims. I was trying to deal with the abuse that had happened to myself when I was young; and at the same time, there was nothing coming from the Pope – nothing. Indeed, he failed to do anything at all with the two cases that were on his desk and couldn't go anywhere else. One concerned the then Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, and the other concerned the founder of the Legionnaires of Christ – and he did nothing; not 'til the day he died did he do anything about either of those cases.

Now, we are a Church in which the Pope is so important, so imagine this: imagine twenty years ago in 1988; imagine that John Paul II in St. Peter's Square one Sunday morning had said, "Look, I've just been informed of these terrible revelations of sexual abuse; imagine priests sexually abusing children. It's the

most horrendous thing I've ever heard. We're going to respond to this. Let's reach out to every one of these victims. Let's reach out with humility, honesty, compassion. Let's put every last one of them before the good name of the Church. Let's do all we can to uncover any causes and eradicate them." How powerful that would have been. Furthermore, the very loyalty of the bishops to the Pope, had he said that, would have meant that that loyalty worked in favor of victims instead of against them.

Now, I'm not going to put all the blame on one person, but that absence of leadership by the person – I mean, he has all the authority, and as everybody knows, with authority goes responsibility – so if he had that position within the Church, then someone like myself trying to deal with this in a far flung country, that's where we looked. That's where I wanted to get leadership, affirmation, support in what I was doing; and instead, there was silence. And this was an extraordinarily powerful fact. Now the bishops had to be loyal – oath of loyalty to a silent Pope – and they had to protect even his *bella figura*. I hope you're understanding what I am trying to get at here, how powerfully affective this was.

There's a thousand years of history behind the system I've described, and it constitutes a powerful and a deeply rooted culture. And to change a culture is one of the hardest tasks known to humanity. It's as hard as taking a group of Americans and trying to change them into a group of Chinese, not just language, a whole lot of things. You're trying to change a culture, a whole way of thinking, a whole way of living. So, I hope that these few thoughts give some idea of why, in responding to abuse, it is essential to go well beyond the immediate causes of abuse, and to look seriously at all ways in which power is understood and exercised within the Church.

SEX

I remember a big sign, and it had the one word on it: "SEX;" and then underneath in tiny letters, "Now that we have your complete and undivided attention, would you please not throw your cigarette butts on the floor." (Laughter) In the *First Testament*, sometimes called the *Old Testament*, two principles had great importance in relation to sexual relationships. Now, before I get into those two, there are other statements. There are some quite beautiful statements in the *First Testament* about love and sexual relationships. The Song of Songs, I think, above all, because it's about love; but it's very, very explicitly about sexual love. Indeed, the couple that it talks about are clearly in a sexual relationship; but they're not married yet, so it's actually about an unmarried couple's sexual relationship; the Bible talking about this, and very, very beautiful language, plus there are some other extremely beautiful statements. Having said that: those quite beautiful statements are dwarfed by the vast amount you find on two other subjects: the subjects of property and purity.

- Now property. In the whole of the ancient world, not just Israel, society was not based on the individual; it was based on the family, and society was a gathering of families. And each family was centered around the man as the head of the family. His wives – plural – his concubines, his children and his slaves, were all his property – literally property; and his wives and concubines were his sexual property. Now this meant that, if one of his wives had sex with another man, it was adultery, for which she could be stoned to death. But if the man had sex with an unmarried woman, it was not adultery, because he hadn't offended the rights of any man. If he had sex with another man's wife, that was adultery, because it offended the rights of another man. Right? Now this dominate, Jesus came along and changed it, upside down, in one phrase, in the Gospel of Mark in particular, where he said that a man could commit adultery against his wife. Now that was truly revolutionary – not just a little change in morality, it actually upset the whole basis of society, because if he could commit adultery against her, then she was no longer simply his property. She had rights, big rights; and so a whole new basis for the family had to be discovered; and that meant a whole new basis for society as a whole. It was a truly revolutionary statement; and many would say, it was still trying to come to terms with it and implement it.
- The second one was the purity ethic. Now this referred to ritual cleanness and uncleanness, such that, when a person was unclean, they could not, for example, enter the temple, but had to be purified before they could. Now the purity laws cover a wide variety of things. You'd be most familiar with all the ideas of unclean foods, and the difficulty of explaining them: you know, fish were not unclean, but lobsters were. All sorts of things were quite difficult to explain. But they also

touched on sexuality; so that even if a married couple had a sexual relationship, they were unclean for a period of time. A menstruating woman was unclean for the whole time of her period, and indeed, if she sat on a chair, that chair became unclean; so that if someone else touched the chair, they became unclean. If she child birthed, she was unclean for a number of days – again, what was it? She was unclean for seven days after giving birth to a male, but fourteen days if she gave birth to a female. (laughter) I'm not.... I'm just telling you what's in the Old Testament, okay?

Now these purity laws covered quite a number of different things in relation to sexual relationships. It often used that word *abomination*, but don't read too much into it. Yes, it did say that homosexuality was an abomination, but so was eating lobster! (Laughter) So don't let's go overboard about the word abomination. Now once again, Jesus abolished this principle when he said, "Nothing ... nothing that enters the body from outside can make a person unclean." So there are no unclean foods, none. He said only things that come from within, from the heart and the mind – you know, evil intentions, evil desires; they can make a person unclean.

So Jesus abolished the two principles that had dominated in the understanding of sexuality in the First Testament. The problem for the early Church was that having abolished these two principles Jesus did not spell out any details of what he would put in their place; and this is a most important fact. Jesus did away with those two, did not spell out what he would put in their place. As a result two things happened:

1. Firstly, traces of those two epics continued in Christian history. So something of the property ethic continued – and let's admit, it exists today: you know, you get a divorce, and the man will then kill the wife and children so that they will not become the property of someone else: "They're my property," and he'd kill them rather than see ... It still exists!
2. And the purity exists still exists, too, in various ways. It was part of the original introduction of obligatory celibacy for priests – things have changed and developed, but it was part of the original introduction – the idea being that there was something unclean about the idea of a priest having sex with his wife, and then going straight over and celebrating mass – that was somehow unclean.

So, traces have existed right up to this day; but the more important one was that the Church had to find a substitute; and it did find a substitute, but it did not find it in the gospels. It found it outside. It took it in fact from a Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who lived in the *Diaspora*, that is, outside Israel, surrounded by pagans, and was trying to prove the reasonableness of Jewish law; and he developed this idea in relation to sexuality, of what was natural and what was unnatural. And he had his own ideas of his own time – I'll quote him, not me, please – he said that having sex with a menstruating woman was like sowing seed in a swamp; while having homosexual sex was like sewing seed in a desert. So he said those two are unnatural; therefore, they're forbidden in the *First Testament*. Well the Church and Christian thinkers were influenced by Philo. And the Church took it up, such that right up to our own day, you find in Church teaching the idea that every natural act of intercourse must contain two elements: both the unit development – the mutual love and support of the couple – and the procreate development – an openness to new life – so that any active intercourse that did not contain those two was unnatural; hence, sex strictly within marriage; and hence, the condemnation of any form of artificial contraception.

Now this is not something I've dreamt up. If you don't believe me, read *Humanae Vitae*. That's exactly the argument that you will find there. To use the sexual facilities when either of these elements was not present was considered unnatural; and importantly, it was considered a direct sin against God, because it was going against a divine plan, and indeed a divine order; and this led to unhealthy consequences. It meant that even thinking about sex was a sin; and because it was a direct sin against God, it was always a mortal sin – there were no venial sins in this field of sex! This made many people despair of avoiding mortal sin and give up on the moral life. It led to weird consequences. It led to people thinking, "Well, if thinking about sex is a mortal sin, and doing it is a mortal sin, I might as well do it." (Much laughter) You think I'm joking, people? People thought that way. Most important of all, I believe, was that it encouraged the idea of an extraordinarily angry God, who would condemn a person to an eternity of punishment in hell for a single sexual thought. There are elements here so unhealthy, that when put together with an unhealthy

psychology and unhealthy living conditions, they can easily contribute to abuse. These are these unhealthy ideas that I mentioned at the very beginning, or some of them.

Furthermore, in placing all the emphasis on the sin against God, rather than the offense against the abused minor, these ideas were a direct part of the unsatisfactory response to abuse. An offense against a minor was treated overwhelmingly, and often exclusively, as a sexual sin against God; and hence, it was dealt with in exactly the same manner as any other sexual sin, such as thinking about sex. This meant confession, forgiveness and restoration to the status quo – to the way before – and that became a very real part of the moving of priests around. The argument was, “They’ve repented and it was so sincere. Look, there were tears in the man’s eyes. He really repented. So, if I’m going to forgive him I’ve got to put him back there, to do less than that would be lacking in forgiveness.” I know! I’ve been accused by Roman cardinals of being lacking in forgiveness, because I argued, in these cases, you couldn’t put him back into the job he had.

The problem is overcome only when we make a distinction between forgiving a past wrong and preventing a future evil, and not confusing the two. Yes, I believe that after pedophilia, and after any other sin, if a person truly repents...forgiveness; but that does not mean you put the person back in the job he had before, because of the danger that is caused to children. I do not believe that God gets upset by sexual desires or acts, in and of themselves, alone. If you’re going to quote me there, quote both halves of that sentence please. Let me repeat it, I do not believe that God gets upset by sexual desires or acts in and of themselves alone. God created sex. Why would God get upset by sex? But God gets very upset by the harm caused to an innocent child. That’s where the sin is to be found. That’s what gets God angry.

And so, in relation to sex, I believe that the first question we need to be asking is not whether it is harming some natural order determined by God, but whether it is in any way harming either another person, or the community, or oneself. So I’m suggesting here – in the book^{1/} I ask questions; I don’t make statements. Why? Why? Because I believe that in answering one absolute set of statements, it’s not good to set up another lot of absolutes, because that merely causes arguments. So I ask questions, because I hope that starts conversations; and that’s what I want: conversation, not argument and confrontation.

But what I’m asking about is whether we should abandon ... abandon the entire sexual morality of the last 2000 years, and replace it with a morality based on persons and relationships. Now, I’m not basing it solely on not harming others; because, if Jesus did not spell out the details of what he would substitute for the two ethics of property and purity, he did give the overriding principle, when he said, “Love one another.” Notice Jesus did not ever say, “Do not harm one another.” He said, “Love one another.” So that has to be the basis of any truly Christian ethic in this field: not harming others – very popular today, but it has its obvious danger of brinkmanship, as though I can go up to the very brink of not harming others in satisfying my own desires; but if a whole community basis itself on that, I’m stating the obvious, when I say an awful lot will go over the brink – whereas, Jesus said, “Love one another.” So that emphatically does not mean that if you feel even a transient liking toward someone else you can do what you like. That would not be a Christian ethic. At the very least it means putting the other person first, as all true loving must do.

Now, to take it further, I would have to recommend you to Chapter 10 of the book^{1/} to read all that because there is a need to make careful statements in this field; and I would invite you to do that to think about it, but I must move on. Because I have written this book^{1/} people are constantly saying to me, “This is all very well; but how do we bring about the changes you speak of.” Well, before I even begin to answer this part, I have no direct program to bring this about, least of all for this country, because I know my own country, I don’t know yours. I do not presume to stand up and tell you this is what you must do; so all I can do is give you a few ideas. You have to take it from there. Allow me to answer in four parts:

1. The first is simple: change will be most difficult. I admit that. We are trying to change a culture; and the defenses of this particular culture are 1000 years old, and exceedingly powerful; and yet, change is possible. Twenty years ago, 1988, who could have foretold the fall of Communism? And yet it happened the following year. Who could have foretold the fall of Apartheid in South Africa? And yet it happened. Who can foretell the future? I mean, who in 1958, fifty years ago, could have predicted the Church of today, or the world of today? And I can’t predict the world of fifty years from now. I can’t predict it a few years from now.

2. The second principle is: the relationship with hierarchy in the Church, with bishops in a particular way. Now over this issue, as everyone knows, in Boston, there was a confrontation. And I can't quarrel with that. What happened was what I think had to happen; and I think it had to happen in the way it happened. I certainly am not going to condemn them. Faced with a terrible scandal, they acted. The same may be true in many other places. That's maybe what you have to do. That's up to you to decide. What I do want to say here is it can only be a step along the way.

Confrontation, however necessary it may be, must lead to conversation, if it is really to bring about powerful change. I ask you to consider this. The major changes that we seek cannot, at present, come from any source other than the Pope. And we must be aware of the relative powerlessness of the bishops before the power of the papacy and the Vatican systems that support it. Now in dealing with bishops, here you will be dealing with some who will defend the color of the shoes the Pope wears. Oh, I've heard them do it. But you'll find others who may have thought many of the things I talked about today, many of the things I have in the book,¹ but they're not going to tell that to you. They're afraid that it'll appear in the newspaper the next day; they're afraid that it'll be back in Rome the day after that; and they're afraid they'll be sacked the day after that. Remember what I said, which is very true, I've given an example in my book² of the short leash that the bishop is on. Where I said to a group of forty victims, I was asked a direct question, "Are you happy with the level of support you're getting from Rome?" And I thought for a second, and I said, "No!" In the paper the next day, bang! came the letters from Rome, even at the end saying the matter's been deferred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; in other words, that I was suspected of heresy for saying I was not happy with the level of support I was getting from Rome on this issue of sexual abuse. So, you know, this is what you're dealing with; and I'm trying to say to you: confrontation, where it's essential, yes! but it must somehow lead on to conversations somewhere, if we are ever to really change. You need the support of the bishops. Sadly it's...and anyway.

3. The third part of my answer is: that we need to have this conversation not just with leaders, but as widely as possible among all members of the Church. The greater the number of people involved, the more they understand the issues, the more chance we have of change. Mahatma Gandhi once said, beautiful phrased, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world. We must be the change we wish to see in the world." And the Church I wish to see is the Church of conversation. So that is what we must be in the world in the Church today.
4. The final part of my answer is: that I believe the best way to engage reluctant leaders in conversation is precisely through the issue of sexual abuse. For the scandal of abuse has been so great that is arguably the one issue that has the energy to produce change. All Church leaders, without exception, have at the very least been through a profound humiliation and embarrassment – that's the least that can be said over this issue. Deep within them, they know that the Pope did not give them leadership; and they also know that there's much to be done before they can face the future with a clear conscience. Many, sadly, are sort of hoping well we can sort of put this behind us now and get on with other things; and they're slow to accept the idea that until they face this, it's really impossible for them to talk about anything else, because nobody's believing them. People are saying, "Well get your own house in order, then we might listen to you; but not until then." So they're very slow; and yet they know in their hearts that we haven't done what we had to do.

So, provided it's done in a spirit of conversation rather than confrontation, may I suggest some of the issues that can be raised? Here, I'll be trying to put words in your mouth; you'll have to decide whether they belong there:

- We have been so profoundly shocked by the revelations of sexual abuse that our faith in the Church itself has been severely damaged.
- In addition, as parents and grandparents, we are deeply concerned for the protection of our children; and we feel that, as yet, not nearly enough has been done to ensure their safety into the future.
- We believe that Pope John Paul II should have handled the two cases of Cardinal Gura and Father Delagalo, promptly and openly. Indeed, we expected a far stronger lead from that Pope

in the very beginning; and we're left confused by a person who gave such strong leadership in other fields, and then gave no leadership in the field that concerned us most.

- Despite the welcome statements made recently in the United States by Pope Benedict, we believe there is still a need for a public apology by the Pope, directly to victims, made in St. Peter's Basilica, surrounded by the Cardinals, assuring victims:
 - First of all, that they were not guilty of any fault, because they were victims of someone more powerful than they were, because that person was abusing a power the Church had given him; apologizing for all the ways in which teaching structures or attitudes within the Church may have contributed and,
 - Assuring the victims that the Church will investigate all aspects of the matter in order to eradicate abuse in the future.

We are by no means satisfied however that the church is in fact doing everything possible to uncover the causes of abuse and to eradicate them.

- We believe that, as a first step, there is a need to study all the ways in which Church teachings, attitudes, laws and practices contribute to unhealthy psychology, unhealthy ideas and unhealthy living conditions. We know that celibacy itself is not the sole cause of abuse. But we also know that it's impossible to say that it has made no contribution. So, we wish to see a particular study of this matter, especially of the ways in which an unwanted, unaccepted and unassimilated celibacy can contribute to unhealthy psychology, for example: severe depression, unhealthy ideas; for example: misogyny, and unhealthy living conditions; for example: lack of support and loneliness in the life of the priest or religious.

Looking beyond these immediate issues, we believe that no study will be adequate unless it looks at all matters relating to power and sex within the Church. The ones I've spoken about:

- The idea of priests and religious being taken up.
- The need to protect the good name of the Church at all costs.
- The inability to look at issues surrounding abuse in a fresh light, because of the fear that any questions might harm papal authority.
- The idea that abuse was primarily a direct offense against God, rather than offensive to God because of the harm caused to children.
- And the need to distinguish between forgiveness for past wrong and prevention of future wrong.
- We been most unhappy with the overall response to abuse by Church authorities at every level; and we ask for an investigation of why this was so. In particular, we ask for a study of any and all institutional factors that may have contributed to the inadequacy of the response and to such practices as: the moving of offending priests from one parish to another.
- We believe that part of the problem was that each diocese and each religious order responded separately, so that the overall response was most uneven; and the whole country inevitably ended up being judged by its worst cases – and that's exactly what happened in this country.
- We believe that the means must exist whereby the whole country can respond as one in times of crisis; and that means quite simply: where the majority of bishops can coerce the others to act with them as one. At the moment they can't do that.
- One single good and holy man, Pope John Paul II, was unable, for whatever reasons, to respond adequately to this crises; and the whole Church suffered as a result of that inadequacy of one person.

- We believe that the ideas of collegiality and the *sensus fidei* of the whole Church, both proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council, must as a matter of urgency, be given concrete expression in specific structures. That, had they existed, would have enabled a coordinated and far better response to abuse by the whole Church. They didn't exist; and so we did depend on one single person.
- Finally, we know that there are very large numbers of sincere and devout Catholics who have serious problems with many Church teachings concerning power and sex. We feel that these Catholics are so many, and so serious, and so sincere, that they deserve honest conversation on these topics rather than the imposition of authority or condemnation.

An early title that I thought of giving to the book^{1/} was *Nothing So Ugly, Nothing So Beautiful*. This is based on a letter that John Henry Newman wrote to friend a year or two before he took the step of joining the Church. In that letter he wrote, "There is nothing on this earth so ugly as the Catholic Church, and nothing so beautiful." Wonderful phrase, isn't it? In the midst of the revelations of sexual abuse and many of the grubbier details of the response, the Church was so ugly that outsiders turned away in disgust, while insiders felt a deep shame and confusion. Now, I know that I am speaking largely to people who've not left the Church. And you've not left because you have seen and experienced the beauty. If you cannot see the ugliness, you're closing your eyes; but if you cannot see the beauty, you do not know the Church. If I have personally encountered some of the ugliest things in the Church in the story of abuse, I've also been in a privileged position to see some of the most beautiful; not least, in all those people who were willing to get down to the mud and the filth in order to respond.

Despite some of the reactions there have been to my book,^{1/} it is emphatically not an attack on the Church or a desire to cause it harm. On the contrary, it comes out of an intense desire to see a better Church; a Church in which everything that is humanely possible has been done to eradicate abuse; a Church that encourages growth through freedom; a Church in which there is conversation rather than confrontation; a Church in which all, women as much as men, laity as much as clergy, share equally in the full life of the Church, and can grow to become all they're capable of being. By reclaiming the spirit of Jesus, I want to see a new Church for a new millennium.

Thank you. (Applause)

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^{1/} *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*; by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson; Liturgical Press; Collegeville, MN; © 2007, John Garratt Publishing; Mulgrave, Victoria 3170