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Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta speaks at the Leadership Roundtable's Catholic Partnership Summit on the panel "A Culture of Co-Responsible Governance and Leadership"; St. Joseph Sr. Carol Zinn, executive director of Leadership Conference of Women Religious, at right, speaks on a panel "Envisioning a New Culture of Leadership" at the Catholic Partnership Summit. (Ralph Alswang)



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Two Catholic leaders recently turned the discussion about the crisis in the church away from a focus on institutional change to the less measurable work of transformation, the significance of relationships and the need for members of the hierarchy to confront that culture's past.

Sr. Carol Zinn, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia and executive director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, widely considered one of the most significant forces in revealing the truth of the sex abuse crisis, advanced their ideas in separate interviews.

The two were among participants and panelists in a Feb 28-29 session organized by the Leadership Roundtable, an organization formed in 2005 following the revelations of widespread abuse and cover-up in Boston. The Leadership Roundtable event, "From Crisis to Co-Responsibility: Creating a New Culture of Leadership," was held at the Fairmont Hotel in Washington. The two-day event explored ways in which mostly structural change could lead to more transparency and accountability and greater involvement of laypeople in the life of the church.

The discussion, in which I participated, was conducted under Chatham House rules, which prohibit directly quoting individuals. Both Scicluna and Zinn agreed to speak outside the bounds of that discussion to elaborate on points they made during panel discussions.



Sr. Carol Zinn in 2013, when she was president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (CNS/Roberto Gonzalez)

In a phone interview, Zinn provided an explanation particularly of comments she made differentiating between change and transformation and emphasized the significance of relationships in moving into the future. Scicluna, on another panel, referred to Zinn's remarks, saying she had "profound insights about relationships. It's all about relationships."

Change vs. transformation

The topic was "Envisioning a New Culture of Leadership." Amid the expected suggestions — shared responsibility, more lay involvement, more women and youth in leadership roles — St. Joseph Sr. Carol Zinn pulled a kind of conversational 180 and invited everyone to dive deeper and think differently about the current institutional dilemma.

"If you ask me if I want to be in a conversation about changing church structure, I don't have a lot of energy for that," she responded. "If you ask me if I want to have a conversation about transformation of structures, then that's a different conversation for me. The difference between those two, change and transformation, is really critical. Change typically is that kind of activity where you stand in the present moment, and you look to the past, and you make some changes."

Zinn, who as a research fellow at Episcopal Divinity School and Harvard University studied the topic of leadership and transformation, in an interview compared change, for instance, to painting a dining room. "You still have a dining room and it does what a dining room does. … So the result of change is that you have the same form and the same function."

Transformation is different, she said, using the example of what happens in a chrysalis, where a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly. "That's why the scientific world uses it as an example of transformation, because you could not in fact recognize the caterpillar in the butterfly."

If change is standing in the present and looking at the past, "transformation is that process where you stand in the present moment but you look to the future. You look to something that doesn't have a shape or image or something definable, but you commit to moving in that direction and knowing that whatever is going to happen in the future, if it is the result of transformation, it will be a new form and a new function. Just like the caterpillar to the butterfly. New form, new function. Nothing about the caterpillar remains."



(Unsplash/Suzanne D. Williams)

At the core of any conversation about creating a new culture for leadership, she said, should be a discussion about relationships.

"It's the relationships that need transformation. The structures follow the relationships. The form, if you will, follows function," she said. "Changing the structures will not give us different relationships, the relationships have to be transformed."

She cites Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, for its insights into relationships based on the example of Jesus.

"In a relationship, when Jesus had a choice between loving or fearing, he chose love every single time," she said.

"If faced with a choice between showing mercy or judgment, he chose mercy every single time. And faced with a choice between including or excluding, he chose

inclusion every single time.

"If we want to build a culture, a group of people that have things that they teach and learn, it has to be about relationships that are marked by love over fear, mercy over judgment and inclusion over exclusion. If we want a group of people that build a culture that's marked by the way we communicate, we have got to do some serious work about how we are in relationship with one another. If we want a group of people that organizes themselves in a particular way, then we've got to build structures that allow those relationships to be inclusive rather than exclusive, merciful rather than judging and loving rather than fearful.

"If we want a group of people that becomes a culture that understands what its mission and purpose is then we have to go to the gospel life of Jesus and live as he lived. And all of that is not going to be accomplished by just changing things here and there. It is not a journey of change that we're looking at, it seems to me. It is a journey of transformation. And the kind of letting go that has to happen in a journey of transformation is absolutely profound," she said.



LCWR executive director Sr. Carol Zinn, left, waits for an audience with Pope Francis during the International Union of Superiors General plenary in May in Rome. (Courtesy of LCWR)

She sees "contemplative listening and speaking" as the path to embracing the kind of vulnerability and transparency in order to build trust, as well as "relationships that are mutual and respectful."

It is listening "to each other simply to understand what the other person is trying to say, not through the filter of whether we agree with that person or don't disagree, just simply to listen. And when we speak, speak only to be understood, not to try to convince somebody of our way or to prove a point." That contemplative approach will be necessary in discerning together "where God is leading us in this moment in time marked by just incredible pain and suffering and abuse and scandal and so forth. It seems to be a chrysalis moment where we have to choose transformation."

Change, said Zinn, happens "whether you like it or not. Transformation, though, is a choice. Transformation is change, for sure. But not all change is transformation."

"That's what I was offering as a road map for a new culture for co-leadership and accountability and transparency and trust," she said, referring to her comments on the panel. "We have got to take a serious look at how we are in relationship with each other as the people of God and start pretty deep."

The breach that occurred in the Catholic community, she said, was at the "deepest essential core level of what it means for a faith community to gather, at the Eucharist for instance. That's where the breach happened. It wasn't about who celebrated liturgy or whether there were men or women there. It was deeper than that. It was at the level of relationship."

"Roles — I am very respectful of roles and responsibilities and all of that. I'm not looking for everybody to be the same by any means, but the roles that we have in any venue come out of the relationship. You can't put the template of a role of inclusion or mutuality on a relationship that is not inclusive or mutual.

"I was very clear in saying I'm not talking here about who should be ordained or gender issues, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about something deeper than that. But the roles of women and men or the roles of ordained and lay, all of those

roles come out of how we understand relationships. In short, what I was trying to offer was, if we want another culture in our church we are going to have to commit to a pretty serious journey of transformation, of consciousness, of mind and heart and will of how we understand how to be in relationship as the people of God.

"Until we have that conversation, while I certainly respect the work that Leadership Roundtable has done, and is doing, we can have all the fiscal management companies in the world issuing all kinds of accreditations and criteria for diocesan structures to use and we may, in fact, get a corporation with more fiscal integrity, and that would be good. That would be a change. In my humble view, it would not be enough."



Returning to the image of the chrysalis, she said what happens inside that carapace "has its own time and it takes its time. It can not be rushed and it can not be mandated. So I do think the image I hold, since Vatican II really, we are still in the chrysalis. Whatever the 'it' is in the people of God image is still being formed. And it's a very painful process." The cumulative effect of the abuse scandal and cover-up "may in fact be part of the chrysalis activity of deconstructing. That's what happens

in the chrysalis, deconstructing."

"The caterpillar by its very nature is built for that. Humans by our very nature are not built for that kind of letting go and that kind of vulnerability. So when you put an institutional structure on top of the fact that humans are not built to let go like that, we have to choose it." Changing structures and employing better practices, "that's all good. I'm not saying don't do that because it does move the needle toward transformation."

But when people see the amount of change that's occurred during the past 30 years "there's still something in us that is yearning for something more. Once you start having that kind of feeling you are in a transformational journey, you're going to come out on the other side with a new heart, new mind, new will and you will see the world differently."



LCWR executive director Sr. Carol Zinn, second from right, listens during the 2019 International Union of Superiors General plenary in May in Rome. (Courtesy of LCWR)

Breach of sacred trust

(Archbishop Charles Scicluna and I had spoken earlier and this interview picked up on that conversation.)

NCR: In our previous conversation, I asked if at the base, the crisis is a breach at a sacramental level. You said you would change that terminology to a breach of sacred power. Could you explain?

Sciculuna: That would be what distinguishes sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people in any church setting, but especially in the setting of the Roman Catholic Church where people who are ordained to leadership have a sacred power.

The theology of the church, the sacramental life of the church, emphasizes that power.

You talked about hierarchy.

The etymology of hierarchy is leadership that is based on sacred power because *hieros* in Greek is "the sacred." So, we have a leadership that is based on sacred power and the tragedy is when this sacred power is not lived according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ instituted this hierarchical communion that we call the church in the mystery of his death and resurrection.

Every year we celebrate these foundational moments in the sacred Easter triduum. If you want to understand the attitude of Jesus to sacred power and ministry you need to go to the Gospel of John, Chapter 13, when the Lord, fully conscious of his divine nature, but also conscious of the fact that the hour has now arrived, the hour of his death and glorious resurrection, takes off his mantle, puts on an apron and starts washing the feet of the disciples.



Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaks Nov. 13, 2019, at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, about the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. (CNS/Matt Cashore, courtesy University of Notre Dame)

He insists that this gesture is not a one-off. His disciples need to do what he's just done. "You call me lord and master and you are right. What I have done to you, you do one to the other." And this is the *mandatum novum*, the new law that we celebrate at the commemoration of the last supper on Holy Thursday every year. This important gesture of Jesus is lived within the liturgy every year to remind everybody, but also people in leadership, that they have to be servants.

Is it correct then to presume this breach of sacred trust is different from the breach of trust in other circumstances?

It is because it is a breach of sacred trust. People trust the shepherds because of the sacred power, of the fact that they preside over the most sacred moments of the life of the church. They preside at the Eucharist, where Jesus gives his life for his flock. They preside at reconciliation where Jesus reconciles us with the father. And so, people trust their shepherds and that trust is a sacred trust. The betrayal of that trust is on a level which is not only physical and psychological, it is also spiritual. The betrayal in other circumstances, in other associations, is not necessarily on the spiritual level. But it is when it is betrayal by a shepherd servant.

That leads to another question. Victims use language of agony when they speak of priest abusers and bishops who covered it up.

As Pope Francis says with these egregious crimes, we've put service on its head.

But the question I have is more an observation, and I'd like to know if you agree. The church has done incredible adjustments, with review boards and other processes and laws. The language up to the papacy has changed enormously since the scandal was first reported nearly 40 years ago. However, the one thing that has not been done, that can't be forced by the outside, is bishops sitting down with each other and saying, how did we get to this point? How did our culture get to the point where we could turn our backs on children who had been sexually abused by priests to protect those who perpetrated the acts?

I think that people need to confront reality with an immense sense of humility and the truth. But there is also the positive narrative of the church in the United States since 2002 which should not be forgotten. That will not diminish the harm done; it will not necessarily heal the wounds that have been inflicted. But if we are going to confront reality as it is, you have to also acknowledge that the church in the United States has dedicated a lot of energy to a commitment for the protection of young people.

It is also important that leadership examine themselves and also learn from the mistakes of others and from the mistakes of the past. That requires a lot of humility and also facing facts as they are.



Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaks Nov. 13, 2019, at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, about the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. (CNS/Matt Cashore, courtesy University of Notre Dame)

Can you imagine any way that that can happen?

First of all, facts have to be acknowledged and then people have to sit around the table and reflect upon the impact and the system that created these deficits in leadership.

Do you think that's one of the steps in terms of confronting this whole ugly saga that will occur?

I certainly believe that it would be useful, because if we don't learn from the past, we're condemned to repeat it.

My suspicion is if bishops did that and came out to people and said, this is what we learned about how we got here, the attitude of laity would be enormously different.

I think that leadership should own up to past mistakes, even of other people in leadership, since they need to communicate their commitment not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Some people, in talking about this, say a lot of the bishops who did the cover-up have died or are old and retired. My response, in our culture, for instance, people who bought and sold slaves are all dead, but we're still dealing with the effects of that culture.

Yes, because the effects will not go away by the fact that people go away. Effects have a life of their own. The wounds have a life of their own and I think the church needs to confront that, not to be on the negative narrative all the time, but simply to learn from the past and avoid pitfalls that make service become a culture of entitlement and leadership a way of self-promotion. That is no good according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But this is a temptation that we need to overcome at every generation. I don't think that there is a magical formula that will settle things forever because we will always be weak human beings, and we always need to be redeemed by the merciful message and healing embrace of Jesus Christ.

So, I think that there is a temptation to think that we can fix it on our own. We need to be humble enough to pray for healing as a gift from God. Because if we get into temptation that we are going to solve it by human skills and human will power, we'll fall into the trap of ensured failure. If we learn to rely on God's grace, I think we will be all right.

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But if you are in leadership and do rely on God's grace and bring that sense of humility to it, what is the human activity that you think is essential?

First of all, engaging people who have the right skills because leadership lived in solitude is a dangerous place to be. Leadership lived in communion with the people we serve will also save us.

If you were putting together a table for this kind of discussion, what skills would you look for beyond bishops willing to engage in the conversation?

Also people who have deep knowledge of humanity, so you would need the psychological sciences, the human sciences. Also the sciences of management.

How about history?

History is the teacher of life, *magistra vitae*, when it comes to looking forward, you need to look back in order not to find yourself in the same dark corners of the past.

You have been described, in the argot of the U.S., as one who "gets it." I'm sure you didn't go in, as a young priest, expecting your life would be lived this way. What are some reflections you've done on this? Do you sit down at times and say to yourself, 'Charles, how did you get here?'

You must ask that, correct?

[He tossed back his head and laughed so hard he turned red. He paused, then answered.]

At the end of the day, it's a privilege to serve Jesus Christ crucified in so many people and to love his spouse as she is, not as I want it to be.

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