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## We're all Sinead O'Connor now

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NCR Today

In 1992, when Sinead O'Connor ripped up a picture of Pope John Paul II, yelling "fight the real enemy?" on Saturday Night Live, I was a sophomore in college and properly horrified by her actions. Far from home and grieving for my father, who had passed away several months before, I had found comfort in my faith -- and I was more than a little annoyed with my floor-mates who had insisted I needed to "question" it, in the manner that college students do.

1992 also happened to be the same year that the allegations against Fr. James Porter, a priest in Fall River, Mass., surfaced. The institutional church was successful, at that time, in painting Porter as a "bad apple." It would be another 10 years before the scope of the clergy sexual abuse crisis became clear here in the United States. And now, another eight years later, the experiences of Boston in 2002 are being repeated in Ireland, in Germany, and in Austria.

I have a lot more sympathy now for O'Connor's desperate desire to highlight the epidemic that the institutional church was so effective at keeping buried for so long than I did at the time. But time and perspective has taught me the limits of anger and outrage in bringing about justice for survivors of clergy sexual abuse and the reforms needed to prevent further incidents. Anger can only be sustained by so many for so long. Eventually, it burns out and people move along. What's left is devastation. And, more important, a lack of desire -- and energy -- to address the underlying causes.

The truth is, the Catholic community in Boston has never really recovered from the revelations of the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Parishes have been closed in the intervening years. Catholics, especially younger ones, have drifted away from the church while still yearning for some deeper spiritual life. And justice for the thousands of survivors who still struggle with the aftermath of abuse remains elusive.

This is what the dioceses in Europe have to look forward to, even while they deal with their

understandable anger. This is what the Vatican -- and all of us -- need to face.

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