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Milwaukee bankruptcy filing masks the truth

Maureen Paul Turlish | Jan. 10, 2011 Examining the Crisis

COLUMN

In a Jan. 4 letter to the members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Archbishop Jerome E. Listecki explained why he felt forced to file for bankruptcy, explaining ?priest-perpetrators sexually abused minors, going against everything the church and the priesthood represents.?

This is true as far as it goes, but it is hardly enough to address what many experts have described as the most significant crisis in the Roman Catholic Church?s over-2,000 year history, possibly even eclipsing the Reformation.

This evil emanated not only from the sexual violations of innocent children by predatory priests, but also from the failures of enabling bishops to protect them.

Filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is really about keeping the whole truth of this tragic matter from being made public. The filing has most likely delayed, if not cancelled, the previously scheduled deposition of its former auxiliary, Bishop Richard J. Sklba among others.

Is Archbishop Listecki encouraging Sklba to go ahead with his deposition in the interests of truth and justice or isn?t he? Remember that Sklba had already pursued legal grounds to have his deposition sealed.

A public statement from Listecki that Sklba?s deposition should go forward regardless of the Chapter 11 filing would be a sure sign the archbishop is more concerned about accountability and transparency, truth and justice than in keeping secrets and avoiding episcopal responsibility.

Listecki does not mention the actions of enabling or complicit bishops in his letter nor the fact that such actions would have triggered criminal charges in a majority of jurisdictions except for the inadequacies of statutes of limitation across the U.S. Most perpetrators and enablers have escaped criminal prosecution because of this, and access to justice in civil courts is being thwarted by bishops and Catholic Conferences in state after state.

The bishop goes on to state two goals:

> ?First, we want to do as much as we can, as fairly as we can, to compensate victims/survivors with unresolved claims -- both those with claims pending and those who will come forward because of this proceeding. Second, we want to carry on the essential ministries of the archdiocese so we can continue to meet the needs of our parishes, parishioners and others who rely upon the Church for assistance.?

Is the bishop unaware that without justice and charity for ?victims/survivors? the second goal loses all meaning? It becomes less than meaningless. It becomes a sign of contradiction and Matthew chapter 7:15-20 is prescient in stating the fact:

> ?Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep?s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.?

Can the hierarchy be blind to the fact that its actions, in continuing on its present course, are speeding up an already unprecedented erosion of credibility among the ordinary faithful who cling to the belief that church leadership is still capable of telling the truth and being accountable for its past failures in protecting children?

From the perspective of those both inside and outside of Catholicism, this filing and the protracted litigation it will involve inflicts additional pain and suffering while keeping far too many secrets about how the church reached such a low water mark at the beginning of the 21st century.

The most important and all encompassing responsibility Listecki has in the church?s ongoing sexual abuse crisis is a moral one: to inflict as little additional pain and suffering as possible, to lessen the grief of those who were abused, to provide for a variety of care, and to make restitution for what harm rogue priests and complicit members of the hierarchy have inflicted on innocent children and their families.

Actions by bishops that fall short of this can only be seen as sins against the Holy Spirit.

Remember, these were the children, the most vulnerable of whom the Lord speaks in Mark 10:14:

?When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, ?Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.??

And again in Matthew 18:6:

?But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.?

[Maureen Paul Turlish is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, a member of both the Voice of the Faithful and the National Survivor Advocates Coalition. She testified in support of Delaware?s 2007 Child Victims Law and is the vice-president of the Delaware Association for Children of Alcoholics.]

For Tom Roberts' initial news story on the Milwaukee bankruptcy filing, see: **Milwaukee eighth diocese to file for bankruptcy** [1]

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