



Statement from Archbishop John G. Vlazny March 31, 2010

It did not take long for me on the morning of March 31 to cancel my subscription to the Oregonian. This was not the first time I had contemplated such a move. When the “Catholic bashing” was principally local, I thought this was something I simply had to endure along with the rest of you. Why? The jury of public opinion seemed to conclude that the church deserved such punishment because it was no better than anyone else in handling the problem of child sexual abuse. But I was always suspicious that there was more behind all the attention given to our plight by the secular media.

Let me be specific about my complaints. In the column on March 29 by syndicated columnist, E.J. Dionne Jr., towards the end of his clever attempt to ridicule the Vatican, we find this bold assertion: “The church needs to cast aside the lawyers, the PR specialists and its own worst instincts...” If that’s not bad enough, try this: “The church will have to show not only that it has learned from the scandal, but also that it’s truly willing to transform itself.” Now you tell me, when you are served with a lawsuit for millions of dollars, is it malicious to seek a lawyer’s help? PR specialists? Dream on. As for “transformation”, ask anyone who works for the church or pays attention to church activities about all the efforts at victim assistance and child protection which have been incorporated into church policies both here and elsewhere.

Then on March 30 there was the unconscionable cartoon on the editorial page which unfairly belittled our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. It was a portrayal dripping with hostility, an attack against our high priest, our universal pastor, our faithful teacher, the one person who, in the eyes of the world, symbolizes all that we are and do as Catholics. I was insulted and I hope you were too. People called wondering what I would say or do. I’m grateful for the prod. Can you imagine the reaction people of other faiths or persuasions would have if their leadership were so publicly scorned? The Oregonian wouldn’t dare publish something so ugly about the Dalai Lama. Nor should they.

The last straw came on March 31. On the editorial page again, this time in the form of a prominent editorial, the editors arrogantly scolded the church for its past failures in handling this matter of child sexual abuse and, in an insulting and unfair attack, chose this most holy time of the year, during our church’s Year of the Priest, to connect the practice of celibacy among our clergy with the problem of child sexual abuse, when everyone knows that most abusers by far are married persons! Is every single person now under a cloud of suspicion? Or only single Catholic priests? If only the latter, don’t you wonder why?

For more than ten years as Archbishop of Portland, in one way or another, I have pondered these challenges and perhaps taken them more seriously than they merited.

But I knew that reconciliation and healing among those aggrieved would only be possible if we who are the church were truly repentant and serious about doing better. But the media could never be satisfied. Why? It's a trick as old as the human race. "When you don't like the message, destroy the messenger." The Catholic Church, in exercising her prophetic role and responsibility, is sometimes a very lonely speaker when addressing reasonable solutions to problematic realities like abortion, devaluing marriage and family life, injustices in the economy which lead to unabated poverty demeaning the sacredness of human sexuality and the place of religion in the public forum.

The Oregonian is most likely no more guilty than its counterparts in other communities, but that's the newspaper for most of us in Portland and other folks in western Oregon who like a paper with a "big city" feel. But the triduum of hostility, arrogance and ridicule that greeted readers during the early days of Holy Week, at the expense of the Catholic Church, is simply not tolerable and should not be condoned without some form of protest. The editors, of course, hold all the cards, so what to do? I canceled my subscription and urge others to do the same. Something will be missing while I sip my morning coffee, but with less time for breakfast, maybe I can jog a bit farther and eat a bit less. There's inevitably something good that can be discovered in most unpleasant situations.

My friends, we Catholics are not perfect, but we are deserving of human respect. I had thought I should delay making assertions like these until later. Well, later arrived this morning with the last issue of the Oregonian that will be delivered to my home in the foreseeable future.