



DISILLUSIONMENT TO DE-ILLUSIONMENT

Clerical sexual abuse crisis, part 1 of 4

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WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE CLERICAL SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS is a stumbling block. It has the potential to lead us to doubt our faith, question the authenticity of Church teachings, or conclude that our faith history and sacramental history is invalid. It may rob us of the ability to separate ministry from minister, cause us to distrust our religious leaders, anger us to a point of rage that blocks out rational thought, blind us to what is good and holy and of God, invite us to paint all clergy with the wide, ugly brush of abusive behavior, and tempt us to walk away from the Church.

Having acknowledged this reality, we can suggest ways for parents to shift the emphasis from stumbling blocks to stepping-stones, move from valid *disillusionment* to a stance of *de-illusionment*, and provide preventive, proactive formation support for children on a need-to-know basis and deliver it in age-appropriate ways.

Disillusionment results when we make gods of mere humans, giving them total responsibility for our personal welfare, or when we think of ourselves or others as capable of perfection and then discover we have feet of clay! Failure on the part of someone in authority can put us in a tailspin and throw us into crisis.

At such times we must turn crisis into opportunity. We can develop an attitude of *de-illusionment*; that is, we can let the instance be a wake-up

call to respect authority and learn from the authentic teachings those in positions of authority have to offer, while also growing in maturity and taking responsibility for ourselves. We can let God alone be God.

We relinquish personal responsibility if we let sinfulness on the part of a religious leader interfere with our faith, our faith traditions, and our faith practices! Root your faith in God. Refuse to be deterred by the faults of some of God's representatives.

Embrace the concept of *ex opere operantis*, a longtime teaching of the Catholic Church (see CCC, 1125). Basically, it means that the benefit of the sacraments comes from the work itself (from the actions and words of the sacrament, not from the

celebrant). The sacraments are effective because Christ himself is at work. The teachings and sacraments of the Church remain true and for our good regardless of the virtue of the priest (or lack thereof). Similarly, a fast-food burger is enjoyable regardless of the virtues of the server; dentists and doctors and computer programmers perform good work regardless of their personal lifestyles.

As we continue this discussion in future issues, we'll focus on ways to transform these *stumbling blocks* of the clerical sexual abuse scandal into *stepping-stones* for our children. **T**

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T Read our online coverage of developments in the Church's actions regarding the sexual abuse scandal: todayct.us/2VjiSe8