

The following was a speech by well known Cleveland businessman Sam Miller at the City Club of Cleveland, given on Thursday, March 6. Even though of the Jewish faith, Miller has been a staunch supporter of the Cleveland Diocese and Bishop Anthony Pilla. It was published in the May-June issue of the Buckeye Bulletin.

I'm going to say things here today that many Catholics should have said 18 months ago. Maybe it's easier for me to say because I am not Catholic, but I have had enough, more than enough, disgustingly enough.

During my entire life I've never seen a greater vindictive, more scurrilous, biased campaign against the Catholic Church as I have seen in the last 18 months, and the strangest thing is that it is in a country like the United States where there is supposed to be mutual respect and freedom for all religions.

This has bothered me because I too am a minority in this country. You see, unfortunately and I say this very advisedly the Catholics have forgotten that in the early 1850's when the Italians, the Poles, the Latvians, the Lithuanians, all of Catholic persuasion, came to this country looking for opportunity because of famine, (particularly the Irish) they were already looked upon with derision, suspicion and hatred. Consequently the jobs they were forced to take were the jobs that nobody else wanted bricklayers, ditch diggers, Jewish junkmen, street cleaners, etc.

This prejudice against your religion, and mine has never left this country and don't ever forget it, and never will. Your people were called Papists, Waps, Guineas, frogs, fish eaters, ad infinitum.

And then after the Civil War, around 1864, the fundamentalists, conservatives, Protestants and a few WASP's began planting burning crosses throughout the country, particularly in the South. And today; as far as I'm concerned, very little has changed. These gentlemen now have a new style of clothing they've gone from bed sheets to gentlemen's suits.

There is a concentrated effort by the media today to totally denigrate in every way the Catholic Church in this country. You don't find it this bad overseas at all. They have now blamed the disease of pedophilia on the Catholic Church, which is as irresponsible as blaming adultery on the institution of marriage. You and me have bees: living in a false paradise. Wake up and recognize that many people don't like Catholics. What are these people trying to accomplish?

From the Sojourner's Magazine dated August, 2002, listen carefully to a quote, "While much of the recent media hype has focused on the Catholic Church's pedophilia scandal, relatively little attention has been given to the high rate of sexual misconduct in the rest of American Christendom. This is truly a crisis that crosses the borders of all religions."

Now let me give you some figures that you as Catholics should know and remember. For example, research by Richard Blackman at Fuller Theological Seminary shows that 12% of the 300 Protestant clergy surveyed admitted to sexual intercourse with a parishioner; 38% acknowledged other inappropriate sexual contact. In a 1990 study by the United Methodist Church, 41.8% of clergywomen reported unwanted sexual behavior by a colleague; 17% of laywomen said that their own pastors had sexually harassed them. Phillip Jenkins concludes in his book "Pedophiles and Priests" that while 1.7% of the Catholic clergy has been found guilty of pedophilia, 10% of Protestant ministers have been found guilty of pedophilia.

This is not a Catholic problem. This is a problem of pure prejudice. Why the papers, day after day, week after week, month after month, see fit to do nothing but come out with these scurrilous stories? When I spoke recently to one of the higher ups in the newspaper I said, "This is wrong". He said, "Why, do you want us to shoot the messenger?" I said, "No, just change the message". He said, "How?" I said, "I'll tell you how".

Obviously, this is not just a Catholic problem. And solutions must be broader and deeper than those carried out by Catholic cardinals. The whole church has a responsibility to offer decisive leadership in the area of sexual misconduct whether it is child abuse, sexual exploitation, or sexual harassment.

Recently, churches have shown unprecedented unity on issues of poverty and welfare reform. Now it is necessary to call for a broad based ecumenical council addressing the issue of sexual misconduct in the church not only the Catholic Church, all churches, including synagogues. Its goal would be transparency and openness in developing stringent, forward-looking guidelines, consistent with denominational distinctions, for preventing and addressing sexual misconduct within Christian churches and church-related institutions.

Such a council could include not only denominational representatives but also a majority presence from external organizations such as child protection agencies, law enforcement, psychiatric services, victims' agencies, and legal and legislative representatives.

Crisis. "Crisis" in Chinese is one word. "Crisis" in Chinese means, on the one side, a real crisis problems etc., but the other side means great opportunity.

We have a great opportunity facing us. Crisis is often accompanied by an opportunity for extraordinary growth and leadership. We have that today. Even though you are the lowest -- by far the lowest of any organized religion today when it comes to sexual harassment -- American churches have a unique opening to develop and adopt a single set of policies, principles, practices, and common language on sexual misconduct in Christian institutions that is binding across denominations.

A system of cross denomination review boards could be established to help compliance and accountability. A centralized resource bank could be formed that provides church wide updates on new legal, financial, psychological and spiritual developments in the field. Guidelines, both moral and legal, could be established on how clergy, churches, and victims should best use civil and criminal actions in pursuit of justice and financial restitution for injury. A national database could be established with information on all applicants for ordination in any member Christian religion. Every diocese, conference, presbytery, and district could have a designated child protection representative whose job is to ensure that the policies and procedures are understood and implemented and that training is provided.

Any religious institution, or system, that leaves power unexamined or smothers sexuality with silence rather than promoting open conversation that can lead to moral and spiritual maturity becomes implicated in creating an unhealthy and potentially abusive environment. An ecumenical Christian council authentically dedicated to strong moral leadership in the area of clergy sexual misconduct might move the church beyond the extremes of policing our own or abandoning our own.

For Christians, the true scandal is not about priests. It's about a manipulation of power to abuse the weak. When Jesus said, "Whoever receives the child, receives me", he was rebuking his followers for putting stumbling blocks in front of the defenseless. Church is supposed to be a place where one can lay one's defenses down; where one is welcomed, embraced, and blessed. This can only be authentically expressed in a culture that requires absolute respect for each individual's freedom and self hood. Until all churches bow humbly under the requirement, the indictments by wounded women and children will stand.

Just what are these Kangaroo journalists trying to accomplish? Think about it. If you get the New York Times day', after day; the Los Angeles Times day after day, our own paper day after day

looking at the record, some of these writers are apostates, Catholics or ex-Catholics who have been denied something they wanted from the Church and are on a mission of vengeance.

Why would newspapers carry on this vendetta on one of the most important institutions that we have today in the United States, namely the Catholic Church?

Do you know and maybe some of you don't the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students everyday, at cost to your Church of 10 billion dollars, and a savings on the other hand to the American taxpayer of 18 billion dollars. Needless to say, that Catholic education at this time stands head and shoulders above every other form of education that we have in this country. And the cost is approximately 30% less.

If you look at our own Cleveland school system, they can boast of an average graduation rate of 36%. Do you know what it costs you and me as far as the other 64% who didn't make it?

Look at your own records. You (Catholic schools) graduate 89% of your students Your graduates in turn go on to graduate studies at the rate of 92%, and all at a cost to you. To the rest of the Americans it's free, but it costs you Catholics at least 30% less to educate students compared to the costs that the public education system pays out for education that cannot compare.

Why? Why would these enemies of the Church try to destroy an institution that has 230 colleges and universities in the United States with an enrollment of 700,000 students?

Why would anyone want to destroy an institution like the Catholic Church which has a non profit hospital system of 637 hospitals which account for hospital treatment of 1 out of every 5 people not just Catholics in the . United States today?

Why would anyone want to destroy an institution like that? Why would anyone want to destroy an institution that clothes and feeds and houses the indigent 1 of 5 indigents in the United States, I've been to many of your shelters and no one asks them if you are a Catholic, a Protestant or a Jew; just "come, be fed, here's a sweater for you and a place to sleep at night" at a cost to the Church of 2.3 billion dollars a year?

The Catholic Church today has 64 million members in the United States and is the largest non-governmental agency in the country. It has 20,000 churches in this country alone. Every year they raise approximately \$10 billion to help support these agencies.

Why, after the "respected" publication, the New York Times, running their daily expose' on the Church, finally came to the conclusion of their particular investigation, which was ongoing for a long time. And guess what: buried in the last paragraph, they came up with a mouse. In their article "Decades of Damage" the Times reported that 1.8% of American priests were found guilty of this crime whereas your own Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome reported 1.7% the figure I gave you earlier.

Then again they launched an attack on the Church and its celibate priests. However, the New York Times did not mention in their study of American priests that most are happy in the priesthood and find it even better than they had expected, and that most, if given the choice,

would choose to be priests again in the face of all this obnoxious PR the church has been receiving.

Why wouldn't the New York Times, the paper of record they call themselves, mention this? You had to read it in the Los Angeles Times. The New York Times refused to print it.

If you read only the New York Times, you would begin to believe that priests are cowards; craven; sexually frustrated; unhealthy criminals; that prey on the innocent. What a shame.

Sometimes freedom of the press should have some type of responsibility, too. So I say this to you: instead of walking around with a hangdog look -- I talk to a lot of Catholics all the time, "how's everything going?" "Well, in the face of things I guess okay". That's the wrong answer! The wrong answer!

Also, I ran into a fellow who said they started a discussion at some social function on pedophilia and he said, "I excused myself and left the room." I said, "why did you do that?" "Well, you know how it is".

I believe that if Catholics had the figures that I enumerated here, you don't have to be ashamed of anything. Not only are you as good as the rest, but you're better, in every respect.

The Catholic Church helps millions of people every day of the week, every week of the month, and every month of the year. People who are not Catholics -- and I sit on your Catholic Foundation and I can tell you, and what I am telling you is so. Priests have their problems, they have their failings just as you and I in this room do, but they do not deserve to be calumniated as they have been.

In small measure let's give the media its due. If it had not come out with this story of abusive priests, (but they just as well could have mentioned reverends, pastors and rabbis and whatever), probably little or nothing would have been done. But what bothers me the most is this has given an excuse to every Catholic hater and Catholic basher to come out loudly for the denigration of your Church.

If some CEO's are crooks it does not follow that every CEO is crooked; and if some priests are sexually ill it does not follow that all are sick. And your Church teaches that you've got to take in the sick and a priest who is this way has to be taken in and cannot be thrown out the 21st story of a building. He's got to be looked upon and given the same type of health that you would give anybody who has a broken leg or cancer or whatever.

The Church today, and when I say the Church keep in mind I am talking about the Catholic Church, is bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. The agony that Catholics have felt and suffered is not necessarily the fault of the Church. You have been hurt by an infinitesimally small number of wayward priests that, I feel, have probably been totally weeded out by now.

You see, the Catholic Church is much too viable to be put down by the New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Cleveland Plain Dealer take your choice, they can't do it, they're not going to do it and sooner or later they are going to give up. But you've got to make sure that you don't give up first.

In 1799 a notice was placed in a French newspaper that a citizen Brachi had died in prison. Little did the people realize that this was Pope Pius VI who had occupied the Chair of Saint Peter for 25 years. He had been taken prisoner by Napoleon's forces and died in prison as an indigent. At that time the thought was that this was the end of the Catholic Church, this was 200 and some odd years ago. And the reason was that there was no Pope to succeed him at that time.

But you fooled them then, and we're going to fool them again.

I've been talking more or less about the United States of America as far as the importance of the Church. Let's bring it home to Cuyahoga County and the seven surrounding counties.

In education, you save the county 420 million dollars per year. Wherever there's a Church and most other churches have fled the inner city there's a Catholic Church; and wherever there's a Catholic Church there's an absence of drug dealers. You talk to any bank that has real estate mortgages in the inner city, and they will tell you that the one thing that keeps up the value in that particular area is your Church. I've seen, for example, on Lorain near the Metro Catholic Schools there at the Church the nuns used to go out in the morning with brooms and sweep away the drug dealers from around the particular area.

On Health and Human Services, the homeless, adoption, drugs, adult care and so on, you saved the county 170 million dollars a year.

At the end of the day the difference that your local Catholic institutions make in the eight counties that comprise this diocese are several billion dollars per year.

Why don't we hear about this? Why, because it's good news. If some priest was caught with his hand in the collection plate it would be front page news. But the fact that you have thousands of students being education free, as far as the rest of the country is concerned, doesn't make news. Why? Because it is not newsworthy, it's not dirty.

I'm not here to deny freedom of the press, but I believe that with freedom comes responsibility, and with rights you have an obligation. You cannot have rights that are irresponsible.

Unfortunately, our society today is protected by all rights and ruled by some of their wickedness. Anybody who expects to reap the benefits of freedom must understand the total fatigue of supporting it.

The most important element of political speech, as Aristotle taught, is the character of the speaker. In this respect, no matter what message a man brings in, it shouldn't collide with his character.

The other day was shocked when I opened up America, a Catholic magazine, and my good friend Cardinal Keeler, who is a very dear friend of mine, was being fingerprinted by the Baltimore police not for a crime, but as part of the new law put in place that all members of the Church hierarchy must be fingerprinted.

Amos, of the Old Testament, accused the people of Samaria in words that seared and phrases that smote. They "cram their palaces," he said, "with violence and extortion." They had "sold the upright for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals" from Gucci, no doubt. But he also said that all this could be reversed, if only the people of Samaria would turn away from their own self absorption and toward those who, however silently, cry out for help. "Then," promised Amos, "shall your justice flow like water and your compassion like a never failing stream" (Amos 5:24)

The worst feature of contemporary society is its tendency to leave each of us Locked up in himself or herself, connection less. To lessen this isolation we have developed all kinds of therapies spiritual, psychological, and physical front groups that meet and talk endlessly all day long in spas week spas, month spas, life spas. But none of these things, from primal screams to herbal wrap, seem to be doing the trick, any more than the huge houses and wine parties the Samaritan did.

What we need to do is open our heart to the plight of others, even some of your priests who have been condemned. They're human beings and they should be shown the same type of compassion we have shown anybody who is critically ill. We need to open our hearts to the plights of others, like our hearts were a dam, so that indeed our justice and compassion may flow to all.

What is essential is that each of us steps forward to hold out our hand to someone. There is no other way to walk with God.

One of the biggest Catholic bashers in the United States wrote "Only a minority, a tiny minority of priests, have abused the bodies of children." He continues, "I am not advocating this course of action, but as much as I would like to see the Roman Catholic Church ruined. I hate opportunistically retrospective litigation even more."

Now he's talking about our tort monsters. "Lawyers who grow fat by digging up dirt on long-forgotten wrongs and hounding their aged perpetrators are no friends of mine."

I'm still quoting this man, "All I'm doing" he said, "is calling attention to an anomaly. By all means, let's kick a nasty institution when it is down, but there are better ways than litigation." These words are from a Catholic hater.

I never thought in my life I would ever see these things.

Walk with your shoulders high and your head higher. Be a proud member of the most important non governmental agency today in the United States. Then remember what Jeremiah said: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." And be proud, speak up for your faith with pride and reverence and learn what your Church does for all other religions. Be proud that you're a Catholic.