YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD VOTF OR
"ONCE WE HAVE THE PURSE STRINGS,
ROME WILL HAVE TO BOW!"

by Joseph A. Orr, Jr.

It is an unfortunate fact that the troubles facing the Roman Catholic Church in the United States were brought on by itself. The actions and omissions of Church leaders and the laity have spawned new dissident organizations and emboldened those already in existence. These activist organizations, most notably the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), are seeking the Church's destruction. While many believe that the buck should stop with the Church leaders who bear the more visible and scandalous responsibility for the crimes, the laity must assume their responsibility for their sloth and indifference. These have allowed the teachings of the Church, most notably those of Vatican II, to be corrupted by the radical idealism of the 1960's. It is these ideals that have led to the degeneration of our moral rectitude into moral relativism. The refusals by a large portion of the clergy and the laity to refute populist demagoguery forcefully and openly have allowed psychopaths to enter the clergy. (As a victim of clerical sexual abuse with a degree in political science and philosophy who has spent the last twenty-one years trying to understand what happened to the Church in the U.S. and to him, this is my conclusion.)

"Once we have the purse strings, Rome will have to bow!" This is the exclamation of a vocal member of my local VOTF chapter. I have yet to hear a single word regarding how the VOTF might help those who have been left to survive with their minds and souls deformed in such a way that there is no word to describe it. (There is no word for what happens to the person after sexual abuse by a perpetrator who, to the victim, represents the authority of God.) Further, there was no comment about the victims that did not survive because they took their own lives rather than face a daily exercise of psychological torture.

Before attending my first meeting, I went to the VOTF website to see what they stood for and what they intended to do about a situation that they have no understanding of. For that matter, it appears that neither the Church nor the larger part of the psychological/psychiatric community has an
appreciation for the clerical sexual abuse dynamic. The dynamic is complex and impossible for most people to fully understand unless they have experienced such a horrific event. After years of depression and anxiety, I found the correct "psycho-pharmaceuticals": talking about the abuse and getting the help of a few courageous priests. I was then able to begin looking properly toward God as my healer and not my tormentor.

The VOTF's website, which is very professional and businesslike, states that they are organizing for the sake of the victims. While this idea is put forward first, it is secondary or even tertiary to their ideas about changing the structure of the Church. The latter means supporting "financial councils" in dioceses and parishes. This is also true of my local chapter. The meetings are very businesslike. There is no sense of how to help the victims, however. In fact, this really appears to be of little concern to them. Victims seem to be only a tool to further their agenda. At the very core, their primary objective is to get financial control of the Catholic Church. That, we are led to believe, will rid the Church of sexual predators. This is either an outright deception or an application of daunting mental gymnastics.

How, by controlling the Church's money, do you prevent a highly respected priest, bent on preying on young people, from eventually finding a victim within his grasp—a victim over whom he has power spiritually, physically, and possibly academically? The community trusts the priest, the parents trust him, and the child trusts him. It seems that it would take an FBI agent, constantly monitoring his actions, to prevent this. Even if that were the case, how would one know if he could trust the FBI agent? What VOTF really wants is the power to choose their priests and bishops much like the Protestant denominations, which hire their ministers and can rid themselves of any of them who do not tow the party line. One VOTF leader commented: "We have a lot to learn from our Protestant brethren." Actually, the Protestants have a larger problem than the Catholic Church with clerical sexual abuse. With the power of the purse, VOTF can seek to manipulate the hierarchy of the Church to do their bidding instead of God's. There are many things that people in the pews do not like to hear that touch their consciences. There are more that have their own agenda and would have no problem pressuring their priests and bishops to tow the line. Further, VOTF does not want their Church to pay damages to the victims (but neither does the Church in the U.S. itself).

The first meeting of my local VOTF chapter was held on the campus of a local parish in secret; the press was asked to leave, unknown to me at the time, to prevent the bishop from hearing of it. I never revealed that I was a victim and I continually questioned the leadership about the victims. I was continually told that I did not understand. I presented them with a printed copy of the National VOTF website that stated that the organization's objective was to help the abuse victims, but to no avail. To the leadership, I still just did not understand what they were trying to do. Actually, I understood them perfectly.
Many of the leaders, no matter what they say they are, are travelling down the road to schism. They will couch their terms in the Gospel, invoke the Lord's name in prayer, and expound on the meaning of Vatican II when it is obvious that they have not read the documents.

My chapter president visited our bishop. She stated that the bishop had entertained her and that she had his support. When I looked into this, I found that the latter was completely false. Further, the president was willing to parade before the bishop a man who had been sexually abused, but not by a priest, in order to place more pressure on the bishop. I would not volunteer to do this.

After the first meeting, I spoke with many people who were of good will and attended because they cared about the Church and had no alternative setting in which to deal with the present crisis. The Church, unfortunately, does not offer anything like this. The Church has failed to get its message out and has just taken the beating it is getting from the press and from the would-be spokespersons of these dubious "Catholic" organizations. Most people attending the meeting could have been persuaded either way, but from the pulpit truth has not been presented, only apologies. In my opinion, the clergy and the laity must vigorously defend the Church against her enemies from without, and more importantly from within, by using the men and women, clergy and laity, who have the courage. The faithful clergy and laity must not lie down and wait for the storm to pass; it is upon us and gaining strength. A confessor of mine said that if this movement were of God, it would succeed. If it were not, it would not succeed. I had to wonder whether the Reformation, which has divided Western Christianity for nearly 500 years, was of God. We must defend our Faith in action and deed; if we do not, the repercussions may well be more than most can bear.

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