

A Priest by Lacordaire

To live in the midst of the world
without wishing its pleasures;
To be a member of each family,
yet belonging to none;
To share all suffering;
to penetrate all secrets;
To heal all wounds;
to go from men to God
and offer Him their prayers;
To return from God to men
to bring pardon and hope;
To have a heart of fire for Charity,
and a heart of bronze for Chastity
To teach and to pardon,
console and bless always.
My God, what a life;
and it is yours,
O priest of Jesus Christ.

This statement by French priest Jean Baptiste Lacordaire has helped to form the Roman Catholic priesthood for the last couple hundred years. It has been used by seminary personnel to instill within future priests the high status to be given them upon ordination. It can be found as a bookmark in many priests' prayer books and attached to walls and mirrors in sacristies and rectories. When reading it, priests try to remain humble in their superior status, but sometimes find themselves mesmerized by their intoxicating power.

Sadly, this statement reeks of clericalism and celibate privilege. It places lay people in a position of dependency upon priests and teaches them that they are to be passive and docile in the hands of their spiritual superiors. For laity to think or act otherwise is considered sinful and subject to the confessional, where they are expected to humbly confess their sins to these authority figures and perform whatever penance they deem necessary.

The theology represented in Lacordaire's proclamation has enabled some priests to take advantage of their authority for their own sexual gratification.

Unless this theology is changed, the atmosphere within the priesthood, which enables the sexual abuse of the laity, will continue. This theology is systemic to this crisis and solutions that do not address this root cause are cosmetic.

Vatican II attempted to change this by empowering the laity, but Popes and Bishops recoiled in fear and panic as they saw their power being diminished. Therefore, under the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II, and now Pope Benedict XVI, policies and procedures have been put in place to return priests to positions of superiority.

This is particularly seen in how lay people have recently been instructed to bow and even kneel before the priest in order to receive the Eucharist during mass. Although Vatican Clerics will say this act of reverence is meant for the Eucharist, they also intend it to be a clear sign to lay people of the power priests have who, as they and Lacordaire claim, "penetrate all secrets ... go from men to God ... and from God to men."

Catholic ecclesiology places the priest between the laity and God and gives him a spiritual authority over people not found in any other Christian denomination.

Lacordaire's prayer proclaiming that priests: "share all suffering, penetrate all secrets, heal all wounds, go from men to God and from God to men," is piety gone mad and blurs the line between the priest and God. Furthermore, it's all a delusion. Priests are no closer to God than anyone else. This ecclesiology has been established by celibate clerics to empower themselves.

How can lay people, who have been indoctrinated with this propaganda by power hungry clerics, do anything but sit passively in the presence of these demigods? The only real voice they have is in the courtroom where millions of dollars of damages are awarded to them after being sexually exploited by priests who were placed in a position of authority over them.

The root cause of this crisis is the spiritual and psychological power Roman Catholic ecclesiology grants to priests over lay people. Those ultimately responsible for this crisis are the Church officials responsible for maintaining these laws that create this atmosphere, which enables abuse to occur.