



ST. MICHAEL'S SWORD

September 2018

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

The Catholic faithful thought they had seen it all. We hoped the worst of the clerical abuse scandals were behind us. But the perfect storm was yet to be unleashed. As I write this letter, both the Church and American society in general are reeling under the shock produced by the *Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report* documenting some seventy years of predatory activity involving children and young people in several dioceses, at the hands of clergy members and others working for the Church. And all of this on top of substantial allegations involving former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick—and even a report that the Pope himself may have been part of the cover-up! We wish we were dreaming, but this dream has morphed into a nightmare of reality.

It is true there are a few distinctions to bear in mind. According to Dr. William Donahue of *The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights*, in an article he penned, “Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report Debunked,” the mention by a major media network of “300 predator priests” concerns, in fact, largely unsubstantiated accusations and not proven facts. Also, a number of the “300” were not priests, but deacons, religious brothers, or seminarians. Finally, as many who study these things also tell us, the main problem is not pedophilia, but the abuse of teenage boys (a horrible crime nonetheless) at the hands of homosexuals who have infiltrated the Church, something that “politically correct” commentators fail to mention.



That being said, there is nevertheless a very big problem here, one that calls, I would say, for sharp steel. Not just any steel, mind you—not even the finest Damascus steel of yore, or the strongest titanium—but a spiritual blade that can cut to the bone of very evil things. What is needed is that weapon of which the Apostle speaks, “more piercing than any two edged sword; and reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit, both of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”² Only with such an instrument will the spiritual surgeon, working to reform the clergy from top to bottom, be efficacious in carving out the corruption among churchmen that has so wounded and outraged the Church. Such will be the most merciful and beneficial action of true spiritual steel.

Practically speaking, the civil authorities must do their job in investigating and punishing crimes that fall under their jurisdiction. On the level of ecclesiastical authority only the Holy See can

¹ Testimony by His Excellency Carlo Maria Vigano, August 26, 2018.

² Hebrews 4:12.

take steps in disciplining bishops who have committed or covered up grievous offenses. That same authority could nonetheless give a mandate to lay experts to participate in an inquiry. It goes without saying that whatever steps are necessary must be taken in order to insure perfect moral integrity on the level of the successor of Peter and his collaborators. The authorities must act. There is much for the rest of us to do as well, however. As His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke remarked, quoting Scripture during a recent interview, “this kind [of demon] is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.”³ So we monks intend to undertake a Novena of prayer and fasting leading up to the feast of St. Michael on September 29th. The primary thing for us to do is simply to fulfill our daily duties in our state of life, but sometimes it is necessary to add something extra in the way of prayer and penance. That would be taking in hand solid spiritual steel, something like the bright sword of St. Michael.

Another idea occurs to me. In some places a devotion to the Most Chaste Heart of Joseph has sprung up. Reported apparitions in Brazil in 1998 regarding this devotion received an informal approval from the local bishop there (Itapiranga), though the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has not yet granted its own approval. On March 6, 1998, Saint Joseph is thus reported to have declared,

Now I tell all men: consecrate yourselves to my Chaste Heart. Consecrate all to me: your lives, your families, your jobs. Consecrate all to me, because my Heart is the new font of graces that God concedes to all humanity. I extend my cloak over the whole world and all the Holy Church. Trust in me and you will receive all graces. I give you my blessing: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This scandalous problem involving members of the clergy points, of course, to a lack of the virtue of chastity. Mary Eberstadt has called it, “the elephant in the sacristy.”⁴ We know that most bishops and most priests are faithful to their vow of chastity, but something most alarming has been allowed to grow like a cancer among all too many members of the clergy. Perhaps the Most Chaste Heart of Saint Joseph is the living sanctuary to which we should turn in the present crisis, just as we already devote ourselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary. We monks intend to do our humble part.

Of course we are all sinners, as we confess each day at Holy Mass, and we must not forget the fact. We too are responsible in a certain manner. Please join us as we do penance and make reparation for these terrible sins and crimes, during the special Novena leading up to the feast of Saint Michael on September 29th. May the terrible and merciful sword of the great Archangel fulfill its holy office—and very soon!

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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³ Interview with Raymond Arroyo, August 16, 2018, citing Matt. 17:21.

⁴ <https://www.weeklystandard.com/mary-eberstadt/the-elephant-in-the-sacristy>