

# The Catholic Quandary

Over the years, I have occasionally written about being a practicing Roman Catholic, a fact that sometimes leads to incredulous statements like "YOU go to church?" Somehow, I don't believe the question is a compliment.

This is a tough Holy Week for Catholics, as once again the terrible specter of child molestation is in the air. Driven by a series of articles by the *New York Times*, the church now faces questions about whether Pope Benedict XVI ignored some past abuse cases when he was a cardinal. The evidence is scant, but damning anyway, because of the previous priest-pedophilia scandals.

A number of Catholics have left the church because of the priestly sins, but not me. From the beginning, in Sister Claudia's first grade class, I understood that the Catholic Church was about Jesus, not Father Flannery. Believe me, I saw so many loons in my Catholic school days that I should be a Buddhist. But it is the theology, not church leadership, that keeps me in the fold.

You may remember that I was a driving force in bringing down the villainous Cardinal Law in Boston, a man who allowed child molesting priests to run wild. When Law was forced to resign, I was happy. But then the late Pope John Paul II gave him a cushy job in Rome, where he remains today. If it were up to me, the cardinal would be in prison.

Even though I respected Pope John Paul's holiness, I was deeply disappointed that he did not meet with molestation victims when he visited the United States in 1999. The pope should have done that simply to show devastated American Catholics, and the victims themselves, that he cared and understood their pain. When I publicly criticized Pope John Paul for avoiding the issue, the Catholic League scorched me.

And that's fine. They are entitled to their opinion.

Throughout it all, however, I stayed with the church. If you cut through all the bull, the doctrines of treating others as you want to be treated, forgiveness and redemption, and charity for all stand the test of time. Even if the atheists are right and there is no God, the philosophy of Jesus is full-force positive. Live the way he lived, and the world will be a better place.

The actions of others must be considered, of course. But I like this analogy: We've had some pretty bad leaders in America, right? Do they make you want to renounce your citizenship? The United States is not the people who lead it. It is all of us.

Same thing with the Catholic Church. It's not corrupt priests or apathetic leaders in Rome. It's Jesus and his followers, the folks who sit in the pews on Sunday. And that's good enough for me.