**Letter to The Tablet, August - October 2021**

14 October 2021, The Tablet

# Topic of the week: Abuse: time for the laity to act

The French Sauvé inquiry tragically illustrates yet again the cancer at the heart of the Western Church (“Report counts hundreds of thousands of abuse victims”, 9 October). The Church is exceptional among abusing institutions in that the victims are overwhelmingly boys rather than girls and the perpetrators are men sworn to celibacy. The Church hierarchy has repeatedly failed to deal with this cancer effectively. It is time for the laity to take over. We have the right to do this as it is our children who are suffering and we have to fund the huge costs of litigation, compensation and treatment. We need to know that our priests can be trusted with our children. The new synodal process provides an opportunity to start this process.

The laity should make the following demands:
1. An end to compulsory celibacy, which attracts a small proportion of men who are immature sexually. Celibacy, for them, is not a sacrifice but an escape from women.
2. Women should be integrated fully into the power structures of the Church, including the abuse procedures. Women are the traditional protectors of children.
3. Women should be integrated into the selection and training of clergy. All seminaries should include appropriate women as students, teachers and spiritual counsellors. Women, if selected, should be ordained as deacons and hopefully later as priests.
4. The laity should deal with all complaints of abuse, in cooperation with the legal authorities. The bishops should accept and implement their advice.

Finally we thank the many marvellous clergy, both celibate and married, who have contributed so wonderfully to our marriage and family over many years.

**Terry and Monica Spratley**
Canterbury

14 October 2021

**Married clergy**
As a convert to Roman Catholicism I so admire the priests and Religious who dedicate themselves completely to the Church and its work. I am very much aware of the increasing call to allow priests to marry, understandable in the light of the shortage of clergy.

Recently I had lunch with a friend and her husband, a retired Church of England vicar. I know he had been a very conscientious vicar as I had been one of his parishioners for a while. I asked him if push came to shove would he have chosen the Church or his family, and he said his family.

I know we already have some very good married priests. We may for reasons of survival have to allow priests to marry but apart from the many practical problems it would create, I feel something very special will be in danger of being lost, and the Church will not be the same. We need an honest debate about the consequences of a married clergy.

**Susan Martin**
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