

## For the Devoured

Shepherds who abuse sheep consume them; they devour their dignity, trust, and faith. Scripture makes this clear in Ezekiel 34 when God through the prophet rails against pastors who ‘eat the curds, clothe themselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice sheep’ (v. 3).

No better description of the impact of clerical abuse: demonized consumers-in-collars who gobble up the innocent and leave them with gaping wounds and parts missing.

Abusers usher their prey into ‘the day of clouds and darkness’ (v. 12) where they become ‘food for all the wild animals’ (v. 5). Anyone abused by predatory priests becomes vulnerable to a host of moral, spiritual, and relational compromises. Other predators smell blood and discern the disorientation of those weakened by abuse. No wonder that a disproportionate number of adults who identify as LGBT+ have experienced sexual abuse as children. And now resist the Church as a healing community.

We as Christians must take seriously how clerical abuse and its cover-up have fueled alternate communities that celebrate sins against chastity. Their exotic sins sprout from our toxic soil. Look at Ireland—once the pride of European Catholicism. The recent exposure of the Irish Church’s grotesque, long concealed abuses have scattered the sheep there and empowered them in the last two years to vote in a ‘gay’ prime minister, ‘gay’ marriage, and abortion rights.

Unless and until we confess and renounce our self-protection (rather than victim protection), we limit our authority to call sinners to repentance. How can we champion chastity when our shepherds eat sheep and we fail to rout them on behalf of the consumed?

Ezekiel nails decisive action toward the shepherds and their collaborators. To those who knew and minimized the devastation, the prophet rebukes: ‘Woe to those shepherds who only take care of themselves! Should not the shepherds take care of the flock?’ (v.2)

Shepherds at the highest levels of the Catholic hierarchy need to do just what Ezekiel declared: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says, ‘I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I WILL REMOVE THEM FROM TENDING TO MY FLOCK SO THAT THE SHEPHERDS CAN NO LONGER FEED THEMSELVES. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them’ “(v. 10).

The application is obvious. Starting at the top with Pope Francis, a sword needs to be wielded that severs from the Church all priests who abused any person sexually, as well as any overseer (cardinals, archbishops, bishops and so on) who knew that sheep were being consumed and looked away. The faithful should tolerate nothing less. The scattering of sheep and rise of wickedness in our land demand nothing less.

The devoured can only be restored when the Church acknowledges her complicity with predators. The abused cannot heal while disintegrated shepherds roam the Church undisciplined! Inaction speaks louder than sweet apologies; it minimizes victim suffering and sustains an unsafe environment for all. We need to let go decisively in order to take up our mandate to bind up the wounded.

Only then will Ezekiel's promise of restoration for the devoured be fulfilled. As members of Good Shepherd Jesus, we shall "search for the lost and bring back the strays; we shall bind up the injured, shepherding the flock with justice...No longer will wild animals devour them; they will live in safety and no one will make them afraid...they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nation. 'You my sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are people, and I am Your God', declares the Sovereign Lord" (vs.16, 28-31).