

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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THE BUTLER DIDN'T DO IT

Wow! It gets worse and worse every week! Now it's the Pope's butler in the spotlight. He leaked some Vatican documents that incriminate Vatican power brokers in a variety of schemes involving banking policies, building contracts, and who knows what else. Next week will surely bring more revelations. Stay tuned, but I bet there are no laws in the Vatican that protect whistle-blowers. And expect some hierarchical spin on this story that tries to make the butler the bad guy!

On the heels of the attack on the Girl Scouts, the women religious, the liturgy, the never-ending scandal of the sex abuse/cover-up disaster, and the attempt to manipulate the presidential election, this butler crisis adds another ton of fuel on the blazing fire we call the hierarchy. About all that's left to uncover are a few mistresses and some mysterious deaths – oh, that's right, we already have one of those – Pope John Paul I. That death, by the way, paved the path for the anti-Vatican II reigns of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Move over Borgias, the 21st century is taking over as one of the most corrupt periods in papal history. The hierarchy, at the Vatican, on the national level, and often at the diocesan and parish level, seems hell-bent on self-destruction. We progressives can protest till our voices go hoarse, our ink cartridges run dry, our demonstrations are unnoticed, and our press statements are not released. But, ironically, we may get some of the change we want because the excesses of the hierarchy may destroy its own current structure. Evil feeding on evil and ultimately devouring itself. By insisting on more power and thought-control, they could lose what little credibility they still have. Soon, as Bob Dylan so eloquently sang, they'll be blowin' in the wind. You think?

So, in the midst of this inferno, what's a Catholic to do? Besides being angry in private and embarrassed in public, that is.

Here's my suggestion: compartmentalize, hold on, and wait it out!

I'm not a psychologist, but my guess is that, ordinarily, compartmentalizing may not be the best emotional tactic to promote. To isolate one part of our experience and file it away somewhere in our psyche sounds risky even to an

amateur like me. On the other hand, it is one way to keep this terrible negative stuff away from undermining our spiritual journey with and towards God.

The key is to compartmentalize consciously. Acknowledge the bad stuff, name it as accurately as you can, protest it, and try to change it. But at some point, let it go, lock it up in the negative Church file in your psyche, forget it and go connect with God, find your peace, and live your life in love. Later, come back to the negative stuff. Can you do both of these seemingly diametrically opposed functions? Yes, you can. If you compartmentalize consciously.

I suspect that this technique is used successfully somewhat frequently. We see it in our support group for people who lost a loved one to suicide. The shock, loss, and pain that accompanies the suicide often leaves griever so immobilized emotionally that they have to compartmentalize their grief periodically in order to function at all. We go back to the grief consciously in our group but at some other times, the grief has to be ignored deliberately for the sake of basic sanity.

There are other examples: other types of death, natural disasters, war, intense cruelty, situations over which we have no control, breakups in relationships. Do not ignore or bury these experiences. But sometimes we can set them aside and refresh ourselves with other aspects of our life before we come back to the pain.

Deliberate compartmentalization provides an alternative to complete withdrawal, perpetual anger, or simply giving in for the sake of pseudo peace. With the negative Church stuff, compartmentalizing is an alternative I suggest and use myself.

Some of us have to keep pounding away at the destructive elements of the Church (and ourselves!) in order to ferret out some of the cancers and warts that inevitably travel with the People of God as we move into the future. And, when our ferreting isn't successful, we have to simply say it because it needs to be said. So be it.

In any case, during this current intrigue and the many intrigues to come, just remember that the butler didn't do it. He's the hero. In my books, he is closer to sainthood than anyone else who stalked the halls of the Vatican since Pope John XXIII.

Viva that Papa! And this butler!