

Ganswein says sex abuse crisis is Church's '9/11,' but seeking God is the only way forward

While the current sex abuse crisis is tantamount to the Church's own '9/11,' Catholics can maintain hope if they remain focused on seeking God above all else, said Archbishop Georg Gänswein, personal secretary of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

"I perceive this time of great crisis, which today is no longer hidden from anyone, above all as a time of Grace, because in the end it will not be any special effort that will free us, but only 'the Truth,' as the Lord has assured us," the archbishop said.

Gänswein, who is prefect of the Papal Household, spoke at a Sept. 11 presentation of the Italian edition of Rod Dreher's recent book, "The Benedict Option."

In that book, he said, Dreher notes "that the eclipse of God does not mean that God no longer exists. Rather, it means that many no longer recognize God, because shadows have been cast before the Lord."

Today, Ganswein's speech reflected, "it is the shadows of sins and of transgressions and crimes from within the Church that for many darken His brilliant presence."

The archbishop noted the timing of the presentation, which fell on the 17th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

He drew attention to "the report of the Grand Jury of Pennsylvania, on which now the Catholic Church too must cast a horrified glance at what constitutes its own '9/11,' even if this catastrophe unfortunately is not only occurred on a single day, but over many days and years, and affecting countless victims."

Ganswein clarified that he was "neither comparing the victims nor the numbers of abuse cases in the Catholic Church with those 2,996 innocent people who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 9, 2001."

However, he said, the reality of the souls damaged by the actions of Catholic priests in the U.S. is catastrophically grave.

Benedict XVI had warned in vain about this damage to souls when he lamented to the U.S. bishops in 2008 "the enormous pain that your congregations have suffered as clergy have betrayed their priestly duties and responsibilities through such gravely immoral behavior," Ganswein said.

He reflected on other words from Pope Benedict XVI that shed light on the current crisis in the Church. Speaking to journalists onboard a flight to Fatima in 2010, Benedict had cautioned, "The Lord told us that the Church would constantly be suffering, in different ways, until the end of the world... attacks on the Pope and the Church come not only from without, but the sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin existing within the Church."

Five years earlier, as a cardinal reflecting on the Stations of the Cross, Benedict – then Josef Ratzinger – had observed, “How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him!”

Even before the recent revelations of sex abuse and cover-up, people have been leaving the Church in drastic numbers in some countries, Ganswein said, pointing to recent statistics indicating that “of the Catholics who have not yet left the Church in Germany, only 9.8 percent still meet on Sunday” for Mass.

In his book, Dreher highlights the monasteries founded by St. Benedict in the 500s as a template for preserving culture amid social turmoil.

But in implementing this model, Ganswein said, it is important to note Pope Benedict’s observation that “it was not [the monks’] intention to create a culture nor even to preserve a culture from the past.” Rather, their motivation was simply to seek God.

This is the task for those today who hope to contribute to the rebuilding of the Church, the archbishop said.

“If the Church does not know how to renew itself again this time with God's help, then the whole project of our civilization is at stake again. For many it looks as if the Church of Jesus Christ will never be able to recover from the catastrophe of its sin – it almost seems about to be devoured by it.”

But ultimately, Catholics have hope in the promise of the Christ, that sin will never prevail over the Church, he said.

Pope Benedict recognized this truth as well, in the first Mass of his papacy, when he said, “[T]he Church is alive. And the Church is young. She holds within herself the future of the world and therefore shows each of us the way towards the future... The Church is alive – she is alive because Christ is alive, because he is truly risen.”

With this reality in mind, Catholics can face the future with hope, Archbishop Ganswein said, praying that the present crisis may be transformed a time of purification and renewal.

“Even the satanic ‘9/11’ of the Universal Catholic Church cannot weaken or destroy this truth, the origin of its foundation by the Risen Lord and Victor.”