NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Healing the wounds

Nicole Sotelo | Apr. 20, 2009

There are three simple words that have the power to heal wounds. We teach them to our children. We share them with the ones we have hurt. We say: ?I am sorry.?

In the last year church officials have said ?I am sorry? a number of times and in various ways; more apologies for current wrongs than I have ever heard in one year from an institution that has traditionally prided itself on certitude and even infallibility. The words ?I am sorry? may have the power to reconcile, but they are meaningless without a corresponding conversion of heart. While I welcome the recent apologies, I worry they are just covering the wounds. The real change in behavior has yet to come.

In July 2008, Pope Benedict XVI apologized to survivors of clergy sexual abuse in Australia saying, ?I am deeply sorry for the pain and suffering the victims have endured and I assure them that as their pastor I too share in their suffering.?

Last month, Archbishop Raymond Burke, the former St. Louis archbishop who now oversees the Vatican?s Apostolic Signatura, made an apology after a video was released showing him condemning his fellow bishops for not denying certain politicians communion. Burke issued a statement saying, ?I am deeply sorry for the confusion and hurt which the wrong use of the videotape has caused to anyone, particularly, to my brother bishops.?

Another Vatican official, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, criticized the ?hasty? excommunication of a 9 year-old girl?s mother who helped her get an abortion to save her life. Fisichella is quoted as saying, ?Before thinking about excommunication, it was necessary and urgent to protect her innocent life. ? Unfortunately, this is not what happened.?

Pope John Paul II was known for his series of apologies for historical wrongs but admission of current mistakes by church officials is rare. One wonders what has prompted these and other recent apologies? I venture to say it has to do less with contrition of heart and more with playing defense.

There are two meanings for the word ?apology.? The word traced to its Greek root, *apologia*, refers to a verbal or written defense; a refutation of charges. The term ?apologetics? is associated for many Christians with the field of theology in which one defends the faith.

However, over time there grew a second meaning attached to the word ?apology.? Our modern understanding of ?apology? is that of an expression of sorrow or contrition over an admitted wrong.

Every recent apology from a church official has come from a position of defense: Benedict did not apologize for the sexual abuse crisis until six years after the massive revelations when he was faced with media scrutiny and upset laity on his trips abroad. Archbishop Burke did not apologize until the videotape was released at a press conference. Fisichella did not make his contrite comments until the excommunication story made global headlines and caused outrage among Catholics.

Many church officials have expressed their apologies and regrets but I see little contrition on their part; little has been done to rectify the underlying problems that necessitated the apologies in the first place.

Pope John Paul II, in his exhortation on ?Reconciliation and Penance,? wrote ?? reconciliation itself will be complete and effective only to the extent that [people] reach -- in order to heal it --that original wound which is the root of all other wounds: namely sin.?

I am waiting for the bishops to create true reconciliation by following their verbal apologies with behavior that would correct the wrongs done; that would not just cover, but truly heal the wounds.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/26/2015 - 01:21*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/healing-wounds