

Who's to blame for failing church in Europe?

Tom Roberts | Jul. 1, 2010 NCR Today

The New York Times columnist and Atlantic writer Ross Douthat gives the necessary nod to historical perspective (for those inclined to think the sex abuse crisis might sink the church) in a blog entry before coming to the following dire conclusion about the Catholic Church in Europe:

"But if the Church isn't finished, period, it can still be finished for certain people, in certain contexts, in certain times. And so it is in this case: for millions in Europe and America, Catholicism is probably permanently associated with sexual scandal, rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as in many previous dark chapters in the Church's history, the leaders entrusted with that gospel have nobody to blame but themselves."

I have the same point of view when it comes to the crisis and what it might portend for the future. Consequently I find it curious that Pope Benedict would seek redemption for the institution in part through a new liturgical movement, as explained [here by John Allen](#) [1].

Allen notes that the phrase "new liturgical movement" was first used by Joseph Ratzinger in a memoir in 1997. "I am convinced," he wrote at the time, "that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy, which at times has even come to be conceived of *etsi Deus non daretur*, in that it is a matter of indifference whether or not God exists and whether or not he speaks to us and hears us. But when the community of faith, the worldwide unity of the Church and her history, and the mystery of the living Christ are no longer visible in the liturgy, where else, then, is the Church to become visible in her spiritual essence?"

I have no idea where the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger experienced such bereft and barren liturgies, but isn't it curious that the church's troubles always seem to be caused by something other than its leadership? Everyone and everything else is to blame for falling attendance and a lack of enthusiasm and faith. Like so many others, Douthat would stake the disintegration of the church not to some liturgical reform, however misbegotten one might perceive it, but to the church's leaders. How many people in those disintegrating churches in Europe would say they left because of liturgical reform and how many would say they left because they'd had it with hierarchical duplicity and deception. My hunch is the vote wouldn't be close.

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/what-benedict-means-new-liturgical-movement>