

June 1, 2002

Apology Cites 'Contrition, Shame and Emptiness'

Following is an excerpt from the apology that Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee offered yesterday, as posted on the Web site of The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. A full transcript is online at nytimes.com/national.

I come before you today to apologize and beg forgiveness. I know, and I am sure you do too, that the church to be authentic must be a community that heals. But I also know, and you do too, that there is no healing unless it is based on truth. In my remarks I will do my best.

I apologize to all the faithful of this archdiocese which I love so much, to all its people and clergy, for the scandal that has occurred because of my sinfulness. Long ago, I placed that sinfulness in God's loving and forgiving heart, but now and into the future I worry about those whose faith may be shaken by my acts.

The early church was wise to declare that God can use imperfect instruments to build the kingdom and that the effectiveness of the sacraments does not depend on the holiness of the minister. For me that thought brings some, though meager, consolation. It does not in any way diminish my need to beg forgiveness of all of you.

I acknowledge and fully accept my responsibility for the inappropriate nature of my relationship with Mr. Paul Marcoux. I apologize for any harm done him. At that time, 1979, I did not understand that responsibility in the same way as I do now. I have come to see and understand the way in which the power of the Roman collar can work in such relationships and, even more so, a bishop's miter.

There is an understandable concern about the money paid out in the settlement agreement of 1998. I understood the settlement agreement in question as compensation for Paul Marcoux because of the claim that I had interfered with his ability to earn income. Rather than spend the money litigating this claim, I agreed to an out-of-court settlement. In hindsight I can see why it has the appearance of hush money. Perhaps I should have handled this situation differently. If I had done so, there would still have been sizeable costs to the church, but at least it would have been out in the open. One of my fears in not accepting the settlement was the prospect of scandal and embarrassment for myself and for the church. For that lack of courage, I apologize.

This money did not come from the Stewardship Appeal or from any diocesan funds designated for charitable or pastoral work. In my mind, the money I had given the archdiocese was more than the settlement amount. To my continued embarrassment, I now am told that is not true. In my remaining years I will continue to contribute to the archdiocese whatever I can and, of course, the archdiocese will receive whatever effects I own on my death.

People who are concerned about me ask how I feel at this moment. The best nouns to describe those feelings would be: remorse, contrition, shame and emptiness.

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