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

Someone should tell Finn to step down if he won't do it himself

Bill Tammeus | Dec. 12, 2012 A small c catholic

I wish at least one of America's Catholic bishops had the courage of the late Sen. Barry Goldwater [1].

Goldwater had stuck with Richard Nixon all the way through the Watergate scandal until, on Aug. 5, 1974, newly released transcripts revealed a conversation Nixon had six days after the Watergate break-in that showed the president directed the CIA to stop investigating the crime. Stunned by this smoking gun, Goldwater went to the White House to tell Nixon there was no hope for him to remain president and he should resign.

Because Goldwater wasn't among those who had called for Nixon to quit earlier, it required a special kind of courage to face his president and tell him to get out.

Maybe one day, we'll learn that one of Bishop Robert Finn's peers told him privately that his continued presence as bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph [2], Mo., was hurting the church in many ways and that he should quit.

Maybe.

All we know is Finn remains in office, and none of his fellow bishops has said publicly that Finn needs to go now that he's been found guilty in a court of law of covering up for a priest suspected of child abuse. A smoking gun, but silence from bishops and silence from Rome.

Any book written about Finn's fellow bishops in this affair should be called *Profiles in Cowardice*.

Knowledgeable Catholics tell me there's a long-standing unwritten rule that bishops don't criticize one another in public, almost no matter what.

You can be sure private conversations critical of fellow bishops have taken place in the halls outside of periodic meetings of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops -- even conversations about Finn.

But not in public. As Tom Roberts of *NCR* reported [3] right after the November meeting of the U.S. bishops in Baltimore, Finn was present, but "not once was he mentioned, nor was mention made in that meeting of the fact that a sitting bishop had been convicted of a crime that, were he a priest, would disqualify him from ministry."

How can these men live with themselves? Can they not find a pastoral way to approach Finn and convince him that his continued presence is making the church look foolish and destroying any credibility the bishops might otherwise have in their efforts to fix what went wrong in the scandal of abusive priests and the bishops who covered up for them?

Turning against a peer or co-worker can be terribly difficult, especially in the world of business. Quite often in such cases, the whistleblower pays by getting fired while the one who needs a remedial course in ethics keeps his or her job or even gets promoted.

But for heaven's sake, the church is not a business. It's the called-out people of God who, having received the saving grace of Jesus Christ, are deputized to proclaim the Gospel to others through word and deed.

No one is suggesting Finn can't be forgiven his sins. Indeed, forgiveness is precisely what God always stands ready to offer.

But when someone in a position of ecclesial authority has failed in so spectacular a way that even a secular court has found him guilty, he has the obligation to do what he can to avoid further damage to what Finn often calls -- in words that should make him quake -- Holy Mother Church.

And if Finn is so obtuse that he doesn't understand that, it's the duty of his fellow bishops to instruct him.

But day after day, week after week, month after month, we hear nothing from Finn's fellow bishops or from the Vatican.

As a Protestant who looks in on the Catholic church from the outside, I confess I simply don't understand what would drive those bishops to shirk their duty in so appalling a way. It's shocking, and it must break the sacred heart of Jesus.

[Bill Tammeus, a Presbyterian elder and former award-winning Faith columnist for *The Kansas City Star*, writes the daily "Faith Matters" blog [4] for the *Star*'s website and a monthly column for *The Presbyterian Outlook*. His latest book, co-authored with Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust [5]*. Email him at wtammeus@kc.rr.com.]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Bill Tammeus' column, "A small c catholic," is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: **Email alert sign-up** [6].

Source URL (retrieved on *05/04/2016 - 07:11*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/small-c-catholic/someone-should-tell-finn-step-down-if-he-wont-do-it-himself

Links:
[1] http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/04/01/specials/goldwater-obit.html
[2] http://www.diocese-kcsj.org/
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/39436
[4] http://billtammeus.typepad.com/
[5] http://www.amazon.com/They-Were-Just-People-Holocaust/dp/0826218601/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1299296756&sr=1-1
[6] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup