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Can we face the heartbreaking facts? It is time for #MeToo in the Catholic Church. There is too much abusive behavior by — or ignored by — Catholic bishops.

Washington, D.C.'s former archbishop, Cardinal Theodore ("Uncle Ted") McCarrick, reportedly was overly fond of his seminarians, and was finally punished for abusing a minor 47 years ago. Everybody knew. Nobody did anything.

Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar (near the border with Pakistan) is accused of rape. Accused by a woman religious. There seem to be 18 other sisters with similar stories about Mulakkal and a lawsuit against the cardinal who did not respond to the allegations. Why?

Moreover, who's next?

It's time for the church worldwide to face up to abuse of power by bishops, especially but not only the physical and emotional abuse whispered about in seminaries, chanceries and gay bars. In the U.S., the famous (infamous?) 2002 "Dallas Charter" is all about priests, deacons and minors. Bishops are not under the charter's jurisdiction. Yet the root of this problem is at the top, not the bottom.

The problem is endemic, and the problem is real.

The website BishopAccountability.org lists some 60 secular and religious bishops accused of sexual abuse of minors and 28 more of abusing adults. They are from every country you can think of, from Argentina to Wales. Some are dead, some are laicized. Some may be innocent. Few are in jail or ever have been.

The worst part? It's not only sex abuse.

Begin with priests and bishops. Just about any priest will tell you the Roman collar is a dog collar that bishops can and often will use as a choker. Do what he says or get lost. Be nice, bend to his will, and suddenly you are a monsignor heading a rich parish. Sometimes it's about talent; sometimes it's about cooperating and being a team player; sometimes it is pure abuse of power. In too many cases, warped sexual dynamics are in play.

When actual sex is involved, the bishop's playboy becomes his secretary, or lives in the household, or is otherwise somehow always around. These are Catholic bishops we are talking about. Archbishops. Cardinals.

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Yet no one wants to talk about it. No one wants to say anything because they fear the bishop's power. And it's not just clerics whose cries are muffled. It's the lay chancery employees and religious sisters who need their jobs to support families or communities. Bishops can ruin your life and many have done so, in more ways than one.

Complaints too often go nowhere.

The people free to complain do not depend on the church, but even so, when they bring their case against Father Problem, no matter how detailed and accurate, their letters still end up in chancery wastebaskets. So, they close their checkbooks and leave. Soon, another parish merger — "due to falling membership" — moves the problem along toward his diocesan-funded retirement.

It's not just sexual misbehavior. Bishops around the world oversee abusive pastors and priests and ignore the realities of the situations. Whether it is a do-nothing narcissist administrator, a chair-throwing priest with anger management issues, or a spendthrift pastor whose favorite indoor sport is emptying the bank account, bishops ignore complaints, especially from women.

I rather do not know what to say. The rot at the top has sealed this simmering volcano long enough. Abuse of power has both nothing and everything to do with the Gospel. There are plenty of diocesan swamps and more than enough alligators to go around. Someone needs to bring to task the bishops who abuse their positions and people by ignoring complaints and/or preying on those within their power.

Only then can the whole people of God — laypeople, clerics and future clerics — know they belong to a wholesome church. Only then.

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Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Phyllis Zagano's column, Just Catholic, is posted. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up.

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