Opinion

by Dennis Coday

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August 24, 2018
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Welcome to our online letters to the editor column. It's online but based on the old-fashioned letters to the editor format: Send me your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses. I will collect them, curate them, and post a collection to the NCR Today blog.

Directions on how to join the conversation follow the letters.

Freedom of the Press

Back in high school (1954) our history professor (Fr. Omer OSB) had our class perform a play about John Peter Zenger that dealt with freedom of the press. We had no idea back then what great relevance this play would have for our contemporary scene. In these days of “fake news” and itemization of the press, that play still offers us some hope.

Where have all the prophets gone? I honestly think the are our news reporters these days; some are true prophets and some are false ones. Let us head the true ones, the seekers of justice.

(Br.) Benedict Janecko, OSB

Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Editor’s Note: Please see the NCR editorial “A journalism of peace: the media's indispensable social function.”

Fight against abuse cover up transcends ideologies

To use his own vocabulary, in an Aug. 14, 2018 opinion column (Links for 8/14/18), Michael Sean Winters has launched a “smear campaign” against clergy sexual abuse survivors and human rights activists from the organization End Clergy Abuse (ecaglobal.org). ECA has called upon Pope Francis to investigate three Cardinals possibly linked to covering up sexual abuse by brother bishops. All three are playing prominent roles at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin Aug. 22-28 and the papal visit Aug. 25-26, and we asked the pope to have them step down from their roles. The three are Cardinals Óscar Maradiaga of Honduras and Kevin Farrell, whose Vatican dicastery organizes the World Meeting of Familes and Donald Wuerl of Washington.

Wuerl is of particular concern. According to an Associated Press summary of a Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report released last week, “Wuerl approved transfers of priests instead of removing them from ministry, oversaw inadequate church investigations and concealed information when priests were reported to law enforcement. The report also says he advised parishes not to publicly announce or acknowledge complaints, and offered financial support to priests who were accused and later resigned.”

Winters writes that we “like all activists, they seem to have focused on one thing and one thing only for so long that our lens becomes distorted.” While Winters may have a point, it certainly is not valid to conclude that people who commit their lives to activism necessarily will find their “lenses” distorted. Unless Winters means to include Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and Dorothy Day. What Winters is upset about is that we cited, among others, the results of investigative reports by conservative journalists.

This part of Winters’ claim about ECA is true: we do focus on one thing, regardless of theological, political or personal ideology or belief. That one thing is the sexual abuse of children by clergy and the institutional cover-up of that abuse. Liberal bishops have done it, especially in the past when there were more of them, and conservative bishops have done it. There is no ideological litmus test for it.

Peter Isely, ECA founding member and spokesperson

Dr. Denise Buchanan, ECA board member

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How to achieve reconciliation

I have read several statements of bishops lamenting the situations of Theodore McCarrick, the former archbishop of Washington, and the Pennsylvania grand-jury report on sex abuse in six dioceses, and sadly too many of them sound like pleas to be forgiven so we can all go back to “the way it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be …” The statements, in other words, imply (intentionally or not) that “reconciliation” will allow the bishops to return to the old style of governance and behavior.

Many comments responding to these statements are clear rejections of the bishops’ appeals: “Too little, too late”; “They have no credibility”; “Why should we believe them now?” What people are looking for are actions that can undergird the words.

To achieve authentic reconciliation, not just words asking for forgiveness and stating how sorry the bishops are, I offer this suggestion: Something similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that saved South Africa from a post-apartheid bloodbath, thanks to the leadership of Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I suggest

that every living cleric named as an abuser be sat down at a table. Those who suffered from their actions or cover-ups would be invited to sit down opposite them, to look them in the eye, and tell them their hurt and pain and suffering. In a context like this, perhaps true contrition would occur, and perhaps forgiveness (not without consequences) could be achieved. Perhaps it would be too painful for some victims to confront their tormenters, nevertheless, they should be offered the chance to express themselves.

St. Augustine wrote that “We do not put our faith in a man, but in the Lord.” This is extremely important to remember, but we must also remember that it is through humans that the Lord is present to us, and a non-credible messenger usually damages (if not destroys) the credibility of the message. This is the burden. Expressions of sorrow are not enough. Major change must be made in the structure of the Church. This has nothing to do with dogma; it has everything to do with reform.

(Fr.) David Tokarz,

Mobile, Alabama

The church and racism

This is in response to “Faith-based protesters flock to Washington to counter white supremacists." I am now in my 20th year teaching Theology at Catholic schools in St. Louis. I have been asked what I need from Archbishop Robert Carlson and the Church regarding racism. I need Archbishop Carlson and the USCCB to literally and loudly proclaim “Black Lives Matter.” Say the words.

My partner and I have been to numerous Black Lives Matter protests with our 4 and 7 year old daughters. There has been no Catholic Leadership presence. None. Other Christian faiths are well represented and even on the front lines. I need my Church on the front lines. I need pastors in white parishes to literally say “Black Lives Matter” as loudly as they proclaim that unborn lives matter. Archbishop Carlson mandated pastors in the Archdiocese of St. Louis to preach on racism during Lent. From what I heard from friends and family, many did not and many that did preach on racism did not do it justice. This needs to change.

I recently attended a listening session for the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. They are preparing to release a new document in November. Bishop Fabre,

Chairman of the committee, said that we need forgiveness. A sinner must take decisive action before getting redemption for their sin. The Catholic Church is no exception. My Church has been silent to the sin of racism for far too long.

This proclamation has to come in more than prayer, even more than a document. The Church needs to take action.

Dan Stout

St. Louis, MO

Reclaiming the church

Thank you for your editorial "The body of Christ must reclaim our church." I too believe that part of our problem in the Catholic Church is that we, the Catholics, who do much of the good work of the Church have little voice and no decision-making ability in our own parish, much less in the Church as a whole. It is shocking to think that our hierarchy will prosecute to the full extent of the law anyone stealing money from our Church but will cover up those stealing lives. I support (1) married priests, (2) women priests and (3) parish ownership of their own church and grounds - we should obtain a loan from a bank rather than our bishop. These basic changes along with an empowered parish council capable of interviewing potential pastors from multiple Catholic sources as well as bringing charges to a Catholic Council or the Police, depending on the circumstance, for any financial or sexual abuse would go far to making things whole and secure once more.

Joseph A. Alfred

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Apostolic visitation into McCarrick case

It is gratifying to finally see that the bishops are beginning to move in the right direction to address the sexual abuse crisis. It is too bad that they did not take the advice of so many who spoke out about this crisis since 2002. I guess there is no ducking the facts that are surfacing.

But there is one thing that I do not hear mentioned: Why did such a culture develop among so many bishops over so many years? Besides them wanting to protect the

institution, could it be that their formation about human sexuality is woefully lacking? Did they know/appreciate the harm that was being inflicted on victims? The bishops call the scandal a moral catastrophe, is it not also crimes?

Frank Pasquariello

Whitehouse Station, NJ

It is Sunday morning

It is Sunday morning and I am wondering about the people interviewed coming out of Mass in Pittsburg about the news of the 900 page report of their own state's grand jury?

It is Sunday morning and there are some very good priests, ashamed and embarrassed to the point of being unable to speak, impotent before their equally shamed congregations at Mass.

It is Sunday morning and faithful Catholic parents, after retching out their guts, should turn their deep sadness and anger to thinking about how to bring an end to the "old white man church" that let our children be hurt forever by unthinkable depravity.

It is Sunday morning and more than a thousand people of God have signed a petition asking for the resignations of all of the U.S. Bishops as a signal that they get it, that they understand their role, sins of commission and omission, that brought us to this moment of time. Unlikely? Impractical? How about imperative?

It is Sunday morning and the Catholic Church in the United States is at Code Red. We are in an emergency situation demanding immediate action and radical change. Time to triage and stop the bleeding. Time to become that field hospital, drop the old rules, begin again with everybody in play, not just the old white men whose ambition and misguided protectionism let the criminal cartel operate for so long in the underbelly of our church.

It is Sunday morning and long past the time to bring real justice and respect to the victims whose courage brought us this opportunity to change toward the Gospel not away from it.

It is Sunday morning and we are waiting for the man in white to show up on his Roman balcony and tell us he knows it is time for him to act, regardless of what all the men in red think.

It is Sunday morning, a day we have been taught to keep holy. God is weeping.

Next Sunday morning will we have forgotten?

Carol Stanton

Orlando, FL

Join the Conversation

Just like the old-fashioned letters to the editor, I will not be posting everything sent to me, and submissions will have to conform to the rules, but I pledge to do my best to represent the full range of letters that I receive. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to comments@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- First consideration is given to letters written in response to an article that has appeared on NCRonline.org.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. — We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. — We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.
- We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your comments will receive careful consideration.
- Published letters may be edited for length and style.

These are the same rules that have guided the letters to the editor column in our print edition for 53 years, so I hope they work here, too.