Opinion

by Dennis Coday

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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.

The Church in Crisis

The numbers from the Pennsylvania grand jury a report on child sexual abuse in that state by Catholic priests are staggering: 300 priests and 1,000 victims identified.

The global epidemic of priestly pedophilia can only lead to the logical conclusion that within my church there is an organized culture that enabled the abuse of minors. That support network is facilitated by “secret archives” maintained in each diocese and accessible only to the bishop, as well as treatment centers to which perpetrators are sent for rehabilitation. (Rehabilitation —these guys should be defrocked and sent to jail!)

The standard mea culpa that “mistakes have been made” doesn’t cut it anymore. Frankly, it never did. Moving pedophile priests around from parish to parish and in and out of “treatment centers” was standard operating procedure rather than ad hoc mistakes made in dealing with an occasional rogue priest.

Pope Francis and his cardinals want to move forward, but to do that and to maintain the confidence of the laity, the church must fess up to what clearly seems to be a morally and legally bankrupt system.

Secret archives should be opened to law enforcement authorities and criminal prosecution initiated where possible. Any curial or diocesan policies or instructions on how to deal with disordered clergy should be made public as well.

When the clerical leaders of my church fully reveal the institutional steps that were taken in the past to deal with this phenomenon, only then can they begin an attempt to regain the trust of “the faithful.”

Paul D. Snyder

Newton, Massachuetts

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When a priests breaks his vow of celibacy with a consenting adult it is between him, his partner and his church. When a priest has sex and/or abuses a minor or non-consenting adult it is a crime, and must be dealt with through the legal system.The priest's sexual orientation is irrelevant. His actions are not.

Kathleen Tkach

Clawson, Michigan

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Thank you for your bold, prophetic call to action (Editorial: Choosing the Painful Path of Purification of the Church) regarding the ongoing crisis of leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. As a former Roman Catholic and one who was envious of but knew, in the pit of my stomach, that "Father's Boys" were holding onto a terrible secret, I applaud all of the recommendations you have outlined.

Clearly, the sexual abuse of children by clergy is an abomination; however, I am curious to know why you did not mention the scandal of the physical and psychological abuse of orphans by nuns in many cities and towns in America, which includes allegations of the murder of children.

A careful analysis of all of the causative and contributing factors of this crisis — clericalism, celibacy, blaming gay people, barring women from ordination, secrecy, silencing, patriarchy, and the use/misuse/abuse of authority, power, privilege, etc. — will go a long way to creating desperately needed reform for the church at every level of mission and ministry.

It is said that "A fish rots from its head down." I am also reminded that, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb, he called to the people and said, "Unbind him." It will take an empowered laity to sever the rot from the Body of Christ and liberate it from what binds and prevents it from living into what St. Paul named as "the priesthood of all believers."

The Roman Catholic Church and all of her people remain, as always, in my prayers.

(Rev.) Elizabeth Kaeton

Long Neck, Deleware

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The Roman Catholic Church is in great crisis and I have been surprised how long the train keeps on moving after the wreck. As many are, I am in flux. I have good

memories of sacred grace filled moments, but also traumatic ones for myself. The need, for me at least, is to honor the traumatic memories of others now and throughout time.

My education up to and through graduate school was all at Roman Catholic small and large institutions and my life as a professional has shown me power and control are the root of systemic corruption. This and lack of the nurturing of memory and the respect for critical thinking have created many members who are unaware, incurious, and live in a Sunday bubble.

Father Zorisma in *The Brothers Karmazov* speaks of the harsh movement of love in action. I have been straddling the fence of the troubled waters of these times, I cannot wait much longer. I would gladly jump in if there was concrete and extreme vetting and systemic change.

If that does not happen, I will tell my memories like the child in Camelot and hope that the good that was, however faint, will find a place in fallow ground in the future.

Mary OMalley

Avon Lake, Ohio

Renewing Jesus presence

I had to chuckle as I read Dani Clark's column ("This is why it's divine") I, too, like Father Tom, am a retired Catholic priest, and pastor to a small house church in the western suburbs of Boston. And like the Community of Sant'Egidio in Washington, D.C., we go to an area nursing home once a month for Mass.

Our experiences are similar: the makeshift altar, the combination of Catholics and whatevers! We don't ask too many questions — the residents who come are there because they want to be part of the celebration, and who are we to say otherwise?

The singing and readings are often interrupted by someone straggling in or someone abruptly leaving, but most of them listen attentively to what is said (some can't help nodding off from time to time), and as we circulate to exchange the peace or distribute Communion, there are often tears of gratitude.

The hunger of these people for God's comforting Presence and energizing Word is fulfilled in our presence and words; together we are a local manifestation of the

broader faith community that we all call church.

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist at that nursing home, I'm reminded of the words of Jesus: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am present," and my own faith in Jesus' presence is renewed!

(Fr.) George C. Brown

Framingham, Massachusetts

Challenge columnist's bias

I would like to point out what I think are two examples of bias and contradictions in columns by Michael Sean Winters.

His defense of Washington Cardinal Doland Wuerl. (Here and here for example.) The facts are that Wuerl has passed his retirement date and it should be accepted. Wuerl was complicit in the unjust campaign by Pope John Paull II against the late Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen based upon right wing Catholic extremists using innuendo, gossip, and rumors. Compare that to Winters' attempts to whitewash Wuerl's 18 years over Pittsburgh diocese (per grand jury report, the vilest and largest of the abuse rings in the state.) The attorney general's report is based upon legal documentation and confirmed actions (not gossip or innuendo). Suggest that the chickens have come home to roost.

Winters takes jabs at the late Richard Sipe that are cherry-picked and lack context. He criticizes right wing catholic media and then repeats the same methods. No one is saying that Sipe is perfect but let's be balanced and acknowledge that Sipe's research, experience, and knowledge is documented. Yes, Sipe at times was frustrated but he had to contend with a clericalism that dismissed his documentation; refused to even listen to his allegations, proofs, etc. Sorry that Sipe's work challenges Witner's biases.

William deHaas

Dallas, Texas

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- First consideration is given to letters written in response to an article that has appeared on NCRonline.org.
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- 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.