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.

Pell and McCarrick

Michael Sean Winters has provided readers of NCR with substantial food for thought throughout the “McCarrick/Vigano affair.” That is true of his column “The bruised and bloodied church.” However, it is doubtful that the facts of Cardinal George Pell's case are “not hugely different” from the McCarrick case. The Australian cardinal has never been accused of sexual exploitation of seminarians nor of repeated adult boundary violations. Many in Melbourne regard the charges against Pell as quite flimsy. Our prayers here have been only that truth will be respected by witnesses on both sides. The trial is close to concluding, so we will soon know.

(Fr.) Michael McEntee

Melbourne, Australia.

Pope calls bishops to Rome

While I can appreciate the significance of the pope’s action, “Francis summons world's bishop presidents to Rome for meeting on clergy abuse,” waiting six months for such a meeting does not give me much confidence. The church is shaken to its core and those of us who have remained faithful — and faith filled — want answers now.

Daria Fitzgerald

Milford, Connecticut

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It's sort of disingenuous for that group to discuss "protection of minors." Talk about too little too late! Better the pope have the courage to discuss "How we failed the entire world, broke the trust, and who can help us repair the damage we have done."

Marguerite Sexton

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Where are the women?

Sarah Burch

Eugene, Oregon

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Would it not be more convincing if the survivors were invited rather than the bishops, many of whom did not report the abuses? The laity call for accountability, transparency and inclusion at all levels of church.

Heather Weedon

Canterbury, Australia

Penance for the bishops

Sr. Marilyn McMorrow (See Penance proposal for bishops: six months in real world) has proposed that to do penance for the abuse in the church, the bishops should take six months out to live anonymously as an ordinary person in an ordinary house on an ordinary income. I myself suggest that as a sign of contrition and penance and simplicity they should for a year or more stop wearing their mitres and carry their crosiers. It is more easily done and yet very telling.

Ben Jorna

Johannahoeve, Netherlands,

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Several years ago, I suggested that bishops spend one day a week in a nursing home, a hospital, a day-care center, a homeless shelter or similar setting to obey some of Matthew 25, not as penance for sins, but as normal repentance — a change of life to see and use their hands to help others. Such service would refocus their minds from their emphasis on liturgy, vestments, the church calendar, and laudatory groups of pious people to the "real world" of toilets and smells and duties and anger.

Jorris John Heise

Bloomington, Illinois

Thank you, Marie Collins

Pope Francis has repeatedly praised the virtue of *hypomone* (ὑπομονή in New Testament Greek), translated as “perseverance” or “patient endurance.” The church should indeed be grateful to Marie Collins, an exemplar of this virtue. (See: Marie Collins responds to Francis, seeking transparency in bishop accountability process.)

Andrew Todd

Worthing, United Kingdom

Women cardinals: ‘a perfect idea’

In the light of the contemporary crisis in the Church, Jesuit Fr James Keenan proposes empowering women in Church. (If we want to reform the church, let's make women cardinals.) He suggests forming a college of women cardinals (without being ordained) or a women’s advisory council, stating that it is theologically and theoretically possible.

Keenan talks about the “world” but he seems to be confined to women in Europe and America (or other than Asia and Africa). It is good if it is convinced that majority of the faithful Catholics are not found in the West which moves away from Christ and Christianity. There are many qualified women there too. The West may not be able to direct the world in this respect

K. C. Thomas

Mumbai, India

Editor’s Note: When Keenan lists suggestions for women cardinals, he does include several from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

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Keenan’s proposal on women cardinals is a perfect idea. Women will be able to work in the highest levels of the church. Pope Francis can act immediately without interference. No doubt the power brokers will complain, but they are responsible for the grave harm done to the church. Reform now!

Richard Vanni

Ocean View, Deleware

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One of my candidates for women cardinals in the church would be Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister. She is woman of uncommon wisdom and deep and abiding faith with a lifetime of commitment to and ongoing understanding of the Rule of Saint Benedict as it applies to all the faithful, not just religious, but ordinary men and women.

Like Keenan and many others, I believe women need leadership positions in the church. Her grounding in theology is sound. Her leadership skills are proven and extraordinary. She would be a superb candidate.

Mary Davis

Santa Rosa, California

Advertisement

Lack of transparency a major problem

As subscribers to NCR, my wife and I are thankful to you for the truthful expose of the clergy abuse scandal in the church. We have been deeply troubled by these ongoing events. However, we always look at the greater good that can be achieved once church reform is done, sooner than later.

We are wondering about the article "Letter confirms Vatican officials knew of McCarrick allegations in 2000," which is about a letter dated in 2006 from then-Archbishop Leonardo Sandri to Fr. Boniface Ramsey, the former seminary professor. Is this a smoking gun? Based on NCR's report, we are assuming that the redacted name was another priest, even though Ramsey was referring to McCarrick in his letter, which we would also like to see. We'd also like know who did the redacting. We need transparency and these attempts to undermine the truth is a major problem for us, the faithful.

Phil Klouder

Ocean City, New Jersey

Whose reform would we have?

Timothy Busch, as depicted in “Catholic donor denies he consulted on Viganò allegations against Pope Francis” and other NCR articles, like “Tim Busch, Napa Institute tout 'Authentic Reform' at upcoming event,” is an intriguing character. We plebes in the bleachers are given to understand that he is a co- founder of the Napa Institute, a think and money tank for conservative, elitist Catholics, that he is on the governing board of EWTN that now owns The National Catholic Register and that he helps host various conferences and clerical events in the Napa Valley that attract like-minded spirits such as disgraced, former Archbishop John Nienstedt.

Busch is proposing a lay-led commission to probe sexual abuse in the church composed of folks who are "professionally competent, intellectually honest, morally upright and deeply committed to Christ and church." I wonder if Busch's ideal group would include a very poor, refreshingly humbled ex-fisherman like Peter and a formerly demonically possessed woman of means like Mary Magdalene?

Nancy McGunagle

Kalispell, Montana

Why can’t the church move on?

Fr. Tom Reese's "Why the Catholic Church can't move on from the sex abuse crisis" is spot on. Every diocese needs to commission an independent, no-holds-barred investigation of its child sexual abuse and adult sexual misconduct files, including not only the acts but the follow up by authorities and final disposition. This needs to be done by investigators with the highest reputation and with open access to local prosecutors. They need to put it all out in a detailed report and in a highly publicized manner. The U.S. bishops’ conference web site should have a section where these reports can be accessed directly.

These reports need to be updated on an annual basis with new cases or new developments in prior cases. Victims’ names would not be revealed unless they request to be included. Dioceses also need to release from non-disclosure agreements victims who have made settlements and allow them to participate in the investigation.

Reese is correct that the church has put enormous effort into the protection of children and the training of adults in the past 15 years. I do not expect to hear again (in the U.S.) of the kind of prolonged abuse that occurred and was poorly handled 40 years ago. However, there is still a shadow of secrecy and ambiguity around this issue that we need to put behind us. It is clear now that nothing less will suffice.

Eugene Tozzi

New Rochelle, New York

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Reese is absolutely correct that full disclosure of the detailed record of sexual abuse is a necessity if there is any chance of restoring credibility. I would like to add to this that there should also be full disclosure of the amount of money spent on compensating victims and paying diocesan attorneys, and a complete account of where that money came from.

Paul Lakeland

Fairfield, Conneticut

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Reese’s critique and solution are a major step in moving on from the sexual assault scandal, but full public disclosure is only the first stage. Structural issues to the church at the parish, diocesan, and seminary levels both enabled the abuse to happen and lead to cover up. Misplaced values (fear of loss of money or reputation) did devastating damage. An independent multi-disciplinary assessment of the factors that enabled this horror and recommendations for change are essential to the church everywhere.

Marianne McLean

Perth, Ontario , Canada

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Reese says the bishops are frustrated with continued coverage of clerical abuse and, shockingly, think they have fixed the problem. Later he says there is “great

opposition” by lawyers and bishops to fully disclose past abuse. Those who say bishops have no credibility are absolutely correct. To their credit, some bishops do seem to realize this.

The problem is the structure of the episcopacy itself. It is a closed system, accountable to no one. There is pressure never to speak publicly about a problem of which many are aware. Bishops are obsessed with not causing “scandal” or “confusing the faithful.” I am so tired of hearing that excuse. They have caused scandal. Many believe they are above the law in in both the literal sense and the symbolic sense. My bishop made a habit of proclaiming frequently, “I’m the bishop; I can do whatever I want.” And did.

As long as these attitudes persist, and they seem to be entrenched, trust in the episcopacy will never be restored (it may not anyway). It seems bishops simply cannot grasp in how little regard they are held by the laity after the last round of scandals, or perhaps they would rather deny the problem than begin to solve it.

Marcy Meldahl

Powell, Tennessee

Parish town hall meetings needed

I often attend Mass during the week and afterwards a group of about 10 or so of us gather for breakfast. Yesterday we discussed a letter from our archbishop, Cardinal DiNardo, discussing the sex abuse scandal. He referenced the 2002 Dallas Charter, which you described in the article “Past review board members greet call for abuse investigation with cautious praise.” I asked the group if anyone knew what the charter was and to my surprise seven of the nine people in our discussion had never heard of it. To my way of thinking this is just another manifestation of an on-going lack of transparency from the men running the church. I believe that this must be overcome and a good way to get started is for the bishops to conduct a series of town hall meetings within each parish where what has been done can be explained and questions answered. I am afraid old the days of “pray, pay, and obey” vanished after Vatican II.

Joe Hartman

Pearland, Texas

Inspired preaching

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homily, "Being 'doer of the word' means rejecting hypocrisy, cover-up," was one that not only touched my heart, but reminded me of how God continues to lead and guide and protect us. And it gave me something to do. As a married woman, I can use my sacrament of marriage to show how it can give me the grace to be a more loving spouse. I then can become a witness to the power of God's love for us! Thank you for such an inspiring article.

Louise von Brockdorf

Westport, New York

Editor's Note: You can read and listen to Bishop Gumbleton's homilies here: The Peace Pulpit.

Abuse comes in many forms

I applaud Pope Francis' words in the article, " 'Elitist, clericalist' church allowed abuse to thrive!" Sexual abuse is only one of the many ways people are abused in our church in a clericalist environment. Whenever anyone holds power over another, abuse is possible. Bullying, withholding sacraments and silencing are all examples of forms of authoritarianism and clericalism. The sexual abuse of children is just one of the most egregious forms of abuse within this Catholic cultural sin.

If we, as the People of God, want to ensure that anything like the McCarrick and Pennsylvania scandals never happen again, then we must excise the root cause of clericalism and return our leadership (cleric and lay) to being "servants of the servants of God." Leaders cannot see themselves as better than the least among them!

Keeping the "secret," moving abusers around are much greater sins, in my opinion, than the actual abuse! Pennsylvania proves this beyond a doubt! Abhorrent and abominable!!!

Elizabeth M. Webster

Rochester, New York

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.