Opinion



by Tom Roberts

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Many of you responded with positive notes to the editorial we published last November titled "Open letter to the U.S. bishops: It's over."

What was over? "All the manipulations and contortions of the past 33 years, all the attempts to deflect and equivocate." In essence, the façade that had hidden the activities of the clerical culture for decades had finally crumbled. Everyone now sees into it.

Among the themes that threaded through your reactions was gratitude for NCR's courage in publishing it and that the open letter expressed what so many of you were realizing, feeling, saying to yourselves and to other Catholics.

Not a few priests also privately reacted with gratitude. Wrote one: "Your analysis is spot on. … I hope you will keep pushing us all to get at this culture."

Wrote another: "Thank you all at NCR for taking the risk of being accused of being extreme so that you could speak the truth of the literal crucifixion of the church."

While such affirmation is gratifying, the most important point in this moment is to understand that the editorial was neither daring nor extreme because it stood atop more than 30 years of detailed reporting and analysis of the church and the crisis that exists in NCR files. We can be bold and assertive in our analysis because we've done the reporting.

We'll continue to follow the sorting out of the ongoing clergy sex abuse crisis that now is a secret to no one.

But those of you who have been reading us know that we're well on to the next stream of major stories that will affect the future of the church: the influence of big, conservative money shaping the Catholic narrative in the culture; the influence of highly politicized "Catholic" non-profits that want to narrow our rich tradition to a tick list of do's and don'ts; and the massive demographic shifts underway, both in terms of believers and ministers, changing the church in ways beyond anyone's control.

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And we'll keep tracking the walk of faith, often these days a deliberate and determined walk in the face of the scandals and the ugly forces unleashed in our current political culture.

That's why we published dozens of stories this past year from and about our southern border and the plight of immigrants; why two of our reporters traveled to cover the growing Hispanic reality in the church and the development, over months, of the V Encuentro; why we sent a reporter to the COP24 conference on the environment and climate change in Poland, where the Catholic presence was robust and deeply engaged.

The reporting leads everything we do, and we are able to do that only because of your support. If our website has become one of your regular stops in the digital information galaxy, become a member. It costs only five bucks a month. You get all of the reporting as well as regular behind-the-scenes looks at how we do what we do from writers and editors. And we may even do a members-only event when one of our writers or editors is in your area of the country.

Please, during this week, join NCR Forward.

[Tom Roberts is NCR executive editor.]