News
Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

February 15, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Just before Christmas, NCR published an editorial announcing former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick as our publication's choice for Newsmaker of the Year. It is summed up best by this line in our editorial why the team decided on McCarrick: "His story takes on a greater significance because it unmasks, in ways that previous cases of episcopal malfeasance have not, the secrecy, deceit and corruption of the clerical system. It illustrates the inability of two previous papacies to deal seriously with bishops and archbishops who were abusive themselves or complicit in covering

up abuse by others." Many NCR readers wrote letters to the editor in reaction to our pick. Those letters are edited for length and clarity below.

I read your editorial on NCR's Newsmaker of the Year Theodore McCarrick. It is clear that the church has to make fundamental changes to clean up the clericalism that corrupts it.



Is there anything we, the people in the pews, can do to put pressure on the clergy to change? I volunteer with Voice of the Faithful with the hope that change will come from the work done in that organization.

Maybe NCR can publish an article suggesting ways the Catholic laity can push for the kind of change needed in the church.

GERARD VERNOT

Land O' Lakes, Florida

***

My first reaction to NCR's Catholic newsmaker of the year was shock and dismay. Theodore McCarrick? Why would NCR make such a choice?

This sentence helped me understand and agree: "It is just as much about all of us, capable of evil and good, as well as the clergy who inhabit a terribly damaged culture."

McCarrick is the personification of a "clerical culture" to which many (most?) of us Catholic laity have both intentionally and inadvertently contributed over the years.

We call priests "father," bishops "Your Excellency," cardinals "Your Eminence" and our pope "Your Holiness." No wonder power goes to their heads!

It is up to us to amplify the voice of publications like NCR to help bring about the changes our church so desperately needs.

JIM PURCELL

Los Gatos, California

[Jim Purcell is the board chair of NCR.]

***

Quoted from the editorial: "McCarrick, for all of the failings that have been revealed, was in many ways a good man (My response: No, pedophiles and those who sexually abuse adults are not good men) who accomplished a great deal for the church (He has further eroded what little trust the laity have in the church. The church has lost its moral authority). In that sense, the story is not so simple nor dualistic as McCarrick-the-sinner and the rest of us (how dare you use dualism to equate his behavior with the failings of others?). It is just as much about all of us (no), capable of evil and good (yes, of course), as well as the clergy who inhabit a terribly damaged culture.

Those of us who have been ministering in the church for decades are witnessing the implosion of the hierarchical system of leadership — right now, in real time.

I have been working in the church for 45 years as a lay person. In the past six years, I have seen a 30 percent decline in participation at Mass. I facilitate many adult enrichment courses where men and women for the first time are talking about walking. That they cannot stomach it. They feel betrayed. My parish council representative for our faith formation commission just left the church.

What compelled NCR to write this paragraph?

TIM CLARKE

Kettering, Ohio

***

In 1979, when Time magazine chose Ayatollah Khomeini as its Man of the Year because he fit the "for better or worse, this person made the most impact" criteria, a wise letter to the editor said "change your definition or do away with the title." We love NCR but maybe that is good advice for you as well!

PAUL GRISANTI

Greenwich, Connecticut

***

What is it in this global organization, as it has existed for 2,000 years, which educates and forms recruits by the thousands to be ordained and then some percentage starts abusing kids and vulnerable seminarians? How

can this seminary training become so reproducible that abuser priests exist in virtually every diocese across the globe?

And what is it in the formation of bishops and hierarchy which again reproduces over and over leaders who are so flawed that they value the brand more than child victims? The Dallas Morning News of June 22, 2002, reported that in the second half of the 20th century, 111 out of 189 bishops of the period had covered up at least one pedophile priest.

Here is a fictional assignment I considered. If I were a management consultant, contracted to start an imaginary organization whose mission was to grow their organization to make it efficient in developing child abusers, and to train leaders who were efficient in covering up those abuser recruits, the Catholic structure could be a model. That isn't worded quite right, but it intrigues me.

Well, apparently the church actually accomplished this goal, not just nationally, but internationally. Was it necessary to mix in doctrinaire religion? Yes, I think so, because of the mindset which says that the acts of child abuse were merely a sin, just go to confession and all is well. Mix in the clericalism arrogance and the elitism of the priesthood and bishophood, and disaster comes for five decades.

JOHN MINCK

Palo Alto, California

***

In the editorial about Theodore McCarrick, I noted that his sexual deviancy was legendary. As a consequence, his punishment is that he was stripped of his appointment as a cardinal and that he is now at a "remote friary" doing penance. I assume that includes three good meals a day and a decent room. Doubtful he is washing his own clothes or preparing his own meals.

Although I'm sure his mandate includes not appearing in public as a cleric, he most likely can still celebrate the Eucharist daily. Then I got to thinking about the case of Roy Bourgeois, a Navy officer, Vietnam vet and Purple Heart recipient, who later became a Maryknoll priest. After 40 years as a priest, he was involuntarily dismissed from his order, excommunicated and involuntarily laicized in 2012 for participating in the ordination to the priesthood of a Catholic woman and openly disagreeing with the Catholic church's rejection of women from ordination.

He was detained by Vatican police when he went there to protest the church's rule against women in the ordained ministry. Bourgeois spent his life working for the poor, including as a missioner in South America. He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and has received some 17 major awards for his work for social justice.

The kid gloves treatment of McCarrick and the abhorrent treatment of Bourgeois should spark outrage among the Catholic faithful. Pope Francis should be ashamed of himself for letting this happen under his watch and doing nothing to correct this injustice.

(The Rev) J.O. "PETE" WRIGHT

Redlands, California

***

Given their impact in the lives of all Roman Catholics because of their inhibiting our capacity to live out our faith in a manner consistent with actual official teachings, I think it important to underscore the importance of the "monied interests" in the rise

of and maintaining McCarrick in such a privileged position of immense power.

Let us not forget the distortion of Pope John Paul II teachings by the likes of George Weigel, the distorted film made by the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus, the distortion of our teachings so American capitalism is not threatened or even critically examined by those in Legatus and the support of these "monied interests" in maintaining bishops, archbishops and cardinals who prefer their positions of privilege to being religious leaders that lead by example as Pope Francis is doing, ensuring we have a deep understanding of our faith that enables us to effectively engage the social structures of our world to transform them so all God's creatures and Creation have live with dignity.

It is not by accident John Paul and Pope Benedict XVI were so ill advised about what was really going on in Central and South America, for example.

As we are learning from Francis and the whole clergy abuse mess, popes depend on their local bishops to understand a region or country. And the "monied interests" around the world don't like people thinking that part of being a Christian means not only helping those in need of immediate assistance in a manner that respects their inherent human dignity, but we need to eradicate what John Paul called the sinful structures that generate environmental devastation, wars, record numbers of homelessness here in Canada, the U.S. as well as the rest of the world.

And let us never forget that the Holy Family were refugees!

YVONNE ZAROWNY

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada

***

As a member of the Catholic laity, I am horrified by the suggestion that the disgraced archbishop may be returned to the laity as some form of penalty. I, for one, don't want him.

The ordained (or at least some of them) created this mess and so many others. Are we being consulted about this? Silly question!

In Australia, the most frequently used expression about our bishops is "they just don't get it." Seems like this may be a problem bigger than Australia.

MICHAEL GILL

Kirribilli, New South Wales, Australia

Advertisement

***

This has been quite a topic in our home.

We are dumbfounded that church leaders continue to see the lay state as "punishment" for wayward clergy.

The lay state is a good and holy one when lived according to the tenets of the Gospel and church doctrine.

How about if the church leadership excommunicate him and others who have so woefully fallen short of not only their commitment to live their holy orders, but have not followed the Gospel in so many ways? If his actions and crimes are not cause, then I have no idea what would be.

It is time someone redirect this conversation to a consideration of excommunication — and speak out that the Second Vatican Council documents make very clear "the lay state" is not lesser — and should not be viewed as some kind of demotion.

DONNA G. FRITHSEN

Marlton, New Jersey

***

On the heels of the long overdue end to secrecy and the strength in numbers of the #MeToo movement, questioning alleged victims seems insensitive. Conditions stack easily against the accused as prevalence of abuse adds to credibility. Empathy with victims and media feeding appetites for shock lead to automatic vilification without evidence. There can never be definitive proof. Abuse deeply damages lives, but accusations also destroy them.

Suppose that former cardinal Theodore McCarrick is innocent of the allegations against him. No reports consider the presumption of innocence. Rather, floodgates have opened with widespread prejudice and eager condemnation. Every perceived injustice committed by the church or its workers is given outlet for long held outrage.

McCarrick says he is not guilty. He has no recollection of alleged improprieties with a youth of nearly 50 years ago. Although the one handful of accusations over his 60 years of priesthood may have been known about that does not mean they were believed — even when money was paid out to stop the noise.

As the flurry against McCarrick surfaced, the church deemed allegations credible within a wide scope of criterion to oblige investigation through canonical process. Until such investigations are complete, it is unjust to assume he is guilty. He has stated that he is sorry for the sufferings of all, but his sorrow does not indicate he is responsible for this pain. Many of his close colleagues and friends, of which I include myself, believe in his innocence and continue to support him.

Clergy, as representatives of God are, of course, held to a higher standard. Atrocious acts of abuse by priests are the height of hypocrisy. Pointing out hypocrisy is a gratifying avenue for anger, a satisfying expression of being appalled. Condemnation of hypocrisy feels and appears like moral high ground. We are daunted when reminded that priests are just imperfect mortals.

We must acknowledge the many — most are — genuine and devoted priests suffering from the unmitigated disgrace brought about by some. Do we now condemn the whole of any group where abuse has or may have or might occur?

MARIA MIJARES

Plainfield, New Jersey

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses to letters@ncronline.org. The editor will collect them, curate them and publish a sampling in Letters to the Editor online or in our print edition.

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- 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.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.
- 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 submission will receive careful consideration.
- Published letters may be edited for length and style.

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.