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by NCR Staff

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The Pillar's controversial reporting on Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill gained national attention. Yet a review of past operations, the connections of its editors, undisclosed conflicts of interest and improper use of anonymous sources reveals a history of questionable journalistic ethics. Find letters to the editor from NCR readers below that have been edited for length and clarity.

I know zilch about Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill, and had not even heard of The Pillar until reading the story. (I'm Australian.)

However, in denouncing The Pillar as "homophobic" for investigating and exposing the monsignor's seeming chronic sexual misdoings (mostly electronic), Steven P. Millies is assuming that had the misdoings been heterosexual, The Pillar would not have bothered with them.

Is there the faintest reason for assuming this?

COLIN H. JORY

Canberra, Australia



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My reaction to the Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill story is similar to that of Steven P. Millies.

But if this is the road we are going down, then let's examine the sexual peccadillos of heterosexual cardinals, bishops and priests, starting with the Vatican. Who goes first?

MARK DAY

Vista, California

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The accusation claims illicit behavior which implies illegal. Consensual relations of adults are not illegal anywhere in the U.S.

KATHLEEN WANG

Long Beach, California

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Thank you to Steven P. Millies for his fine article on the so-called investigation by The Pillar. His clarity and integrity befit the usual standards of excellence on NCR.

In comparison, I found the disingenuous nature of the actual Pillar article pale and tawdry. This was encapsulated for me by a reference to Richard Sipe's work. As everyone knows, he was consulted by and informed the superb journalistic Spotlight team of The Boston Globe. Was this highlighted by The Pillar? Of course not. How ironic!

The spirit of division is alive and ugly and flourishing because traditionalists, clerical and laity, are afraid to face what their deepest instincts tell them about the dysfunction within the Catholic Church.

VIVIENNE DRAY

Kent, England

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I don't believe the men at The Pillar are driven by concern for the integrity of the clergy in publishing their claims about Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill's personal life any more than I believe the bishops are driven by concern for the integrity of the sacraments in pursuing their project on "Eucharistic coherence." In both cases, there's a simpler and less uplifting explanation for what's going on.

What the Burrill case shows most clearly is that the bishops' misguided anti-LGBTQ campaign leads to destructive conflicts, and that the church is in need of structural reform of a sort that our all-male celibate clergy is incapable of contemplating.

I share many of the sentiments expressed by John Gehring in his essay "Confessions of an exhausted Catholic." I wish I shared his confidence that "the best

of Catholicism" retains the power to enrich our politics and culture.

HENRY KELLEY

Arlington, Virginia

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I read with dismay Steven P. Millies recent defense of Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill. Does the author understand what the app Burrill is alleged to have used, Grindr, is for? If not, and for the benefit of others unfamiliar with the app, GQ published an article in 2018 entitled, "How to Bang Anonymously, Safely," which sheds light.

Assuming Burrill made use of the app in the same way every other user makes use of the app, then of course his actions have "harmed someone else." Anonymous sex is harmful by its very nature and damages one's mind, body and spirit.

The way The Pillar gathered its information is troubling. But the homosexual aspect is not the core issue. Nor is even the fact that Burrill may have violated his vow of celibacy. No one has the right to objectify another for his or her selfish sexual purposes. When the author completely ignores the inherent damage caused by sexual encounters which do not treat the other with love, respect and dignity, it's time he goes back to the catechism to reflect upon the gift God has given us in our sexuality, the great harm inevitably caused to another when that gift is abused, sometimes by manipulative priests who exploit the vulnerable, who are less upfront about their intentions than Burrill was in using Grindr.

I am praying for Burrill's healing and for the healing of anyone harmed in the sexual interactions he may have had while a priest.

KERRY MacNAMARA

Park City, Utah

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Please don't criticize The Pillar on a technicality for its investigative reporting which outed Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill. The monsignor has not denied the substance of what he is accused of. The church's clergy and hierarchy is full of sexual rot. It needs to end. Now.

JAY RYAN

Overland Park, Kansas

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The column "Pillar: Shoot for the stars and land in the gutter" by Michael Sean Winters personifies inaccurate thinking and biased journalism. He starts with consigning them to the gutter in the headline and then posts a large photo of soaring, classical columns to fortify his own position as soaring and classical. How inaccurate!

Winters' accusations against the reporting are paper thin and easily dismissed. He accuses The Pillar authors with "a lack of ethics" and " vulgar, unethical tawdriness." Winters is a victim of his own arrogance.

CHRIS GRIFFIN

Charlotte, North Carolina

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