News
Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

January 28, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In a recent commentary for NCR, Barbara Thorp, the former director of child protection for the Boston Archdiocese, says that despite decades of work by clergy sex abuse survivors and their families, along with journalists and other organizations, the full story is yet to be told. Former NCR editor Tom Roberts agrees, writing that behind the nearly 40-year public history of the clergy sexual abuse scandal is the unaccountable hierarchical culture.

Thank you so much for Barbara Thorp's honest and compelling commentary on the anniversary of Spotlight's investigation. Her reference to the desperation of Jesus' followers in reaching Jesus (so much so that the roof was removed!) in the synoptic gospels could not be more timely and appropriate. When will we learn?

DARIA FITZGERALD

Milford, Connecticut



***

I disagree with Barbara Thorp's main thesis. For the last decade, an aggressive ideological war has been waged against the moral/ethical/legal principle of the presumption of innocence of the accused in allegations of sexual offenses. Presenting the names of the accused as if they were guilty feeds into that conflict on the wrong side. As we all well know, every single person in a database of the accused would be popularly assumed to be guilty until proven innocent, which is what we already see happening with existing diocesan databases of the accused. Many listed would be dead, and without any opportunity to defend themselves, which, again, is what we see now. How is that acceptable?

The ethical principle of "innocent until proven guilty" is part of our Catholic heritage, traced back to Cardinal Johannes Monachus and picked up later by Jesuit Fr. Friedrich Spee. It is a just principle, and no justice at all can be gained by trying to render it socially and culturally irrelevant. So if we're going to have a national database, let it be of the guilty, and of them alone.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

***

I read with interest your in-depth inspection of the long history of sexual abuse by clergy in the Catholic Church.

With all that time, all those perpetrators, all that data, I would expect some answers as to the root cause. Other religions have problems but they pale in problems in the Catholic Church. Is it seminaries, celibacy, absence of married priests and women in the priesthood? Is it geography, demographics, education, family background? After all, there is an enrollment process but that is not filtering the problem.

DAVID BABICH

Wichita, Kansas

***

It was frustrating to read "The sex abuse scandal is not over. The hierarchal culture still needs transformation" because the author "doesn't get it." The clergy are not "nice" men and shouldn't be treated with kid gloves. Take them off and call them what they are "clerical criminals." It's unknown how many remain free in our society because they have not been caught.

The primary error of the article is to juxtapose the secular world with its laws and mores from the clerical with its. This is not reality. A cleric is not born into the clerical world. He lives in it from his day of birth until his death so why does the author take him out of it?

The author does hit the nail on the head with Barbara Thorp, a social worker. As a retired social worker, I can relate to her position — the clergy only know what they know. I lived in Massachusetts and for a time worked as a mental health professional in a prison where I saw criminals very rarely take responsibility for their crimes. Sound familiar? They lived in secular society and paid the price after they were caught and brought to trial — none pleaded guilty. Sound familiar? They pointed the finger blaming others. Sound familiar? Clerical culture criminals are no different than

their secular culture counterparts.

Where will change in the church take place? Exactly where Pope Francis is making it. Leveling the playing field. Transferring power from the clergy to the people from which it was taken — forcefully at times — from the people. In following Vatican II, Francis is trying to bring back the church to its roots with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If he fails — and I believe the odds are stacked against him — the church will fail.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

Advertisement

***

I applaud Tom Roberts for his column, and echo his call for metanoia rather than window dressing.

In 2002, when the "Spotlight" phase of the scandal erupted, I nurtured the (quite faint) hope that the two-thirds of the bishops (identified by the Dallas Morning News as guilty of shuffling abusive priests) would all offer their resignations. I had hoped that they might realize that they had been unworthy shepherds and needed to publicly ask forgiveness.

Obviously, no such thing happened. But imagine in what a different place the US church would be now if it had.

CHRIS BUTLER

Rancho Mirage, California

***

It seems to me that two big steps are needed — and stunningly obvious:

1. Instead of bishops (et al) prostrating themselves on church floor apologizing for the sins of sexually abusive priests, start notifying civil authorities about clergy suspected of the felony of abusing others.

2. Start demanding that bishops (et al) answer the questions "Were you unaware that sexually abusing minors is a felony? Why did you fail to notify civil authorities of priests suspected of this felony, when you notify civil authorities about priests suspected of embezzlement?"

HOWARD KAY

Quincy, Massachusetts

Join the Conversation

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.

Letters containing misinformation or misleading content without correct sourcing will not be published.

Letters to the editor are published online each Friday.

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