Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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When accused Bishop Howard Hubbard requested the Vatican remove his status as a priest, among those caught by surprise were his alleged abuse victims and their civil attorneys, along with canon lawyers. Read letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to our reporting below. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The title of this article is false. This article isn't about "victim's lawyers" but about the lawyers of alleged victims. Both the repeated use of "alleged" and references to "allegations" in the body of the article are implicitly, and I'd imagine purposely, undermined by the inaccurate title.

Ultimately, the blurring of the distinction between alleged and proven victims is a reminder that irrationalism is not only rising on the right, but is sharply increasing in the Anglosphere more generally.



The issue here is epistemology. How do we evaluate truth claims? One side suggests that we seek out and asses any available evidence, because proof is needed in order to establish facts. The other side tells us that a claim establishes itself as fact simply by virtue of being made, e.g. "X says they were abused by Bishop Hubbard, therefore X was abused by Bishop Hubbard."

To the detriment of all who value reason, it is the reactionary and bankrupt epistemology of the latter side that is fast achieving cultural dominance. The erroneous title of this article is a case in point.

JEFFREY JONES
Hamburg, New York

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I have known Bishop Howard Hubbard for over 40 years and have always considered him to be a very humble and holy person who was known in the Albany diocese for his advocacy for the poor and social justice issues and for interfaith relations particularly with the Jewish community.

Many people in our diocese continue to admire his ministry and are personally supporting him at this difficult time. He has denied all of the charges of personal

abuse. I and many others believe him. He was investigated 20 years ago by the well-known prosecutor Mary Jo White when there were previous charges against him and she found nothing. Many people like me feel he is a victim of "legal" abuse after lawyers representing victims have aggressively sought to find clients who would accuse the bishop himself of abuse, perhaps to elevate the value of a financial settlement.

Regarding the way he handled abuse cases of other priests, Hubbard himself has acknowledged that mistakes were made. What he did was publicly admit what most other bishops did too which was to rely on counselors and therapy for priests accused rather than report to the police which was not the policy of the church in the 1970s-1990s. He was not acting as a free agent but following practices used by the church at that time.

When he was personally accused of abuse, he removed himself from ministry which was the policy he adopted as bishop for all priests accused and he has applied it to himself. He had hoped his own case would be resolved and he would be exonerated by now. He is 84 years old and his case could be wrapped up in the courts for many more years. He also does not want a settlement that would not allow him to be exonerated.

The church should investigate the personal charges against him and exonerate him promptly if those charges are without merit as the bishop says and many of us believe to be the case.

MICHAEL BURGESS
Delmar, New York

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Regarding the article on Bishop Howard Hubbard, I want to speak up for Howard the man. I was an active Catholic priest for 18 years. I am not writing about his leadership or the Catholic Church's handling of sex abuse, but of Howard Hubbard, the good and decent man I have known for more than 60 years.

The allegation of his deviant behavior is completely out of character for that man. I was Howard's assistant in the chapel of Camp Tekawitha while we were both in the seminary and then in Rome for two years before he was ordained as a priest and before I returned after my ordination.

In the 18 years I served as a priest, before and after I resigned in order to marry, I worked with Howard on issues of social and criminal justice. Throughout, he was a very spiritual and dedicated priest and bishop of integrity. I don't think I ever heard him swear, drink too much or spend time badmouthing others. The idea of him carousing in rectories strikes me as absurd. Whatever his leadership qualities, Howard is a straight arrow.

JIM MURPHY
Scotia, New York

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Reading the article might cause reflection on what may be another self-serving cleric looking out for his best interests rather than a church-wide conspiracy. How many denied their guilt until their dying breath bringing the church down with them?

Depending on his character, he can go in one of two extremes if he is truthful. If not, his options broaden as we have so often seen with others.

First, is to humbly submit to the processes inside and outside the church. This means fully cooperating meaning facilitating the process by providing all that is required in a timely fashion. This is the manner the Gospel requires yet, we know the church rejects. The article states the church refused to turn over evidence claiming

"religious freedom." This is the lie the church has been building up for decades to hide behind when it breaks secular laws thereby making it immune to any prosecution. It puts the church above the law allowing it to commit a broad range of crimes without fear of punishment.

Because Hubbard controls his own destiny, he had the ability to cooperate apart from the official church's legal actions. He can state the existence of documents, where they are kept, and the nature of their content. He can reveal what he did and what he ordered to be done and by whom. The article doesn't state this being done. Hence, he's uncooperative in New York State's investigation.

His second option is to manage his career by making late life decisions allowing him to go in the direction he chooses. It should be expected he has two legal teams, secular and canonical. Weighing their counsel, he has chosen this second option. The New York State courts will play out like so many others with the Catholic Church stonewalling and Hubbard hiding behind their well scripted defense. This will cost millions of dollars and cause unnecessary psychological trauma — and retraumatization — of his survivor/victims, their families, and loved ones. Will their stories and court proceedings be a part of Hubbard's laicization petition?

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT
Tyler, Texas