Opinion
NCR Voices



The spires of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in the Denver Archdiocese (Wikimedia Commons/Billy Hathorn)



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Regrettably, it's time for another installment of our long-running feature, Catholics Behaving Badly.

First up is the Denver Archdiocese, which issued an unsigned statement regarding the expulsion of various members of Sodalitium Christianae Vitae after a Vatican investigation found what it termed "sadistic" abuses of power at the organization.

"The Archdiocese of Denver is shocked and saddened by the news of expulsions of members from the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, based on decades-old allegations in South America," the statement began. "While the Archdiocese is actively working to understand the full extent of the Vatican's investigation, we are unable to comment on specifics. This news is inconsistent with our longstanding experience of the men who have served within the Archdiocese of Denver."

So, the archdiocese admits it doesn't understand the "full extent of the Vatican's investigation" but feels comfortable casting aspersions on it? Saying it is "inconsistent" with their experiences with those expelled and that those expelled have "served faithfully" and are "beloved" in Denver? Really?

Have they learned nothing from the years and years of revelations about abuse within the church?

It is often the most charming people who commit the gravest sins. A person can be a monster in one area of their life while being exemplary in another. Until the archdiocesan officials finish their work "understanding the investigation," maybe they should keep quiet.

After all, the principal investigator of the sodality was Archbishop Charles Scicluna, whose reputation for dispassionate investigations of abuse is the gold standard within the universal church. If Scicluna's reputation isn't enough to give the archdiocese pause, they can read my colleague Brian Fraga's report on how one of the accused is responding to his expulsion. It isn't pretty.

Francis X. Maier, who worked for the archdiocese in Denver when they gave a home to an outgrowth of the sodality, the Catholic News Agency, took to the pages of First

Things to defend first the founder of the sodality and now the expelled members. He explains the source of his incredulity, writing of one of the expelled members:

> I know Fr. Cardó. I've seen the results of the work he shares with his SCV brothers. He's a good priest and a man of integrity committed to the people he pastors — and they know it, which is why the parish thrives, why it's a place of beauty and life, and why it's such a magnet for young families.

If this all sounds familiar, it is because prominent Catholics back in the late 1990s and early years of this century employed the same basic argument to defend Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, the founder of the Legionaries of Christ.

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, who founded First Things; former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican Mary Ann Glendon; and George Weigel, biographer of St. Pope John Paul II, all refused to believe the allegations against Maciel, and denounced investigations into allegations against him, citing the growth and holiness of the religious society he founded. Weigel eventually became an advocate for reform of the Legionaries, though he has neglected to admit that his hero, John Paul II, failed to confront the problems with Maciel or clergy sex abuse more generally.

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I reached out to Glendon, who is the Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, because I could not find any evidence of her retracting her support for Maciel. She replied by email: "On the basis of what I now know about Fr. Maciel, I regret my rush to support him in the 1990s."

How many years before the Denver Archdiocese finds itself having to say something similar?

The second instance of Catholics behaving badly in recent weeks was Raymond Arroyo's interview with Bishop Athanasius Schneider on EWTN Sept. 26. Alarm bells should go off whenever Arroyo turns to the auxiliary bishop of Astana in Kazakhstan to discuss issues. Couldn't Arroyo find anyone closer?

During the interview, Arroyo asked Schneider about Pope Francis' comments at an interreligious meeting in Indonesia, specifically, the pope's words, "Every religion is a way to arrive at God. There are different languages to arrive at God, but God is for all. There is only one God and each of us has a language to arrive at God. Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, they are different paths."

Schneider said the words were "clearly against the divine revelation." He said the pope's comments "contradict the entire Gospel" as well as the First Commandment.

Arroyo said, "That's a difficult thing to process ... that the pope is saying something that runs counter to the First Commandment of God. How do you reconcile that?"

Schneider recalled Peter's denial of Christ.

Neither man mentioned that St. Pope John Paul II said something very similar about interreligious dialogue in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*:

> Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the "seeds of the Word," a "ray of that truth which enlightens all men''; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. ...
>
> There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings.

I don't recall conservative Catholics attacking Pope John Paul II when he published that encyclical in 1990. Is there a significant difference between the magisterial teaching of the Polish pope and the Argentine?

We all know Catholics of all ideological stripes behave badly. There are confessionals in the back of the church for a reason. But there is something especially insidious about Catholics who choose to remain willfully ignorant of the ways abuse plays out in the life of the church, and about Catholics who denigrate the Holy Father for

things he says that are essentially similar to things said by their conservative heroes.

Both kinds of behavior eat at the unity of the church.