

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

January 31, 2014 at 3:31pm

Doyle rebuts Cardinal George regarding Chicago abuse files

by Robert McClory

NCR Today

In a blistering rebuttal of Chicago Cardinal Francis George's response to the release of the files on priest abusers, Fr. Tom Doyle analyzes in painful detail what the cardinal wrote in his Jan. 12 column in the *Chicago New World*. Doyle finds the cardinal "defensive, misleading and insulting in addition to the fact that it does not reflect the reality of the key issues." He takes particular aim at the cardinal's discussion of the case of Dan McCormack and his denial that he acted contrary to the findings of his own review board.

In the conclusion of his lengthy analysis, Doyle said, "It goes without saying that the Cardinal and the archdiocese would have been much better served had he said nothing. But he didn't remain silent. The McCormack fiasco was not the result of confusing or bungled procedures, incomplete information. It was the result of the Cardinal's arrogance, his over-riding concern for his and the Church's image and worst of all, his disdain for the victims. The attitude that underlies the Cardinal's statement is not unique to him. This attitude, painfully evident wherever clergy sexual abuse has been reported throughout the Church, shows that the bishops in general have a long, long way to go before their actions began to match up with their promises."

Doyle's analysis, published in National Survivor Advocates Coalition News on Thursday, follows:

Guest Opinion

CLERGY SEX ABUSE TRANSPARENCY ACCORDING TO CARDINAL GEORGE

Thomas Doyle

January 20, 2014

The leadership of the Archdiocese of Chicago has a mediocre to poor track record in responding to reports of clergy sexual abuse and their honesty with the public. Cardinal George's recent statement to the archdiocese (January 12, 2014 in [The Catholic New World](#)) does nothing to change this pattern. This statement was issued to prepare the archdiocese for the release of the files of thirty priests confirmed as sexual abusers. His statement is defensive, misleading and insulting in addition to the fact that it does not reflect the reality of the key issues. A significant part of the statement is devoted to the defense of his mishandling of the Dan McCormack case. The McCormack files are *not* among those released!

In 1982 the parents of a minor boy reported that former Fr. Bob Mayer had sexually abused their teenaged son. This was under Cardinal Cody's watch. They reported the abuse to the archdiocese and in return were intimidated and even threatened with excommunication by the chancellor at the time, Fr. J. Richard Keating who later became the bishop of Arlington VA. In 1988 they finally settled for a measly \$10,000.00 that didn't even cover their legal costs. The boy's mother was not about to succumb to the scare tactics nor was she buying any of the dishonest mumbo-jumbo served up as excuses for their deliberate neglect. She went on to found the Linkup which quickly became one of the two most influential victim support organizations in the world.

Knowing about Mayer's track record Cardinal Bernardin who had by then succeeded Cardinal Cody, gave him two more assignments as a parish associate and in 1990 made him pastor of a parish in Berwyn IL. During this period the archdiocese received other allegations and ordered Mayer not to be alone with anyone under 21. The infinite wisdom of the archdiocese in imposing this restriction was apparently not infinite enough.

In 1991 Mayer was charged with sexual abuse of a minor girl. When confronted by the angry parishioners, the auxiliary bishop dispatched to deal with the incident lied to them about Mayer's background. In 1992 Mayer was sentenced to three years in prison. He has since been laicized.

Advertisement

Cardinal Bernardin died in 1996 and Cardinal George replaced him in April 1997. He was ordained bishop in 1990 and served first as bishop of Yakima WA and then as archbishop of Portland OR. Both Portland and Yakima had their share of sexual abuse problems during George's time. Equally important, he was a member of the U.S. bishops Conference during the years they started to at least talk about clerical sexual abuse. During those years George and his fellow bishops received numerous documents from the conference headquarters that provided detailed information about clergy sexual abuse and the serious risks it posed the Church. He was also present, at least presumably, when a variety of outside experts addressed the assembled bishops on the very serious nature of sexual abuse of children. These included Fr. Canice Connors, at the time President of St. Luke Institute; Dr. Fred Berlin, Johns Hopkins University, on diagnostic concepts, treatment and ethical considerations; Dr. Frank Valcour, psychiatrist at St. Luke Institute on expectations of treatment; Bishop Harry Flynn on care of victims; Jesuit psychiatrist James Gill on priests, sex and power and Fr. Steve Rossetti on the parish as victim. During this period Pope John Paul II addressed his first public communication of clergy sex abuse to the U.S. bishops and that same year, 1993, the bishops established their first committee to deal with the problem. The claim voiced by the Cardinal and his auxiliary, Francis Kane, that "*had they known then what they know now they would have handled the allegations differently,*" has become a mantra for bishops when they are confronted with their disastrous actions. It's also so worn out that one would think the conference

spin-doctors would come up with a fresh excuse.

If Cardinal George read any of the numerous documents sent by the conference and if he was awake for even part of the lectures given at their annual meetings he would certainly have known the serious nature of clergy sexual abuse. So what is it they did not know "*then'* that they know now? It's fairly obvious.

They did not know that their duplicitous defenses and paper-thin excuses would gain them no traction. They did not know that the deference and unquestioned credibility they had taken for granted had eroded. They didn't know that the victims and their attorneys would not be intimidated or put off by the endless legal delaying tactics. In short, they didn't know they'd be caught! That's what they didn't know then that they surely know now.

The Cardinal has apparently not learned that the excuses from the bishops' playbook have gone moldy. He invokes clericalism but applies it to the offending priests, claiming that it causes them to try to avoid accountability for their actions. That's not clericalism, its just plain *fear*. The cardinal is smart enough to know that the truly egregious examples of clericalism are not provided by the perpetrating priests but by the arrogant bishops and cardinals who insist they are above accountability and entitled to twist the truth to suit their own purposes.

The next excuse, deemed not only historically and sociologically invalid, but actually ludicrous, is borrowed from the second John Jay Report. He tries to shift the blame to the social and cultural trends of the seventies and eighties as if these trends cause sexual dysfunction or hierarchical arrogance.

The Cardinal's statement really breaks down and falls apart when he gets to his version of the Dan McCormack story. He claims the plaintiff's attorneys "*fashioned*" the story and distorted facts that would "*mitigate the charge of archdiocesan neglect.*" The lawyers didn't have to do anything to demonstrate archdiocesan, i.e., the Cardinal's negligence. His documented actions do a sufficient job of doing that without any outside help.

McCormack was first arrested in September 2005. It's true that the police questioned him but what the cardinal does not tell his readers is that his priest-personnel representative, who was called by McCormack from the police station, was also a civil attorney who told McCormack not to cooperate with the police investigators. He was released but if his ministry was restricted and if he was put under monitoring, this existed only in the Cardinal's imagination.

The archdiocesan review board eventually received the results of the internal investigation, which came up with sufficient information to allow the board to make a solid recommendation to the Cardinal that McCormack be removed from the parish for the protection of children and not be put back in pastoral ministry. The Cardinal says, "*no one involved in investigating the allegation, not even the review board that struggled with their justified concerns, told me they thought he was guilty.*" This is nonsense. It was no one's job to assess guilt or innocence especially the review board. The sole issue was suitability for pastoral ministry and probability that the allegation was true. On that the board members were clear. Guilt or innocence would be determined later.

Against the review board's urging Cardinal George retained McCormack as pastor. He also kept him on as a regional dean. On January 20, 2006, he was again arrested and it was determined that more children were harmed, primarily because of Cardinal George's arrogance and willful negligence.

On January 28, 2006 the review board sent the Cardinal a letter. Portions of it tell the real story. "*The media statements that the board was unable to reach a decision because they did not have access to the alleged victim or his mother (Sun Times, January 25, 2006), and 'after the family made the accusation in August, the Archdiocese's Office of Professional responsibility referred the allegation to the Independent Review Board (Tribune, January 24, 2006), imply that we as a board chose not to act. Clearly this is not the case*

."

Contrary to what the Cardinal would like people to believe, the review board made clear recommendations: *"These included removing Rev. McCormack from St. Agatha's and suspending him from ministry pending further criminal investigation."*

The board presented their recommendation to the Cardinal on October 17, 2005. Instead of heeding them he returned McCormack to his pastorate. When questioned about his action at the time of McCormack's second arrest the Cardinal and the archdiocesan spokesperson came up with a convoluted and obviously misleading story that tried to spread the blame to the archdiocesan process, misunderstandings about national policies and canon law and finally lack of information. In a 2013 deposition he said, concerning the review board, *"They gave me that advice, yes, I thought they had not finished the case investigation."* All pure nonsense. The review board's letter tells what really happened: *"Our recommendations were presented to you on October 17, 2005....You chose not to act on them, and now we have a situation that reflects very poorly, and unfairly, on the board."* As to George's excuse that he thought the investigation was incomplete, the review board saw it much differently: *"We resent the media implication that the Professional Review Board did not find Rev. Daniel McCormack to be a threat to the safety of children. These reports do not accurately reflect the situation, and we take offense at the lack of truth telling."*

In the second to last paragraph the Cardinal claims that the money for the multi-million dollars in settlements came from revenue *"entirely separate from regular donations or investments."* He then says that the sale of unused properties has provided funds for the settlements. *Where exactly does he think the money came from to buy the properties?*

Attorney Jeff Anderson knows the detailed history of the Chicago archdiocese's response better than anyone else. His summary of *why* things happened the way they did applies to Cardinal George and his predecessors: *We see this as a long-standing pattern of top officials of the archdiocese making conscious choices to protect their reputation and to protect the offenders," he said. "That means conscious choices were made to imperil the children over the years."*

It goes without saying that the Cardinal and the archdiocese would have been much better served had he said nothing. But he didn't remain silent. The McCormack fiasco was not the result of confusing or bungled procedures, incomplete information. It was the result of the Cardinal's arrogance, his over-riding concern for his and the Church's image and worst of all, his disdain for the victims. The attitude that underlies the Cardinal's statement is not unique to him. This attitude, painfully evident wherever clergy sexual abuse has been reported throughout the Church, shows that the bishops in general have a long, long way to go before their actions began to match up with their promises.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/23/2018 - 3:05am): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/doyle-rebuts-cardinal-george-regarding-chicago-abuse-files>

Links:

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>

[2] <https://www.ncronline.org/node/160616>