



DIocese of Baker

Office of the Bishop
641 SW Umatilla Ave. • Redmond, Oregon 97756
Phone (541) 388-4004 • Fax (541) 388-2566
www.dioceseofbaker.org

Four months into the McCarrick Crisis it is evident that the Bishops' Conference does not have the authority to set in motion the kind of prompt, in-depth investigation many of us would like to see. Only the Pope can do that, and he has declined our request for an Apostolic Visitation.

But respect for papal authority does not require us to surrender our own. The well-justified wrath and suspicion of the faithful in the United States falls on us as their shepherds. They rightly expect us to do all that we can to rid the Church in our country of the shameful residue of Theodore McCarrick's ministry.

On rare occasions by a vote of censure United States Senators officially disassociate themselves and the integrity of the Senate from a member's extraordinary violations of their standards. Should the Conference of American Bishops do the same with Archbishop McCarrick?

Pope Francis has sent him to a life of prayer and repentance and accepted his resignation from the cardinalate. Catholic universities have withdrawn his honorary degrees. Catholic high schools have removed his name from their buildings. All these measures have been implemented before a penal process has issued a canonical sentence. But as the Conference of American bishops we have taken no official action to distance ourselves from the shameful behavior of one of our own.

What are people to make of our silence? Could it lead them to think we do not take shame seriously? When I raised this point in a bishops' discussion at the Extension Conference in Chicago, I was told that first and last we must be merciful to the sinner and not heap guilt upon him for his sin. But how can we lead our brother to the mercy of God if we leave unspoken the stern demands of His justice?

Consider questions we would raise in the confessional. Is the sinner sorry for his sins and desirous of forgiveness, or does he continue to justify both his sins and himself? Does he deny or downplay the effects of his sins, or does he sincerely acknowledge the damage they did to others and to himself? Is he willing to apologize publicly for the obloquy his deeds have brought upon the Church? Should we not ask him to do so? Might our asking prompt him to do so?

The underlying question is this: does a brother bishop's claim on our mercy obviate his victims' claim on our justice? If Archbishop McCarrick were to come to the microphone in Baltimore, would he be allowed to speak? As a Conference we have not ruled out his participation. But there will be no open mike for those who suffered at his hands. Our irresolution would say to them and their families watching on TV that we recognize him while we forget about them.

So much of the McCarrick Scandal is shrouded in mystery. We need to set out on a transparent search for truth. Why not commission an independent study of sexual abuse and cover-up by *bishops* as the John Jay Report did for priests? What does the record of the past fifty years show bishops to have done or not done—where and when and at what financial cost to the people of their dioceses? Even without authority to subpoena witnesses or documents, Conference-commissioned investigators would have mountains of publicly available information to sift through, collate, and report—officially. This would not be all we might desire, but it would be far more than the little we have now or are otherwise likely soon to get. And it would be *our* determined effort as bishops to find the truth the Church in America desperately needs.

Bishop Liam Cary