



The McCarrick Scandal — A Year Later

In June of last year a story like none other burst into the headlines and shook the faith of Catholics throughout the Church. For decades as a bishop Cardinal Theodore McCarrick had been abusing and intimidating seminarians and priests under his authority. To make matters worse, the prelate's brazen behavior had been widely known in priestly and journalistic circles, and word of it had even made its way to his superiors in Rome—but to no avail. Nothing slowed his steady ascent to positions of ever-greater national and international influence.

The summer of 2018 put a stop to it at last. McCarrick resigned from the cardinalate, was banished to a Franciscan friary in the Midwest, and was expelled from the priesthood within a year of the day that his notorious ways came to light.

But justice is far from fully done, for not a word of repentance has accompanied these drastic changes in the former cardinal's institutional identity and life setting. Theodore McCarrick "has never publicly admitted his guilt in the face of the overwhelming evidence of his crimes," Father Gerald Murray noted. "He has not

asked forgiveness of his victims, nor made monetary reparations . . . for the grave harm he inflicted . . . ; his expulsion from the priesthood has not resulted in any change in his Church-provided living arrangements."

The McCarrick case, then, is resolved but not closed. The three dioceses where he served — Metuchen, Newark, and Washington, DC—have yet to make known the findings of their internal investigations into his conduct. Nor has the Vatican released a report on its review of the archives in Rome. Cumulatively, these inquiries could cast light on vitally important questions. Who sponsored and protected McCarrick through the years, both in the US and in Rome? Who financed his national and international projects? Whom did he promote and protect in return? Such questions need to be asked about the McCarrick-like behavior of bishops in other countries as well, for the past year has shown that his is not a unique instance of Apostolic betrayal. What we learn about him can have valuable application elsewhere.

In the wake of the scandal, we American bishops attempted, belatedly, to address our vulnerabilities to episcopal corruption and try to right the badly swaying ship of the Church. In a column earlier this summer I wrote of the concrete remedies we would vote on at our upcoming meeting in Baltimore that had been developed with last summer's fiasco in mind. All of them passed with overwhelming majorities. Let me briefly review them here.

First of all, we affirmed our commitment “to respond directly and appropriately to cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons, [to] sexual misconduct, and [to] the mishandling of such cases by bishops.”

To undergird this promise we voted to implement a third-party system— independent and easily accessible— for reporting allegations of sexual assault or cover-up against bishops.

And this effort to ensure transparency will be bolstered by the strategic involvement of skilled lay people throughout the process: “...when we receive or when we are authorized [by the Vatican] to investigate such cases,” we commit ourselves “to include the counsel of lay men and women whose professional backgrounds are indispensable.”

Finally, we adopted for the United States the directives Pope Francis put in place this past spring to govern the Church throughout the world. These specify that bishops will be held accountable, not only for the sexual abuse of minors, but also for the sexual exploitation of adults by the abuse of power, for not reporting incidents of such abuse, and for failing to follow civil law or canon law in such cases.

It is important to note that civil law holds bishops and priests to be mandatory reporters of the sexual abuse of minors. Whatever knowledge we have that such a crime has been committed we are obligated to report immediately to civil authorities for their investigation and possible prosecution.

In late September the bishops of Portland, Baker, Boise, Helena, and Great Falls-Billings will meet in Idaho to decide on measures to implement these new decrees in our province. It is to be hoped that they will effectively deter the dreadful deeds of bishops that put the Church through the shameful summer of 2018.