



## Navigating the Storm in the Church

**The McCarrick scandal** broke out in the United States, but it sent out shock waves far beyond our borders. How could a man rise so fast and so high in the leadership of the universal Church when he had long been known to be a sex abuser? How did he extend his influence into high-level Catholic policy-making on China, South America, and the Middle East? How did he come to play a king-making role in the selection of American bishops?

Presumably, answers to these questions are awaiting discovery in the archives of the Vatican and in the chanceries of Metuchen, Newark, and Washington, DC—the three dioceses Theodore McCarrick once headed as bishop and archbishop. Last fall the Vatican undertook an investigation into its files on the former cardinal and promised an official report on its findings. Metuchen, Newark, and Washington were combing through their records as well.

What these inquiries may have turned up, we know not; for not a single report has been issued in the year they've been under way. Nor have we been told when we might expect to see one. In a world rife with well-founded suspicion of Church leadership, such unexplained, unapologetic delay does not bode well for the restoration of trust in bishops any time soon.

In the wake of the scandal in the United States, accusations of abuse and cover-up against bishops in Chile, Honduras, Argentina, and Poland filled the headlines. However, few if any of these prelates enjoyed the international stature of Theodore McCarrick or exercised the wide-ranging influence that he did. Clearly, the trail of his ascent needs to be tracked down *now*, while it is still fresh, before the footprints fade or get washed away.

The most prominent call for a full-scale, no-holds-barred investigation came from the former papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Vigano. In August of 2018 he made detailed allegations about a high-level cover-up of McCarrick's hidden life which he claimed archival documentation in Washington and Rome would confirm. Without disclosing what those files did or did not show, the Vatican denied or dismissed the Vigano accusations. But corroboration came from other sources nonetheless. Multiple e-mails released by McCarrick's long-time priest-secretary confirmed one of Archbishop Vigano's central claims: that Pope Benedict XVI had imposed sanctions on the then-cardinal McCarrick which he blithely ignored.

Early this year Pope Francis brought together bishops from around the world to address clerical sex abuse and issued binding universal norms to deter it. We American bishops quickly adopted them at our meeting this June. By then the Pope had removed Theodore McCarrick from the priesthood.

Justice was done speedily, but not transparently. An administrative penal process in Rome convicted the former cardinal of solicitation in the confessional and of sexual abuse of minors and adults aggravated by the abuse of power. The Vatican did not see fit to divulge the reasons for its verdict, and neither the documentation nor the testimony that informed its decision have been made public. We have only the judgment, not how the officials reached it and why.

To guard against a repeat of this scandal of scandals we need first to understand in depth what brought it about. But in the past year efforts to come to grips with its devastating effects have yielded a disappointing dearth of accessible information to work with. Theodore McCarrick's rapid rise and sudden fall remain as inexplicable as they were on the day the scandal broke.

Responsibility for breaking this deadlock, Pope Francis has written, "falls, above all, on the successors of the Apostles," the bishops, ". . . and demands from them a commitment to follow closely the path of the Divine Master."

That can only be the path of Truth, and our Master Jesus is the Way. Rightly then do the Catholic faithful expect their shepherds to lead them to the truth in this tragedy. Any other destination would be unworthy of Him Who came to set us free.