

Letters
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Accountability

It is hard to believe that a bishop would actually put forward the idea that the church was ahead of the curve with regard to the sexual abuse problems plaguing it, as Robert Nunz notes in his letter, "Best Possible Light" (2/19); and Jean M. Bartunek, R.S.C.J. refers to it in her letter, "Concern for Renewal" (2/26). Both are speaking of Bishop Thomas J. Curry's letter, "Church Renewal" (2/12), replying to "Catholic Fidelity" (State of the Question, 1/15).

While Bishop Curry's rationalizing statements and anti-Catholic conspiracy theories are not all that out of character for many bishops, his comments do appear to be an early attempt at a revisionist timeline for the church's continuing sexual abuse scandal and, now, its burgeoning financial scandal. Transparent? Yes. Accountable? Not yet.

If the bishops had followed, even minimally, the requirements of the laws in place at the time these crimes against children were perpetrated, they would not have had later to take the extraordinary precautions to ensure that sexual misconduct does not recur. Let us remember that these extraordinary precautions were something the bishops did only when their backs were forced to the wall, more by public opinion than by any binding authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The remedy should not have been to cover up prosecutable crimes of child abuse, thus permitting almost all statutes of limitation to expire, for the sake of avoiding scandal. The remedy should have been to rid the body of Christ, the church, of this cancer. To the shame of all Catholics this was not done.

What is so distressing is the way church leadership conspired to hide and protect priests from legal prosecution. Such behavior has been unprecedented in recent religious history and overshadows, by sheer numbers, any similarly culpable action by any other public or private institutions. There is no doubt that the Roman Catholic Church in the United States will take decades to recover, if it ever can, from this incomprehensible debacle of collusion, conspiracy and cover-up, which was layered on top of the behavior of rogue priests.

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