

REPORTING THE “SUMMER OF SHAME”:
CLERGY SEX ABUSE AND U.S. CATHOLIC JOURNALISM IN 2018

by

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ABSTRACT

SAMUEL BARTON DAVIS. Reporting the “Summer of Shame”:
Clergy Sex Abuse and U.S. Catholic Journalism in 2018
(Under the direction of DR. KENT BRINTNALL)

This paper explores how two US Catholic newspapers—the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *National Catholic Register*—reported on the topic of sex abuse in the Church in 2018, revolving around how they presented and discussed the events surrounding Cardinal McCarrick’s abuse revelations. Taking a close look at how these organizations tell the story of sexual abuse in the church, particularly over the course of the events of 2018, reveals how Catholic news media outlets have interests in maintaining particular narratives of sexual abuse in the Church. These interests are political, personal, and theological, as they are informed and expressed from a Catholic perspective.

The narratives these papers generate are at times congruent, but other times quite contentious to the point of calling each other out by name. This contention becomes dramatically apparent after the *Register* publishes a letter by Archbishop Carlo Viganò, former papal nuncio to the United States, calling for the resignation of Pope Francis. For the *Reporter*, there is a continual focus on clericalism, Church teachings they see as problematic, and Catholic power structures as the root of the problem of sexual abuse in the Church. They tend to write to and from a survivor-victim advocacy perspective. The *Register* regularly cites lax teachings on sexuality, a gay subculture in the priesthood, and cultural relativism as causes of rampant sexual abuse in and out of the Church. Their perspective tends more towards questions of theology and doctrine.

DEDICATION

For my partner and parents, who know how much completing this thesis means to me.
And for Granddaddy, who always knew I could do it.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1985, news organizations have published thousands of articles telling the story of sex abuse in the Catholic Church, drawing widely diverse narratives about how and why it has occurred, who or what is responsible, and how it should be addressed. Catholic news reporting has been a central component in the public understanding of clergy sex abuse. Interestingly, and perhaps appropriately, the story began in US national Catholic news media. The title of an editorial on the front page of the *National Catholic Reporter* on June 7, 1985 reads, “Priest child abuse cases victimizing families; bishops lack policy response.”¹ This story, which covers the criminal trial of Fr. Gilbert Gauthé, is widely believed to be the first news report of a case of sex abuse by a priest in a national circulation.² The next thirty-five years would be filled with stories about sex abuse in the Church and its cover-up by bishops.

In the history of news coverage on sex abuse in the Catholic Church since 1985, there are two moments that stand out: 2002 and 2018.

2002 is recognized as when *The Boston Globe* investigative team “Spotlight” revealed widespread concealment of sex abuse by priests in the Boston diocese, ultimately leading to the resignation of Cardinal Bernard Law, then Archbishop of Boston. The *Globe* published their first article on January 6, 2002 showing Cardinal Bernard Law’s awareness and complicity in this systematic cover-up, followed by a series of related publications through to December of that year when Cardinal Law resigned as Archbishop. What made this story so big was not just the sheer number of accused priests and abused victims in the Boston archdiocese, but the evidence

¹ Tomas C. Fox, “Pages and Protection: A First Step in Bringing Clergy Sex Abuse Secrets to Light,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 7, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/pages-and-protection-first-step-bringing-clergy-sex-abuse-secrets-light>.

² Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, *Perversion of Power* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), 194.

that Church leadership secretly settled with accusers, promising them no more harm would be done while quietly transferring priests to new parishes without sharing any knowledge of past allegations. This was all done to avoid scandal for the Church, but only provided more opportunities for abuse to occur in unsuspecting communities—a pattern that was already evident in the 1985 Gauthé case.

2018, on the other hand, contained a series of significant events, several of which would contribute to what became known as the “Summer of Shame.”³ The root of this shame, and the primary subject of this paper, is the news that came in June and July of that year that Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, former Archbishop of Washington D.C., was found credibly accused of sexually abusing several seminarians and at least one minor. Like the events of 2002, this story was significant not just because McCarrick was one of the most influential US Catholics, but because it brought into question what the Vatican, including the last three popes, knew about Cardinal McCarrick, and what role Catholic hierarchy played in allowing him to become and remain so powerful. Additionally, the cultural and political climate of 2018 lent this series of events a heightened relevancy—#MeToo spurred movements like #ChurchToo and #SilenceIsNotSpiritual, and Catholic news media certainly played a part in what the *Washington Post* called “the year of dog whistle politics.”⁴

The former has received significant attention over the last twenty years. The Spotlight team published a book documenting their story of investigation of the Boston Archdiocese, later

³ Christopher White, “For the US Church, 2018 Was a Story of Both Shame and Sparkle,” *Crux* (blog), December 27, 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2018/12/for-the-us-church-2018-was-a-story-of-both-shame-and-sparkle/>.

⁴ Eugene Scott, “2018: The Year of Dog Whistle Politics,” *Washington Post*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/11/14/year-dog-whistle-politics/>.

adapted into the film *Spotlight* which won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2015. Several books and countless academic articles have discussed the significance of the moment.

The latter, barely three years ago, has received little historical analysis. This paper aims to do that.

This paper explores how two US Catholic newspapers—the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *National Catholic Register* - reported on the topic of sex abuse in the Church in 2018, revolving around how they presented and discussed the events surrounding Cardinal McCarrick's abuse revelations. Taking a close look at how these organizations tell the story of sexual abuse in the Church, particularly over the course of the events of 2018, reveals how Catholic news media outlets have interests in maintaining particular narratives of sexual abuse in the Church. These interests are political, personal, and theological, as they are informed and expressed from a Catholic perspective. The narratives these papers generate are at times congruent, but other times quite contentious to the point of calling each other out by name. As this paper will show, this contentiousness becomes dramatically apparent after the *Register* publishes a letter by Archbishop Carlo Viganò, former papal nuncio to the United States, requesting the resignation of Pope Francis. The letter accuses the pope of being fully aware of Theodore McCarrick's behavior but doing nothing about it, even lifting sanctions on him laid by Benedict XVI. This tension remains evident in years following as both the *Register* and *Reporter* continue to comment on the continuous flow of information on McCarrick and others, including a report detailing what the Vatican knew about McCarrick's behavior.

Since 2017 I have been studying how Catholic news media has portrayed sexual abuse in the Church over the last three decades. After studying these two papers specifically, I found 2018 to be representative of how they have approached the topic more broadly. For the *Reporter*, there is

a continual focus on clericalism, Church teachings they see as problematic, and Catholic power structures as the root of the problem of sexual abuse in the Church. They tend to write to and from a survivor-victim advocacy perspective. The *Register* regularly cites lax teachings on sexuality, a gay subculture in the priesthood, and cultural relativism as causes of rampant sexual abuse in and out of the Church. Their perspective tends more towards questions of theology and doctrine.⁵

⁵ This stance is strongly supported by Pope Benedict XVI, who in April 2019 penned an essay (also published by the *Register*) outlining what he saw as the cause of the sex abuse crisis in the Church. In it he cites his experience witnessing the rise of the sexual revolution in Europe in 1968, which he believes eroded “previously normative standards regarding sexuality.” Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “Pope Benedict Essay: The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse,” *National Catholic Register*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-benedict-essay-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse>.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the work of American religious scholars, such as Dr. Sean McCloud's *Making the American Religious Fringe* (2004) and R. Marie Griffith's *Moral Combat* (2017), this paper attempts to contribute to larger questions of media portrayals of religious and sexual history in the US. More specifically, it explores how US Catholic news media discusses the issue of sex abuse in the Catholic Church through their reporting of the events of 2018. In this way, this paper is meant primarily to contribute to the body of literature that exists on the topic of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. As noted above, when discussing the role of news media on the issue, most focus on the *Boston Globe* and the events of 2002. These are books or articles that detail the history of sexual abuse in the Church,⁶ discuss the psychological and/or spiritual implications of sex abuse by priests,⁷ or offer oral histories and accounts of abuse victims and survivors.⁸ Books prior to 2002 primarily covered the history of abuse in the Church,⁹ power dynamics of clergy abuse,¹⁰ and accounts of early whistleblowers.¹¹ In hopes of steering attention away from 2002 and Boston, I have looked to books and articles taking up questions

⁶ David France, *Our Fathers: The Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004); Leon J Podles, *Sacrilege: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Baltimore, Md.: Crossland Press, 2008); Michael D'Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2013); Thomas P. Doyle, A. W. Richard Sipe, and Patrick J. Wall, *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church's 2000-Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse* (Los Angeles: Volt Press, 2006).

⁷ Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power*; Jason M. Fogler et al., "The Impact of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse: The Role of Gender, Development, and Posttraumatic Stress," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, no. 3-4 (October 12, 2008): 301-28; Kenneth I. Pargament, Nicole A. Murray-Swank, and Annette Mahoney, "Problem and Solution: The Spiritual Dimension of Clergy Sexual Abuse and Its Impact on Survivors," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, no. 3-4: Betrayal and Recovery: Understanding the Trauma of Clergy Sexual Abuse (October 12, 2008): 397-420.

⁸ Paul J. Isely et al., "In Their Own Voices: A Qualitative Study of Men Abused as Children by Catholic Clergy," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17, no. 3-4 (October 12, 2008): 201-15.

⁹ Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children* (Place of publication not identified: LevelFiveMedia, 2013); Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ A. W. Richard Sipe, *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995).

¹¹ Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*.

such as Catholic identity,¹² lived religious experience,¹³ and broader histories of sexual abuse in the church such as Dyan Elliott's study of clergy abuse in the Medieval church.¹⁴ I also hope to contribute to the massive body of work on religion and media,¹⁵ particularly in the US, studying the works of Diane Winston¹⁶ as well as scholars studying specifically Catholic journalism.¹⁷

¹² James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Brian J. Clites, "Towards a Post-Partisan Lexicon in the Study of American Catholicism," *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 3 (October 19, 2014): 21–23.

¹³ Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *American Catholics: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, 1. issued as an Oxford Univ. Press paperback (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Dyan Elliott, *The Corrupter of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Diane H. Winston, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jolyon P. Mitchell and Owen Gower, eds., *Religion and the News* (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

¹⁶ Winston, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*; Diane H. Winston, ed., *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2009); Mara Einstein, Katherine Madden, and Diane Winston, eds., *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018); John M. Giggie and Diane H. Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Burns, "John O'Connor and the 'New Age' of Catholic Journalism, 1960-1967," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 3 (2007): 109–26.

STRUCTURE

This paper begins with a history of both the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *National Catholic Register*, giving a sense of their positionality going into 2018. This includes my reasoning for choosing this medium as well as these particular newspapers.

Next this paper provides historical context necessary to understand the significance of the events during, before, and after 2018. The end of 2017 as well as the first six months of 2018 set the stage for much of the drama that occurs in the latter half of the year. This will include some exploration of how the *Register* and *Reporter* start to form narratives that will inform their journalism later in the year.

The third section of this paper provides a more in-depth description of how the events of 2018 unfolded in July and after, followed by a description and analysis of how both the *Register* and *Reporter* narrated and analyzed these events.

Finally, this paper will conclude with a discussion of the events directly following 2018, including the Vatican abuse summit in 2019 and the much-anticipated McCarrick report in 2020, showing how the *Reporter* and *Register* continue to shape their respective narratives of sex abuse in the Church.

HISTORY OF THE *REPORTER* AND *REGISTER*

Why these two newspapers? Both the *Reporter* and *Register* are much more than a printed newspaper. Between blogs, podcasts, etc., their reach is not limited to their print circulation. Being free online periodicals, these are relatively easily accessible resources for on-demand Catholic-related news. They publish consistently and frequently. They've both consistently won awards for their writing. They both claim to write to a primarily Catholic readership from a specifically Catholic perspective. Between the two, there are moments of clear division woven within a broader concordance on the issue of sex abuse in the church informed by their shared Catholic identity.

My analysis of the coverage concludes that the *Reporter* provides a comprehensive chronology of the sex abuse scandal, while the *Register* is far less consistent in its reporting on the subject. In fact, the *Register* does not focus on the topic of sexual abuse in the church *until* 2018, especially when compared to the coverage provided by the *Reporter*. A 2010 study done by Pew Research Center shows similar findings:

An examination of three Catholic news outlets reveals wide differences in their approaches. The *National Catholic Reporter*, an independent weekly, devoted fully two-thirds (66.7%) of its Vatican coverage to the scandal. Two Catholic news services, on the other hand, devoted considerably less of their Vatican coverage to the story. Catholic News Service gave it 44.8%, and the Catholic News Agency¹⁸ gave it 33.3%.¹⁹

The *National Catholic Reporter* and the *National Catholic Register*, referred to hereafter as the *Reporter* and the *Register*, are two of the most circulated national Catholic newspapers in the United States. These two national newspapers fulfill very similar roles with identifiably differing

¹⁸ Catholic News Agency is owned by EWTN and provides most of the reporting for the *National Catholic Register*.

¹⁹ "The Pope Meets the Press: Media Coverage of the Clergy Abuse Scandal," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), June 11, 2010, www.pewforum.org/2010/06/11/the-pope-meets-the-press-media-coverage-of-the-clergy-abuse-scandal/.

political identities. Both newspapers are published bi-weekly in both print and online formats, including, but not limited to, breaking news, opinion pieces, editorials, interviews, as well as letters to the editor, blogs, and film and book reviews.

Over the years, both papers have received numerous awards for their work. In 2017 the Catholic Media Association (CMA), formerly the Catholic Press Association, awarded the *Register* “Paper of the Year,” and awarded Tom Fox, retired editor and publisher of the *Reporter*, the Bishop John England Award, the association’s highest honor for publishers.²⁰ In 2019, the CMA named the *Reporter* “Best National Newspaper.”²¹

As recently as 2020, the *Reporter* has analyzed and published their online activity, showing that the website had 10.7 million sessions from 5.4 million users in 237 countries and territories.²² The report showed that in 2019 more than 68,200 people received NCRonline newsletters, and the bi-weekly print newspaper had over 22,800 subscribers. The *Register* supplies no such analysis, and the last record of their readership was in 2013 showing a print circulation of almost 25,000 when the *Reporter*’s circulation was about 35,000.²³

As of June 2021, the *Reporter*’s Facebook page, @NCRonline, has over 281,000 followers, and the paper’s Twitter account has nearly 51,000 followers. The *Register*’s Facebook page, @NCRegister, has over 586,000 followers while the paper’s Twitter page has over 128,000 followers. I include these number to demonstrate that neither of these newspapers are limited in

²⁰ Dennis Coday, “Fox Wins Top Award for His Work at NCR,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/fox-wins-top-award-his-work-ncr>.

²¹ Tom Roberts, “NCR Receives Top Honors from the Catholic Press Association,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 28, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/media/ncr-connections/ncr-receives-top-honors-catholic-press-association>.

²² “About Us,” *National Catholic Reporter*, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/about-us>.

²³ John F. Fink, “Editorial: The Catholic Press and New Media (February 22, 2013),” *The Criterion*, February 22, 2013, <http://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2013/02-22/editorial.html>.

reach by their print subscriptions. I chose not to focus on the text of these sources, because upon investigation I found that most of the content produced in these spaces is derived from material provided on the newspaper websites.

I chose these two papers in part because they both have intimate histories with sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, albeit in very different ways, as discussed below.

National Catholic Register

The *National Catholic Register* was originally founded as the national edition of the *Denver Catholic Register* in 1927 by Matthew J. Smith.²⁴ Smith is quoted in the inaugural issue as saying, “If you like a Catholic paper with snap, vigor, courage, here it is. If you like one that is easy to read, here it is. If you like one that will always be loyal to the Church and has no selfish axe to grind, here it is.”²⁵ At its peak, the newspaper claimed a readership of over 700,000.²⁶ After suffering financial decline, it was purchased by the Twin Circle Publishing Co., a company founded by Patrick J. Frawley in 1965 on the principal of protecting America from internal communist threats. A well-known conservative and proud Catholic millionaire, Frawley committed the *Register* to a traditionalist editorial stance, which had previously taken a more progressive position.²⁷

²⁴ “Twin Circle Buys National Register; Both to Continue,” *The Catholic Advocate*, August 6, 1970, Catholic Research Resources Alliance Catholic News Archive, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=ca19700806-01.2.6&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

²⁵ “About Us,” NCRRegister, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.ncregister.com/info/about-us>.

²⁶ “About Us.”

²⁷ Louis Cassels, “Frawley An Opinion-Maker In Roman Catholic Church,” *Desert Sun*, September 5, 1970, UCR: California Digital Newspaper Collection, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19700905.2.74&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>.

Facing financial struggles, the *Register* was sold to the Legion of Christ in 1995 and moved to New England. Also known as the Legionaries of Christ, the Legion is a staunchly conservative order that became just as well known for its vow of secrecy and obedience to its leader as for its militaristic culture.²⁸ Marcial Maciel, charismatic founder and general director of the Legion from 1941 to 2005, was close with John Paul II, regularly receiving his praise for his success in fundraising and recruiting during a time of looming priest shortages. Some regarded him as a living saint.²⁹

Maciel was accused multiple times over at least three decades of repeated sexual abuse spanning as far back as the 1940s. Formal charges filed in 1998 were examined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Cardinal Ratzinger, but citing his advanced age, the CDF decided not to prosecute. Ratzinger reopened the case in 2004, and in 2005 after Ratzinger was named Pope Benedict XVI, Maciel stepped down as director and was instructed to lead a life of “prayer and penitence” in May 2006. When Maciel died in 2008, the *Register* published a glowing obituary, lauding Maciel’s extensive list of achievements.³⁰ The *Register* has since had to reckon with the role it played in denying the accusations launched against the Legion’s founder.³¹

Legion leadership wouldn’t acknowledge his accusations until 2009, after the Vatican ordered an investigation into the order and found that he had fathered at least one child.³² In May 2010, the Vatican denounced the structures that allowed Maciel to lead a double life and announced it

²⁸ John Dart, “2 Catholic Papers Sold: Media: Group with Reported Ties to Legion of Christ Religious Order Buys National Catholic Register and Catholic Twin Circle,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-10-07-me-54194-story.html>.

²⁹ Jason Berry, “Money Paved Way for Maciel’s Influence in the Vatican,” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 6, 2010, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/money-paved-way-maciels-influence-vatican>.

³⁰ Register Staff, “Legionary Founder Dies,” *National Catholic Register*, February 5, 2008, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/legionary-founder-dies>.

³¹ Tom McFeely, “CNS on Father Maciel,” *National Catholic Register*, February 4, 2009, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/cns-on-father-maciel>.

³² *Ibid.*

would oversee the order's reform.³³ The General Chapter of the Legionaries of Christ made a formal apology in 2014, and in 2019 the organization acknowledged 175 cases of child sexual abuse by 33 priests, 60 of whom were abused by Maciel.³⁴

Amidst the turmoil the order was going through, the *Register* was sold by the Legion in 2011 to the equally conservative³⁵ Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) in Irondale, Alabama which continues to operate the paper today. EWTN is perhaps best known for its vociferously traditionalist founder, Mother Angelica.³⁶

National Catholic Reporter

Robert G. Hoyt founded the *National Catholic Reporter* in 1964, a time when Catholic newspapers were still almost exclusively published by dioceses or religious orders.³⁷ Hoyt set out with the goal of bringing the professional standards of secular news reporting to the Catholic press; he was quoted as saying, "If the mayor of a city owned its only newspaper, its citizens will not learn what they need and deserve to know about its affairs."³⁸

³³ CNA, "Fr. Maciel Guilty, 'profound' Revision of Legion Needed, Report Apostolic Visitors," *Catholic News Agency*, May 1, 2010, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/19521/fr-maciel-guilty-profound-revision-of-legion-needed-report-apostolic-visitors>.

³⁴ Ana Langner, "Legionarios de Cristo aceptan abuso sexual de 175 menores de edad," *La Jornada*, December 21, 2019.

³⁵ Jack Jenkins, "From the Bible Belt, EWTN Shapes World Catholic News," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/media/bible-belt-ewtn-shapes-world-catholic-news>.

³⁶ Paul Vitello, "Mother Mary Angelica, Who Founded Catholic TV Network, Dies at 92," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2016, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/us/mother-mary-angelica-who-founded-catholic-tv-network-dies-at-92.html>.

³⁷ Peter Steinfeld, "Robert G. Hoyt, 81, Founder Of National Catholic Reporter," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2003, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/12/nyregion/robert-g-hoyt-81-founder-of-national-catholic-reporter.html>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The paper gained popularity in its first two years for its extensive coverage of the Second Vatican Council, the historic convocation of bishops that led to the revision of several Church positions and practices.³⁹ In 1967, the paper received considerable attention for translating and publishing secret reports of a majority opinion that the Church should revise its teachings on contraception.⁴⁰ Instead, Paul VI would double down on the Church's inhibition of contraception in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. This, along with other articles in 1967 and 1968, prompted Bishop Charles H. Helmsing of Kansas City-St. Joseph to condemn the *Reporter* as heretical, asking the editors to drop the term "Catholic" from their masthead, claiming that "by retaining it they deceive their Catholic readers and do a great disservice to ecumenism by being responsible for the false irenicism of watering down Catholic teachings."⁴¹ 66 Catholic journalists signed a statement defending the paper.

In 2013, Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City, Missouri recalled Helmsing's condemnation, believing the *Reporter's* positions had "not changed trajectory in the intervening decades" and that it was his responsibility as the bishop of the *Reporter's* local diocese to "instruct the Faithful about the problematic nature of this media source which bears the name 'Catholic.'"⁴² In his response, *Reporter* editor Thomas C. Fox stated that "*NCR* is proud to call itself a Catholic publication" citing cordial relations with Bishop Finn's successors as well as recognition from the Catholic Press Association of the US and Canada. He goes on to point out an editorial the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "About Us," *National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/about-us>.

⁴¹ Daniel Hawkenberry, "Kansas City Bishop Condemns N.C.R., Asks Change of Name," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 16, 1968, http://www.greenspun.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg.tcl?msg_id=00Cofv.

⁴² Robert W. Finn, "The Bishop's Role in Fostering the Mission of the Catholic Media," *The Catholic Key* (blog), January 25, 2013, <https://catholickey.org/2013/01/25/the-bishops-role-in-fostering-the-mission-of-the-catholic-media/>.

Reporter had published the year before calling for Bishop Finn’s resignation or removal after he was found guilty of failing to report suspected child abuse by a local priest.⁴³

As discussed briefly in the introduction, the *Reporter* has a long history of reporting on the cover-up of sex abuse in the Church. The paper is credited with the first national news story to correctly identify sex abuse by priests as a systemic problem sustained by bishops nationwide.⁴⁴ Prior to 1985, the press was unlikely to cover stories of crimes or misbehavior of priests or bishops, partially for fear of retaliation by appearing anti-Catholic.⁴⁵ Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, clinical psychologist who has worked with victims of clergy sex abuse, points out in her book *Perversion of Power* that the early coverage done by the *Reporter* as a national Catholic newspaper was pivotal in allowing and encouraging secular media to follow suit.⁴⁶

In 2015, Thomas Fox, himself a survivor of clergy sex abuse, ran a series of articles on the 30th anniversary of the *Reporter*’s first story exposing sex abuse in the church and the negligence of bishops. This series included a contribution by the late Barbara Blaine, one of the most outspoken survivor advocates of the last three decades, who credits her discovery of the 1985 *Reporter* article as the moment she decided to create SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.⁴⁷ This series also included pieces by Thomas Doyle, canon lawyer and early whistleblower of clergy abuse, and Jason Berry who covered the story of Gilbert Gauthier of Lafayette, LA, the first widely-publicized case of sexual abuse by a priest.⁴⁸

⁴³ Tomas C. Fox, “Kansas City Bishop Says NCR Undermines the Faith,” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 27, 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/kansas-city-bishop-says-ncr-undermines-faith>.

⁴⁴ Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*, 106–7.

⁴⁵ Frawley-O’Dea, *Perversion of Power*, 194.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 194-5.

⁴⁷ Barbara Blaine, “Thanks to NCR, My Crisis Became a Cause,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 6, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/thanks-ncr-my-crisis-became-cause>.

⁴⁸ France, *Our Fathers: The Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal*, 157.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SEX ABUSE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Understanding how Catholic news media has reported sexual abuse in the Church requires a basic historical understanding of what has been called the “Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis.” The phrase, heavily used in both catholic and secular media, refers to the current historical moment since the public revelation that not only are there priests sexually abusing children, but that the Church has been intentionally hiding any allegations by secretly settling with the accuser(s) while quietly transferring priests to new parishes. Catholic historian Robert Orsi has critiqued the use of the term “crisis” to describe something that he argues has long been a Catholic norm—a lived reality for survivors, abusers, and superiors alike throughout modernity. This paper recognizes and agrees with this critique, assuming the “crisis” to be simply a revealing of a much deeper institutional practice of concealing widespread sexual abuse. Thus, the term “crisis” will only be used when quoted directly from either the *Register* or the *Reporter*, who both define the term in their own way. Instead, this paper will use the word “scandal” to specifically refer to the historical moment since the *Boston Globe* first broke the story of a systematic cover-up of sex abuse in Boston in January of 2002.

Following the *Spotlight* revelations, the clear message coming from church leadership was that this was a problem only in the United States, an example of societal corruption stemming from free-sex movements in the 60’s. This argument, as will be shown later, becomes a big part of the conversation in 2018. Pope John Paul II showed he was convinced enough of this that he called all the US bishops to the Vatican for an emergency meeting. He had accelerated the careers of many figures thought guilty of covering up clerical abuse, namely Cardinals Bernard Law of Boston and Roger Mahoney of Los Angeles; and he ignored thousands of pleas from victims and victims’ advocates, many writing to him personally, requesting an audience or even just a reply

acknowledging their suffering, none of which received as much as a confirmation of the Vatican having received their communication.

It wouldn't be long before Pope John Paul II would die and Benedict XVI would replace him, proceeding to take a more rhetorically explicit response to the crisis. Starting with his first speech as pope, he frequently talked on the subject. He would be the first pope to meet with survivors of clerical sex abuse. He quickly defrocked (removed from ministry) hundreds of priests and reopened the case on Marcial Maciel, the influential leader of the Mexican order Legion of Christ, close friend of Pope John Paul II, and a notorious sexual predator.⁴⁹ His legacy, however, extends well before and after his tenure as Pope Benedict and is intimately involved with the subject matter of this paper.

Before he became Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger served as the Prefect for the Congregation of the Faith from 1981 until he was elected pope. In this position, he was personally responsible for all cases of clergy sexual abuse brought to the attention of the Vatican.⁵⁰ Both the *Register* and *Reporter* frequently laud Benedict's model for addressing the abuse crisis and express a desire for Pope Francis to continue to build on his legacy.

When Francis was named pope in 2013, his identity contrasted starkly with that of the previous two popes. The *Reporter* expressed hope that the abuse in the church would be taken more seriously. The *Register* spoke of hope that the new pope would follow the example set by Pope Benedict.

⁴⁹ Berry, "Money Paved Way for Maciel's Influence in the Vatican."

⁵⁰ Laurie Goodstein, "Pope Has Gained the Insight to Address Abuse, Aides Say," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2005, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/23/world/worldspecial2/pope-has-gained-the-insight-to-address-abuse-aides-say.html>.

In 2014, Francis formed a Papal Commission which included survivors. Cardinal O'Malley, successor to Cardinal Law as Archbishop of Boston after Law's resignation in 2002, was named to head the commission.⁵¹

⁵¹ Included are representative sources that cover this history in detail: Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power*, 1–15; *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*, Updated edition (New York: Back Bay Books, 2015); Podles, *Sacrilege*, 143–70; D'Antonio, *Mortal Sins*, 244–64; France, *Our Fathers: The Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal*, 271–321.

SETTING THE STAGE – REOPENING OLD WOUNDS

Several events leading up and going into 2018, both in and out of the church, are a large part of why the events of 2018 are so significant. This section covers several of these moments with some details on coverage from the *Reporter* and *Register*.

Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, formed by Pope Francis in 2014, led a turbulent existence by 2017. March of 2017 brought the public resignation⁵² of Marie Collins, the only remaining survivor in the group at the time, who was quite vocal in her frustrations with resistance coming from Vatican officials towards the commission's work.⁵³ Collins wrote an exclusive statement for the *Reporter* detailing her reasons for resigning.⁵⁴ The *Register's* Edward Pentin wrote a piece detailing how Collins' resignation highlighted tensions that had existed between the group and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).⁵⁵ In December, the group's term lapsed into inactivity, drawing criticism and concern for the commission's purpose and significance.⁵⁶ The *Reporter* published an editorial saying that Francis' decision to create the

⁵² Joshua J. McElwee, "Lone Survivor on Vatican Abuse Commission Resigns in Frustration," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/lone-survivor-vatican-abuse-commission-resigns-frustration>.

⁵³ She would later meet privately with Pope Francis during his visit to Ireland in August 2018.

⁵⁴ Marie Collins, "Exclusive: Survivor Explains Decision to Leave Vatican's Abuse Commission," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/exclusive-survivor-explains-decision-leave-vaticans-abuse-commission>.

⁵⁵ Edward Pentin, "Marie Collins Highlights Ongoing Tensions Over Vatican's Handling of Clergy Abuse," *National Catholic Register*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/marie-collins-highlights-ongoing-tensions-over-vatican-s-handling-of-clergy-abuse>.

⁵⁶ Joshua J. McElwee, "Abuse Commission Member Suggests Francis May Let Group Lapse Temporarily," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/abuse-commission-member-suggests-francis-may-let-group-lapse-temporarily>.

group in 2013 “finally” showed him taking clergy sex abuse seriously, expressing concern that letting the group lie dormant suggests complacency, eroding the commission’s credibility.⁵⁷

Death of Cardinal Bernard Law

The end of 2017 also brought the death of Cardinal Bernard Law, arguably the face of the clergy abuse scandal in the United States for over a decade, refocusing attention on his infamous legacy and resignation as Archbishop of Boston in 2002 following the flood of media showing his negligence in cases of clergy sex abuse.⁵⁸ *The Reporter* published a series of articles detailing the significance of Law’s passing,⁵⁹ bringing attention to the fact that Law, before his time as Archbishop of Boston, played a significant role in bringing attention to clergy abuse in 1984 when the Gilbert Gauthé story broke in Lafayette, LA. Both the *Register* and *Reporter* brought up his leadership in Catholic-Jewish relations, immigrant and refugee advocacy (the Supreme Court allowed President Trump’s travel ban for Muslim-majority countries this same month), and his history of civil rights activism during his time as an editor of a diocesan newspaper in the 1960s, highlighting the tragic end of his long career.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ NCR Editorial Staff, “Letting Abuse Commission Lapse, Vatican Sends Disappointing Message,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/letting-abuse-commission-lapse-vatican-sends-disappointing-message>.

⁵⁸ Robert D. McFadden, “Bernard Law, Powerful Cardinal Disgraced by Priest Abuse Scandal, Dies at 86,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2017, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/19/obituaries/cardinal-bernard-law-dead.html>.

⁵⁹ Rachel Zoll, “Cardinal Law, Central Figure in Church Abuse Scandal, Dies,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/cardinal-law-central-figure-church-abuse-scandal-dies>; NCR Staff, “Drawing Lessons from the Life of Cardinal Bernard Law,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 27, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/drawing-lessons-life-cardinal-bernard-law>; Thomas P. Doyle, “Cardinal Law’s Complex Role in the Contemporary History of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/cardinal-laws-complex-role-contemporary-history-clergy-sexual-abuse>; NCR Staff, “After His Fall, Law Found Normality in Rome,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/preview/after-his-fall-law-found-normality-rome>.

⁶⁰ Matthew Bunson, “Cardinal Bernard Francis Law (1931-2017),” *National Catholic Register*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/cardinal-bernard-francis-law-1931-2017-aozo7g3r>.

Australia's Royal Commission Report and George Pell

Also in December 2017, Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released its final 17-volume report after nearly 6 years of investigation. This report included recommendations the Church should follow, including a request to introduce voluntary celibacy for clergy and that confession no longer be exempt from civil reporting laws. The news brought up former Vatican financial chief Cardinal George Pell, who in 2017 was facing charges of sexual abuse, still the most senior Catholic official to face such charges.⁶¹ Michael Sean Winters at the *Reporter* points out how Pell's trial, which was announced in May 2018, marked a shift in the Church's willingness for secular authorities to take charge, suggesting the Church's understanding that it can no longer hold itself accountable through internal processes.⁶²

The *Register* followed the news of Pell closely in 2018, reporting on every update, but scarcely made editorial comments outside of basic information. Pell would be convicted in December 2018 on multiple counts of sexual abuse of minors, and this conviction would be upheld in August 2019. Ultimately his convictions would be quashed after multiple appeals in April 2020. The *Register's* Fr. Raymond J. de Souza would come to Pell's defense in 2019, calling his conviction a "monstrous miscarriage of justice, a religious persecution."⁶³

⁶¹ Rod McGuirk, "Australian Probe into Child Abuse Attacks Catholic Celibacy," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/australian-probe-child-abuse-attacks-catholic-celibacy>.

⁶² Michael Sean Winters, "Vatican Silence on Cardinal Pell's Trial Is a Turn from a Long History," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/distinctly-catholic/vatican-silence-cardinal-pells-trial-turn-long-history>.

⁶³ Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, "Calling Cardinal Pell's Prosecution What It Is: Religious Persecution," *National Catholic Register*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/calling-cardinal-pell-s-prosecution-what-it-is-religious-persecution>.

#MeToo

The #MeToo movement was in full swing by the end of 2017, dominating the conversation around the relationship between power dynamics and sexual assault throughout 2018. *Time Magazine* honored those who came forward to report sexual abuse by naming “The Silence Breakers” their 2017 Person of the Year.⁶⁴ Two Church-related movements spurred out of this, #ChurchToo and the evangelical based movement, #SilenceIsNotSpiritual.⁶⁵ Throughout 2018 both the *Register* and *Reporter* bring attention to the similarities of allegations against powerful men in politics and media with allegations against priests and bishops, including some of each paper’s first articles of 2018. These moments begin to reveal some key differences and similarities in the ways the *Register* and *Reporter* approach discussing sexual abuse.

In the *Reporter*, for example, Christine Schenk praises the #MeToo movement for “shining a brilliant light” on sexually abusive behavior of powerful men, calling them to account for their treatment of women as sexual objects. She points out how in the Catholic Church, while women are denied “full and equal participation in decision making,” there are increasing examples of “gifted women theologians and biblical scholars who are turning a female lens on ancient patriarchal texts.” Arguing that the Church barely functions “without the 32,000 female pastoral ministers” who “put up with invisibility, long hours, and bad wages” to serve the “People of God in the US,” she states that not only are women essential for change in the Church, but that “Women are the Church.” Her ultimate plea is to ask women to “stay in the church—as messed

⁶⁴ Stephanie Zacharek Edwards Eliana Dockterman, Haley Sweetland, “TIME Person of the Year 2017: The Silence Breakers,” *Time*, December 6, 2017, <https://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>.

⁶⁵ NCR Staff, “NCR Podcast: A Catholic Take on the #MeToo Movement,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncr-conversation/ncr-podcast-catholic-take-metoo-movement>.

up as it is—and be the change you wish to see.”⁶⁶ Here is where the *Reporter’s* eventual call for making women cardinals begins to show, which starkly contrasts the *Register’s* rhetoric as will be shown in a moment. But the plea for people to stay in the church, and to be active agents in its change, is something both papers clearly express.

Here at the beginning of 2018, Fr. Roger Landry, a frequent contributor for the *Register*, demonstrates several of the ways the *Register* will discuss related events throughout 2018 and beyond. In his blog post, he argues that the revelations of the #MeToo movement demonstrate a general cultural problem of sexual objectification of women, as Schenk does in the *Reporter*, but argues that little has been done to analyze the cause of this problem. He argues that while “lust and license, perverts and predators, have to some degree always existed,” our culture no longer sees these as “evils to be opposed” since the sexual revolution. While he points out several cultural aspects that allow for objectification and abuse of women, he focuses primarily on contraception, pointing out 2018 as the 50th anniversary of Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*:

A culture of contraception rejects the maternal meaning of a woman’s body in the very act by which a woman can become a mother. Once woman’s full dignity and nature are no longer embraced in the lovemaking between spouses, we should not be surprised at how quickly, Paul VI was indicating, respect for women and woman’s dignity will collapse in other sexual contexts as well.⁶⁷

Drawing a connection between dignity and nature and using that as an argument against a culture that embraces sexual diversity, is repeatedly found in the *Register* throughout 2018, as will be shown.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Christine Schenk, “Reflecting on #MeToo: An Open Letter to Our Daughters,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/simply-spirit/reflecting-metoo-open-letter-our-daughters>.

⁶⁷ Roger J. Fr. Landry, “Our Culture Is Wrong About Sex, and Chastity Is Needed Now More Than Ever,” *National Catholic Register*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/our-culture-is-wrong-about-sex-and-chastity-is-needed-now-more-than-ever>.

⁶⁸ Jennifer Roback Morse, “Pope Emeritus Benedict Is Right: The Sexual Revolution Is Part of the Problem,” *National Catholic Register*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/pope-emeritus-benedict-is->

POPE FRANCIS' VISIT TO CHILE AND ITS AFTERMATH

While there had previously been concerns voiced about the pace Francis had taken in properly addressing sex abuse in the Church, especially among the controversies around the Commission for the Protection of Minors as seen above, the critique surrounding the pope's rhetoric and judgement during his visit to Chile in January was unprecedented.⁶⁹

There was already some expectation of difficulties leading up to Francis' visit to South America. Reports of fire bombings at three Catholic churches, bomb threats directed at Pope Francis, and news of multiple protests planned for the pope's visit all came within days of Francis' arrival. Protests were aimed at the pope for his decision in 2015 to appoint Juan Barros Madrid to serve as bishop in Osorno, Chile. Barros had been accused of covering up, and of being complicit in, sexual abuse committed by his mentor, Fr. Fernando Karadima, a charismatic priest who was found credibly accused of sexual abuse in 2011 and sentenced to a life of prayer and penance.⁷⁰ Francis had defended Barros since appointing him in 2015, when Francis was caught on camera candidly blaming "leftists" for making "stupid" claims to slander the Church.⁷¹

The situation became more tense when The Associated Press revealed a 2015 letter from Francis showing that he was aware of the accusations against Barros before choosing to appoint him to Osorno later that year. It also showed that arrangements had been made for Barros and two other

right-the-sexual-revolution-is-part-of-the-problem; Edward Pentin, "Is There a Link Between Priestly Celibacy and Sexual Abuse?," *National Catholic Register*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/is-there-a-link-between-priestly-celibacy-and-sexual-abuse-v96ry95h>.

⁶⁹ NCR Editorial Staff, "Francis' Commitment to Abuse Survivors in Question," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/francis-commitment-abuse-survivors-question>.

⁷⁰ Austen Ivereigh, "Controversial Chilean Bishop's Appointment Continues to Divide Diocese," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 7, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/controversial-chilean-bishops-appointment-continues-divide-diocese>.

⁷¹ Ivereigh.

Chilean bishops to resign, but the pope insisted on changing this decision to continue with Barros' appointment.⁷²

When questioned about his support of Bishop Barros during his 2018 trip, Francis said, "The day they bring me proof against Bishop Barros, I will speak," that "there is not one piece of evidence against him," and that the accusations were "calumny." Francis' words came despite the existence of multiple accusers, who said Francis had not heard evidence only because they had not been given the chance to provide their testaments. One victim of Karadima, Juan Carlos Cruz, alleges Barros witnessed his abuse and covered it up. This angered many in the abuse survivor community, who believe victims should not be required to provide "proof" before being taken seriously. Most notably, Cardinal O'Malley of Boston issued a statement that called Francis' statements "a source of great pain for survivors of sexual abuse.," saying that they conveyed a message of "if you cannot prove your claims then you will not be believed," a historically common way of discrediting and placing blame on victims.⁷³

An editorial appeared in the *Reporter* titled "Francis' commitment to abuse survivors in question." This editorial focuses on how Francis' words echo decades of harmful discrediting rhetoric from the Church when faced with victims of abuse, only revictimizing them and forcing their silence. In reference to the pope's words, the editors argue that

these remarks are at the least shameful. At the most, they suggest that Francis now could be complicit in the cover-up. The script is all too familiar: Discredit the survivors' testimony, support the prelate in question, and bank on public attention moving on to something else. History has shown that the great number of survivors were telling the truth. Any reform that has happened in the church is

⁷² Nicole Winfield and Eva Vergara, "AP Exclusive: 2015 Letter Belies Pope's Claim of Ignorance," *AP NEWS*, April 20, 2021, sec. Pope Francis, <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-ap-top-news-chile-south-america-international-news-07e48f9e01c54ec496397f68bea5d30a>.

⁷³ Joshua J. McElwee, "Cardinal O'Malley: Pope Caused 'great Pain' for Abuse Survivors in Chile," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/cardinal-omalley-popes-defense-chilean-bishop-caused-great-pain-abuse-survivors>.

due to their courageous resolve. The hierarchy was caught in its lies and humbled, but not before unknown numbers of believers were driven out of the Catholic Church. The scandal has cost the church moral authority, credibility and billions of dollars. In recent years, we had thought chastened church leaders had begun to correct mistakes of the past. We were wrong. The supreme pontiff apparently has not learned this lesson.⁷⁴

In praise of O'Malley's statement, the editorial reads: "Here, we must applaud O'Malley's action. He could have quietly spoken to Francis. Perhaps he knew that would have left abuse survivors yet again without any prominent defender." The *Reporter's* concern for the defense of abuse survivors is in line with its history of aligning closely with survivor advocacy groups.

New York Times and *Reporter* contributor Ken Briggs wrote a piece for the *Reporter* that suggests several complexities raised by the controversial actions of the pope:

What potentially lends this controversy particular significance is that it appears to reveal a side of the pope that contrasts with his popular image as a "people of God" leader who ordinarily grants a hearing and dignity to the rank and file of the church. He is a "leveler" who has mocked the pretenses of elite church officials and identified strongly with the poorest and most workaday Catholics in his vast community. The rebuke to those very Catholics in Chile who appear to fit that profile poses the troubling question.⁷⁵

Analyzing the contrast of Francis' image as pope of the "people of God" with his actions in defense of a fellow bishop without first considering allegations of the "poorest" of Catholics contributes to the *Reporter's* consistent narrative perspective of survivor advocacy.

A *Register* editorial a few days later responded similarly to O'Malley's critique:

Healing and institutional change within the Church demand a deep sensitivity to the experience of victims and a firm demonstration of the belief that the protection of children must come first, even when that duty threatens a bishop's paternal bond with his priests or a pope's sympathy for an episcopal ally. Cardinal O'Malley's statement showed that he has learned this lesson after decades of hard-won experience. He has been Pope Francis' closest ally on this sensitive

⁷⁴ NCR Editorial Staff, "Francis' Commitment to Abuse Survivors in Question."

⁷⁵ Ken Briggs, "Chile Controversy Contrasts with Image of Pope Francis as a Leveler," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncr-today/chile-controversy-contrasts-image-pope-francis-leveler>.

issue, and we hope his correction will hit its mark. What the Church needs now is a sensitive, transparent and systematic response to credible allegations of child sexual abuse and episcopal negligence. Pope Benedict's reforms must be defended and furthered within the Holy See, and the commission's child-protection guidelines should be repeatedly endorsed by the pope and circulated to every diocese. This is what real reform looks like.⁷⁶

The editors here exemplify several consistencies in the rhetoric typically employed by the *Register*. First is a recurring focus on healing, which comes up frequently in the *Register's* discussion of clergy abuse. Second is the emphasis placed on Pope Benedict's reforms, namely the directive to remove priests facing credible accusations. Congruently with the *Reporter*, the editors here express a continued concern for the damage Francis has contributed to the Church's declining credibility.

J. D. Flynn, editor-in-chief of Catholic News Agency, wrote a piece asking the question, "Did Cardinal O'Malley Open a Door to Papal Criticism from US Bishops?" In it he notes that,

In the Church's long history, criticism from bishops aimed at the pope is not uncommon. But contemporary critique from American bishops is usually far less direct and far more veiled than Cardinal O'Malley's statement. His statement may prove exceptional: a singular correction on a unique issue. Or it may pave the way for other kinds of statements.⁷⁷

Flynn raises some "significant issues" that might call on bishops to criticize the pope, primarily concerns that the upcoming synod on vocations and young people would include a debate over interpretation of Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, a potential risk to clerical celibacy. He imagines that "with Cardinal O'Malley setting a new precedent," American bishops affiliated with "natural

⁷⁶ The Editors, "Church Must Keep Clergy Sex-Abuse Reforms on Track," *National Catholic Register*, January 26, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/church-must-keep-clergy-sex-abuse-reforms-on-track>.

⁷⁷ J. D. Flynn, "Analysis: Did Cardinal O'Malley Open a Door to Papal Criticism From US Bishops?," *National Catholic Register*, January 23, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/analysis-did-cardinal-omalley-open-a-door-to-papal-criticism-from-us-bishop>.

family planning apostolates” might feel empowered to raise their voices if they felt the pope was giving “conflicting signals about clerical celibacy.”⁷⁸

Flynn’s words seem to suggest a potential plan of attack on the moral theology of Pope Francis, insofar that it accepts differing interpretations to clerical celibacy. This suggestion of a “new precedent” for critiquing the pope sets the stage for the moment the *Register* publishes Carlo Viganò’s testimony in July 2018, in which he claims Pope Francis harbored Cardinal McCarrick for political reasons, calling for the pope’s resignation.⁷⁹

Just days after the letter was released, Francis named Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta to investigate the accusations put forward by Juan Carlos Cruz and others. A *Reporter* editorial praised and endorsed the move, pointing out how in 2001, when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger moved responsibility for addressing accusations of clerical sex abuse to the CDF, Scicluna was his point man. In 2005, Scicluna was instrumental in forcing Marcial Maciel out of public ministry.⁸⁰

The *Reporter* says the prosecutor will still have to prove he is independent of the pope in his discernment, yet endorses Francis’ move, recognizing Scicluna as having shown a commitment to transparency.⁸¹ The *Register*—in some contrast—declined to comment editorially about Francis’ appointment of Scicluna.

⁷⁸ Flynn.

⁷⁹ Edward Pentin, “Ex-Nuncio Accuses Pope Francis of Failing to Act on McCarrick’s Abuse,” *National Catholic Register*, August 26, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/ex-nuncio-accuses-pope-francis-of-failing-to-act-on-mccarrick-s-abuse>.

⁸⁰ NCR Editorial Staff, “Editorial: Sending Archbishop Scicluna Is a Smart Move,” *National Catholic Reporter*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-sending-archbishop-sciicluna-smart-move>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

From January to May, the major story is Chile: this includes the protests prior to and during the papal visit, Francis' statements in defense of Barros, the public criticism of Francis by Cardinal O'Malley and the fallout of these.

The *Reporter* argues that the pope may lose the trust of his church, particularly the poor and the survivors of abuse for whom he had been an advocate. The *Reporter* argues that survivors of sexual abuse by clergy should be considered among the poorest members of the community, and that Francis should consider this when addressing the scandal.

Sciocluna met with Cruz in New York in February. The *Reporter* gives a news report that Cruz said, "For the first time, I felt that someone was listening."⁸²

In late April, Francis published a lengthy letter to the bishops admitting that he had made "serious mistakes" expressing he felt "pain and shame" for the "crucified lives." He refers to 64 testimonies from survivors, apologizes publicly, and shares plans to apologize personally to some of the survivors.⁸³ In a commentary for the *Register*, Fr. Raymond J de Souza writes, "There has never been anything quite like the letter that Pope Francis wrote to the bishops of Chile." "In passionate penitential and prayerful prose, the Holy Father reversed himself completely on the very issue that so marred his apostolic visit to Chile earlier this year." The article describes the apology as "sincere, frank, and humble." Noting the global impact of the pope's admission of error, Fr. de Souza compares it to Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 apology for

⁸² Junno Arocho Esteves, "Clergy Abuse Survivors Grateful after Private Meetings with Pope," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/clergy-abuse-survivors-grateful-after-private-meetings-pope>; Peter Feuerherd, "Vatican Investigator Meets with Chilean Abuse Victim in New York," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 17, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/vatican-investigator-meets-chilean-abuse-victim-new-york>.

⁸³ Maria Benevento, "Francis' Chilean Critics Welcome Apology, Hope for Action on Abuse Cover-Up," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/francis-chilean-critics-welcome-apology-hope-action-abuse-cover>.

inadvertently lifting the excommunication of a holocaust denier. “The letter of Pope Francis is more far-reaching because his offense was so great—not a one-time oversight, but a mistaken judgment sustained and defended over several years.” Francis’ apology is therefore to be praised, de Souza says, as even more significant than that of Benedict in 2009.⁸⁴

Closely following his letter to the Chilean bishops, Francis invited several survivors of sex abuse by clergy to meet personally with him at the Vatican. The pope set aside an entire day for each survivor. Both the *Register* and *Reporter* focus on the pope’s meeting with one survivor in particular, Juan Carlos Cruz, who had been a central figure in the case against Barros. According to the *Reporter*, this was less like a meeting and more like “a personal act of contrition.”⁸⁵ The *Register* was quick to make the homosexuality of Cruz a central part of the story with the headline, “Chilean Abuse Victim Claims Pope ‘Told Me to Accept Being Gay, God Made Me This Way,’”⁸⁶ which begins to shape their narrative that the underlying issue is homosexual culture:

Cruz confirmed that they did speak about homosexuality, and that he explained to the pope that he is not a bad person and tries not to hurt anybody. The Vatican has not yet confirmed or clarified the comments that Cruz said the pope made regarding homosexuality. The Vatican has preferred to withhold comment on private conversations the Holy Father has had.⁸⁷

The *Register* article quotes the Catechism’s words on people with same-sex attractions, that they “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” but also that “deep-seated”

⁸⁴ Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, “After the Pope’s Extraordinary Apology for Chilean Abuse Case, What Comes Next?,” *National Catholic Register*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/after-the-pope-s-extraordinary-apology-for-chilean-abuse-case-what-comes-next>.

⁸⁵ Brian Roewe, “Inside Chilean Abuse Survivor’s Meeting with Pope Francis,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 11, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/inside-chilean-abuse-survivors-meeting-pope-francis>.

⁸⁶ CNA/EWTN News, “Chilean Abuse Victim Claims Pope ‘Told Me to Accept Being Gay, God Made Me This Way,’” *National Catholic Register*, May 21, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/chilean-abuse-victim-claims-pope-told-me-to-accept-being-gay-god-made-me-th>.

⁸⁷ CNA/EWTN News.

homosexual inclination is “objectively disordered” and “under no circumstances can they be approved.”⁸⁸ This is one of many moments where the *Register* displays a fear of unclear messages on homosexuality coming from the pope. In many ways this is the central focus of the *Register* throughout 2018.

In contrast, the *Reporter* quotes Cruz as saying, “Today I have more hope in the future of our church.” No mention is made in the *Reporter* of Cruz’s comments about being gay (or the pope’s acceptance of his homosexuality).⁸⁹

In May of 2018, the world’s press reported the resignation of all the bishops of Chile. On May 24th, the *Reporter* published an editorial in which they call on Francis to seize the moment:

This series of events is a personal milestone for this pope. Francis' admission that he was wrong was stunning in its honesty. His determination to correct the mistakes is a powerful personal witness and a teaching moment for the whole church. . . . These are signs that the voices of the multitude who have stood knocking on the church door demanding justice are being heard. It has taken decades, thousands of sacrifices and untold suffering, but—finally—real change is apparent. Accountability is overtaking impunity. . . . The shock of these mass resignations creates an opportunity and momentum that Francis should seize upon to implement the tribunal he proposed three years ago. No more delays. He should act now.⁹⁰

The *Register* handled this differently. Discussing the leadup to the pope’s meeting with the bishops of Chile, an article titled “Pope Francis’ Chilean Healing Mission” compares this meeting with one held by John Paul II in 2002 but calls it altogether different, namely because in

⁸⁸ CNA/EWTN News.

⁸⁹ Esteves, “Clergy Abuse Survivors Grateful after Private Meetings with Pope.”

⁹⁰ NCR Editorial Staff, “Editorial: Francis Should Seize Momentum of Chile Resignations,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-francis-should-seize-momentum-chile-resignations>.

this case the pope is the one to have exacerbated the problem. In 2002, the Vatican was seen as aiding the US Bishops; in this case the bishops appear to be coming to assist the pope.⁹¹

The *Register* often uses language that makes this a story about healing:

The Chilean bishops are certainly not victims in this matter generally, but Pope Francis has compounded their errors, frustrated their attempts at correction and damaged their credibility. There is a good deal of healing required there. No doubt the Holy Father will take responsibility for that and seek forgiveness from his Chilean brothers.⁹²

The healing Fr. de Sousa refers to here is specific to the pope's damaged credibility, but the word "healing" is found frequently in the *Register* in 2018. The implications of this are discussed in the analysis on page 61 of this paper.

In another *Register* article, "Pope Francis Flexes Papal Power With Chile," the emphasis is on his use of supreme authority, calling the pope's decision a "remarkable act of bravery" that after several months, no bishop will be in Chile that Francis did not personally select.⁹³ The article suggests that the pope suggested their resignations: "It is inconceivable that the Chilean bishops would drop this entire steaming mess on the pope's own desk without him inviting it."⁹⁴ The *Register* is following a narrative of authority, one that would contrast with the praise of Francis' humility often found in the *Reporter*.

A good example of the *Reporter's* language is found in an op-ed by Kieran Tapsell on June 6, praising Francis' letter to Chileans that came at the very end of May. He lauds Francis' letter as "a welcome change to the attitude of Pope Benedict XVI" who in his 2010 letter to the Irish

⁹¹ Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, "Pope Francis' Chilean Healing Mission," *National Catholic Register*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-chilean-healing-mission>.

⁹² de Souza, "Pope Francis' Chilean Healing Mission."

⁹³ Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, "Pope Francis Flexes Papal Power With Chile," *National Catholic Register*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-flexes-papal-power-with-chile>.

⁹⁴ de Souza, "Pope Francis Flexes Papal Power With Chile."

people placed all the blame of cover-up on the Irish bishops, ignoring criticism of the church's secrecy laws and dysfunctional disciplinary system.⁹⁵ Tapsell claims this shift of focus towards structural problems is new, as well as Francis' call to listen to "non-clerics," but that for real cultural change to occur, Francis must abolish the pontifical secret over child sexual abuse:

Popes are absolute monarchs, answerable to nobody, and they can change canon law with the stroke of a pen. Changing canon law will not change the culture overnight, but, as George pointed out in his article, a culture will never change while a law embodying it is in place.⁹⁶

Here we see a clear representation of the *Reporter's* recurring critique of institutional structures they see as detrimental in the pursuit of accountability and credibility.

Transitioning to the latter half of 2018

As stated earlier, the events related to the Chile controversy dominated Catholic news from January to May of 2018. Before moving on to the latter half of the year, I want to pause for a moment to highlight the significance of the moment.

The numbers in my data, for January through May: The *Reporter* published a monthly average of 20 articles on sex abuse. The *Register* had an average of five articles per month. This ratio and frequency are consistent with previous years.⁹⁷ The pattern is not just relative but also absolute: The *Register* simply does not emphasize the sex abuse cases prior to 2018—that is the year in which the *Register* takes up sex abuse as a major topic.

⁹⁵ Kieran Tapsell, "The Ball Is in Pope Francis' Court over the Culture of Cover-Up," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ball-pope-francis-court-over-culture-cover>.

⁹⁶ Tapsell.

⁹⁷ "The Pope Meets the Press."

In July and August of 2018, however, the coverage of sex abuse by *both* papers increases exponentially following the revelations of McCarrick's abuse of seminarians and minors. August in particular shows the most dramatic increase, with the *Reporter* publishing at least 133 articles related to sexual abuse, and the *Register* publishing at least 30, mostly in relation to McCarrick. This coverage stays at a high level from August but slowly tapers downward in the final months of 2018. I want to bring attention to this in part because the coverage of the latter half of the year overshadows some of the events that occurred earlier, but these moments from January through May set much of the tone that will define the remainder of 2018.

CARDINAL MCCARRICK

In June of 2018, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the former archbishop of Washington, DC, was found guilty of sexual misconduct and sentenced to a life of penance and prayer. The pope would accept his resignation as Cardinal in July. Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman wrote in the *New York Times*, “He Preyed on Men Who Wanted to Be Priests. Then He Became a Cardinal,” detailing his rise to Cardinal including interviews with some of McCarrick’s accusers.⁹⁸

The *Register*’s first articles about McCarrick, appearing between June 20 and July 20, do not go beyond basically reporting the facts. These articles do mention concern that the McCarrick case will ultimately damage the church’s credibility.

Both papers make a similar point: I’ll let the *Register*’s words serve here: “[T]his scandal has opened up an important and timely debate about transparency and accountability in the Church’s response to sexual misconduct that involves senior prelates and adult subordinates.”⁹⁹ It becomes clear that the *Register*’s focus on adults is handy for those who want to blame homosexuality rather than focus on the abuse of minors. Here are the words of the *Reporter*:

It is noteworthy that the previous settlements for sexual misconduct involving adults had not resulted in the drastic step of resigning from public ministry. Nor should they. Priests sometimes fail to keep their vows of celibacy just as married men and women sometimes fail to keep their vows of fidelity. The sexual abuse of a minor—or a subordinate, which constitutes an abuse of power—is different and should be treated differently. If it turns out the settlements were with subordinates, questions will be raised about why this punishment of removal from public ministry was not applied earlier.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, “He Preyed on Men Who Wanted to Be Priests. Then He Became a Cardinal,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2018, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/16/us/cardinal-mccarrick-abuse-priest.html>.

⁹⁹ Joan Frawley Desmond, “Cardinal McCarrick Accused: Critics Demand Answers in Wake of Abuse Claims,” *National Catholic Register*, June 29, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/cardinal-mccarrick-accused-critics-demand-answers-in-wake-of-abuse-claims>.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Sean Winters, “McCarrick Verdict Is the Latest Marker on the Road to Conversion,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/distinctly-catholic/mccarrick-verdict-latest-marker-road-conversion>.

Here we see the papers largely in agreement, discussing the new questions raised by the revelations of McCarrick's behavior with adult seminarians.

In July 2018, when new allegations against McCarrick suggested that he had abused minors, J. D. Flynn of CNA and the *Register* makes the argument that the call for accountability regarding McCarrick is largely “free from ideological division” before mentioning how some deny the correlation between homosexuality and sexual abuse allegations.

When Finn was being investigated for negligence, many conservatives assumed that he was being unfairly maligned by progressives, even before they learned the facts of the case. When Barros of Chile was under suspicion, even Francis blamed the “leftists.” McCarrick was regarded by most as an avowed progressive, but few have seen criticism of him as ideological. The shock, at least now, seems to break the partisan divide. To be sure, some recent commentators have been quick to reject any correlation between homosexuality in the priesthood and allegations that a bishop engaged in predatory homosexual behavior with subordinates. But the Vatican in 2005 declared directly that those with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” should not be admitted to seminary formation, which seems an authoritative recognition that homosexuality amongst priests can have negative effects. Those arguing otherwise are unlikely to gain much traction, at least at the moment.¹⁰¹

This foreshadows a series of articles that would show up in the *Register*, along with several other conservative news outlets, that homosexuality in the priesthood is a major cause of sex abuse in the church, calling for a “purification” of gay clergy.

On July 25, 2018, the *Register* reported on a case in Honduras, paralleling the McCarrick case:

Similar to the charges surrounding Cardinal McCarrick, who reportedly engaged in a long-standing practice of pressuring seminarians into sexual activity with him while he was serving as bishop in two New Jersey dioceses during the 1980s and

¹⁰¹ J. D. Flynn, “McCarrick, the Bishops and Unanswered Questions,” *National Catholic Register*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/mccarrick-the-bishops-and-unanswered-questions>.

1990s, Auxiliary Bishop Jose Juan Pineda Fasquelle of Tegucigalpa has been accused of engaging in homosexual interactions with Tegucigalpa seminarians.¹⁰²

The next day, the *Register* printed an editorial in which they explicitly criticize clerical culture for the first time: “The crisis that now threatens to engulf the leadership of the Church, from Rome to Santiago, Chile, and from Washington, D.C., to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, has exposed a clerical culture that in far too many instances has failed to stop homosexual predation and other forms of sexual immorality.”¹⁰³ The *Register* clearly sees evidence of a “clerical culture” and believes it to be an issue, insofar as it allows a culture of sexual immorality, but this condemnation of a clerical culture should not be confused with the *Reporter*’s concern for “clericalism” which will be discussed later. It is important to note here that the *Reporter* had very little to say about the news in Honduras, only mentioning the sexual misconduct accusations against Bishop Pineda following his resignation.¹⁰⁴

In its criticism of clerical culture, the *Reporter* takes a different tack. A commentary in July by Mary E. Hunt, a lesbian feminist theologian, argues that the McCarrick moment is the second part of a trifecta: the Church has abuse of children, adult subordinates, and the third and neglected group of victims, women:

The abuse of minors and the utilization of underlings are variants on the systematic abuse of women rooted in an ideology of female subordination to male power. To have that top-down schema recapitulated with young and vulnerable men is totally consistent with the patriarchal logic on which it is based.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Edward Pentin, “Honduran Seminarians Allege Widespread Homosexual Misconduct,” *National Catholic Register*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/honduran-seminarians-allege-widespread-homosexual-misconduct>.

¹⁰³ The Editors, “Sins That Demand Justice: How Clerical Culture Failed to Stop Sexual Predators,” *National Catholic Register*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/sins-that-demand-justice-how-clerical-culture-failed-to-stop-sexual-predators>.

¹⁰⁴ Joshua J. McElwee, “Honduran Bishop Serving as Deputy to Cardinal Rodriguez Resigns after Abuse Allegations,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.nronline.org/news/accountability/honduran-bishop-serving-deputy-cardinal-rodriguez-resigns-after-abuse>.

¹⁰⁵ Mary E. Hunt, “A Catholic Trifecta of Disgrace: Next Step in Abuse Saga Is Due,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.nronline.org/news/accountability/catholic-trifecta-disgrace-next-step-abuse-saga-due>.

This connects with the *Reporter*'s call later in 2018 to allow women to serve as cardinals.¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that the *Register* has chosen *not* to make an issue of patriarchy, not even mentioning the concept. This is one of many *Reporter* articles that not only focus on women, but a concern for marginalization in the culture of the church. More examples are provided in the appendix.

A motif that shows up in both papers is purification. Here is the *Reporter*:

NCR [the *Reporter*] has reported and commented in recent editorials about the progress the Catholic Church has made in addressing the decades-long scandal of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy. The McCarrick case shows in vivid detail where the church continues to fail and what it must do to purge itself of this contamination.¹⁰⁷

See a similar point in the *Register*'s editorial:

We pray that the moral ambivalence that permitted and nurtured Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's rise will be condemned and that Pope Francis, in concert with the U.S. bishops, will begin a much-needed purification of the Church.¹⁰⁸

This purification, however, means different things for the *Register* and *Reporter*. The *Register* makes clear that for them, purification has everything to do with this "moral ambivalence" they see as allowing a culture of homosexual predation. Purification in this way could be interpreted as a literal purification of gay priests, as much as that accusation is denied later on.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Pentin, "Honduran Seminarians Allege Widespread Homosexual Misconduct."

¹⁰⁷ NCR Editorial Staff, "Editorial: Addressing Abuse, Church Must Address the Betrayal of Community," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-addressing-abuse-church-must-address-betrayal-community>.

¹⁰⁸ The Editors, "Sins That Demand Justice."

¹⁰⁹ Jennifer Roback Morse, "About Those 'Gay Clergy Networks,'" *National Catholic Register*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/about-those-gay-clergy-networks>.

A *Register* editorial on August 10th takes this stance in a strong way, perhaps its strongest stand yet regarding the ultimate causes of the sex abuse scandal. It explicitly places the blame for the crisis on lax church teachings on sexual morality:

The McCarrick case surely confirms that powerful forces have tolerated and even fomented sexual immorality within the priesthood, and will resist exposure. Those who downplay this fact should consider a troubling irony. Even as the Church is grappling with multiple scandals involving homosexual predation and the abuse of seminarians and priests, well-placed Catholic leaders have signaled their sympathy and support for homosexual relationships as a legitimate alternative to the marriage of one man and one woman instituted by God.¹¹⁰

A week later, the *Register* chose to hit hard on this same theme, with an essay entitled “Active Homosexuality in the Priesthood Helped Cause This Crisis.” The title alone indicates the *Register*’s choice for its overarching approach to the sex abuse scandal. The article explicitly blames homosexuality in part for the crisis, which is something the *Reporter* never does. The purification motif is then found useful by the author:

Pray for a necessary house-cleaning, an honest conversation about all the causes of this crisis, and the purification the Lord wants for his Church. The episcopacy, the priesthood and the very credibility of the Church hang in the balance.¹¹¹

This article also highlights two other motifs found in both the *Register* and *Reporter*: 1. a call to prayer and 2. a continual concern for the credibility of the Church.

The *Reporter* does mention the argument linking homosexuality to sexual abuse, in an article printed on August 21, 2018, then lays out a variety of evidence (citing the same famous study at John Jay College of Criminal Justice) against that claim. This same article in the *Reporter* (in an

¹¹⁰ The Editors, “No Half Measures in Responding to Clerical Crisis,” *National Catholic Register*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/no-half-measures-in-responding-to-clerical-crisis>.

¹¹¹ Charles Msgr. Pope, “Active Homosexuality in the Priesthood Helped Cause This Crisis,” *National Catholic Register*, August 18, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/msgr-pope/active-homosexuality-in-the-priesthood-is-at-the-root-of-this-crisis>.

implicit reference to the *Register*) suggests that those pushing that claim are following an anti-gay and anti-Francis agenda.¹¹²

¹¹² Michael Sean Winters, “Critics Wield Grand Jury Report to Advance Anti-Gay, Anti-Francis Agenda,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/critics-wield-grand-jury-report-advance-anti-gay-anti-francis>.

ARCHBISHOP VIGANÒ'S CALL FOR THE POPE'S RESIGNATION

The *Register*'s op-ed above seems to suggest a shift; indeed, the two papers seemed to diverge significantly in their language in the late summer of 2018. In August of 2018, the *Register* printed a statement by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò claiming that Francis had ignored warnings about McCarrick for political reasons; Viganò then called for the resignation of the pope.¹¹³ The *Register*'s decision to print that statement gave it legitimacy—a bold editorial decision by the paper.

Archbishop Viganò's history was relevant to this moment: during the pope's visit to the U.S. in 2015, Viganò had arranged for the pope to meet with Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who had served some jail time after being convicted of refusing to grant marriage licenses to gay couples. In August of 2018, the *Reporter* reminded its readers of Viganò's promotion of Davis as evidence that Viganò's statement about the pope was politically motivated; indeed, the pope had chastised Viganò back in 2015 for setting up that meeting with Davis.¹¹⁴ The *Reporter* also noted that Juan Carlos Cruz had told the *New York Times* that Francis had apologized to him (Cruz) for having met with Davis, explaining he did not fully know who she was.¹¹⁵

In an editorial on August 30th, the *Reporter* states that Viganò's letter makes unsubstantiated allegations about the pope,

seizing this moment of turmoil as an opportunity to undermine his papacy. We question whether their (Francis' critics') commitment to keep children safe is

¹¹³ Pentin, "Ex-Nuncio Accuses Pope Francis of Failing to Act on McCarrick's Abuse."

¹¹⁴ Brian Roewe, "Who Is Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò?," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/who-archbishop-carlo-maria-vigano>.

¹¹⁵ Cindy Wooden, "Vigano, Vatican Spokesmen Dispute Facts of Pope Meeting Kim Davis," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vigano-vatican-spokesmen-dispute-facts-pope-meeting-kim-davis>.

genuine and worry that the noise surrounding Viganò's letter will serve only to distract from real and necessary reform.¹¹⁶

In this major *Reporter* editorial, the word purification is once again used, in the title, in fact, but in a manner distinct from that in the *Register*. In this case the purification would come through a long list of reforms, ranging from the abolition of confidentiality agreements to “a national inquiry into every diocese across the fifty states,” to greater authority for women in the church.¹¹⁷

Michael Sean Winters exemplifies this tension more clearly in his politics column article, “Viganò’s Latest Statement Part of Concerted Campaign to Attack Papacy,” in which he discusses Viganò’s account of his arrangement of Pope Francis’ meeting with Kim Davis:

It should be obvious to discern why Viganò championed Davis then as now. His 11-page dossier was filled with anti-gay slurs and complaints about a "lavender mafia" that tried to do him in. I suspect the reason Pope Benedict XVI exiled him from Rome and Francis sacked him early on is because they saw what we can now all see: This is an ambitious, gossipy, mean-spirited little man.¹¹⁸

Winters goes on to call out Edward Pentin of the *Register*, who was instrumental in the *Register*’s publishing of Viganò’s original letter, pointing out how Pentin’s blog posts¹¹⁹ suggested he might have realized he had been “taken for a ride.”

But while this tension existed, there were voices at both papers that expressed fear that this moment, rather than bringing clarity to central issues, simply damaged the Church further. Fr.

¹¹⁶ NCR Editorial Staff, “Editorial: It’s Time to Choose the Painful Path of Purification,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 30, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-its-time-choose-painful-path-purification>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Michael Sean Winters, “Viganò’s Latest Statement Part of Concerted Campaign to Attack Papacy,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/vigan-s-latest-statement-part-concerted-campaign-attack-papacy>.

¹¹⁹ Edward Pentin, “Further Questions Emerge About Benedict XVI’s Sanctions on McCarrick,” *National Catholic Register* (blog), August 31, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/further-questions-emerge-about-benedict-xvi-s-sanctions-on-mccarrick>.

Raymond J. de Souza, in a commentary article¹²⁰ for the *Register*, believes that Viganò's call for Pope Francis' resignation was a mistake. He argues that even if Viganò's charges are true (which would of course be damaging), the events surrounding Juan Barros in Chile were far more damning, after which Francis dramatically expressed contrition, showing his willingness to admit when he is wrong. Among statements about the "stupidity" and "hypocrisy" of posts made by the *Register* and its parent company EWTN, Winters argues in another article that these statements don't just de-legitimize Francis, but de-legitimize all popes, damaging relationships between Catholics, hindering any common mission all Catholics share.¹²¹

For the *Reporter*, however, they see the damage coming fully from those on the side of Viganò. In an editorial on October 18, the *Reporter* praises the words of Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, who came forward refuting the claims in Viganò's letter.¹²² For the *Reporter*, Ouellet's statement revealed two things: a "pretense of unity" that hid deep divisions among the hierarchy, and a false commitment to an "orthodoxy" of papal loyalty that only extends as far as they agree with the pope's words and actions.

Viganò responded to Ouellet's criticism with another letter, using stronger language to describe what he sees as the only solution to the Church crisis, again shared by Edward Pentin of the *Register*:

This is a crisis due to the scourge of homosexuality, in its agents, in its motives, in its resistance to reform. It is no exaggeration to say that homosexuality has become a plague in the clergy, and it can only be eradicated with spiritual weapons. It is an enormous hypocrisy to condemn the abuse, claim to weep for

¹²⁰ Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, "It's Time to Turn Down the Temperature," *National Catholic Register*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/it-s-time-to-turn-down-the-temperature>.

¹²¹ Michael Sean Winters, "The Bruised and Bloodied Church Will Be Reborn—or It Won't," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/distinctly-catholic/bruised-and-bloodied-church-will-be-reborn-or-it-wont>.

¹²² NCR Editorial Staff, "Editorial: Ouellet vs. Viganò Exposes Right Wing's Anti-Francis Strategy," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-ouellet-vs-vigan-exposes-right-wings-anti-francis-strategy>.

the victims, and yet refuse to denounce the root cause of so much sexual abuse: homosexuality. It is hypocrisy to refuse to acknowledge that this scourge is due to a serious crisis in the spiritual life of the clergy and to fail to take the steps necessary to remedy it. . . . The evidence for homosexual collusion, with its deep roots that are so difficult to eradicate, is overwhelming. . . . To claim the crisis itself to be clericalism is pure sophistry.¹²³

In stark contrast to the *Reporter's* praise of Viganò's critics, Msgr. Charles Pope writing for the *Register* sent waves of praise to Viganò for his "courageous" letter, believing it to be "destined to be one of the great pastoral and literary moments of the Church's history."¹²⁴ Pope goes so far as to compare Viganò's words to those of Jesus, arguing that any "bristle" some experience from Viganò's language is "emblematic of our dainty and thin-skinned times—times marked by identity politics cries of victimization, and every form of shock and outrage over the slightest reproach."¹²⁵ This language is reminiscent of the backlash many women in the #MeToo movement have experienced when coming forward with claims of abuse.

Michael Sean Winters wrote again for the *Reporter* to address Viganò's letter, arguing that this letter revealed his "true motives," which were not "his concern for the victims of clergy sex abuse" getting the better of him, but rather his personal dislike for the pope's approach to moral theology. Commenting on Viganò's condemnation of homosexuality in the priesthood and claim of corrupting networks of gay clergy, Winters wrote, "I do not doubt that in the face of suspicions and bigotry, many minorities develop ties with each other for mutual support," but "the ugly history to such claims—'The Jews all stick together,' for example—should give anyone

¹²³ Edward Pentin, "Archbishop Viganò Responds to Cardinal Ouellet's Letter With New Testimony," *National Catholic Register* (blog), October 19, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/archbishop-vigano-responds-to-cardinal-ouellets-letter-with-new-testimony>.

¹²⁴ Charles Msgr. Pope, "Reflections on Archbishop Viganò's Courageous Third Letter," *National Catholic Register* (blog), October 22, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/reflections-on-archbishop-vigano-s-courageous-third-letter>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

pause about raising such concerns.” He again calls out the *Register* for repeating Viganò’s claims and suggesting their validity.¹²⁶

See the appendix for a series of examples of the *Register*’s argument against homosexuality in the clergy as well as the *Reporter*’s defense of gay priests and LGBT individuals.

¹²⁶ Michael Sean Winters, “Viganò’s Third Screed Unintentionally Reveals His True Motives,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/distinctly-catholic/vigan-s-third-screed-unintentionally-reveals-his-true>.

PENNSYLVANIA GRAND JURY

On August 14, a Pennsylvania grand jury released its report that bishops had covered up cases of more than 300 priests accused of sexual assault, estimating over 1000 victims. This was the first state-wide report of this kind, and after its release several other states announced launching similar commissions of their own.¹²⁷

In response, the *Reporter* published an editorial emphasizing the need to for the laity to take charge in the church. Exemplifying one of the significant impacts of Vatican II, the editors state, “We are the body of Christ, we are the church” and call the laity to action; “tell our bishops we no longer trust them” and that “regaining our trust requires reform in how the church as an institution operates.”¹²⁸ This editorial particularly exemplifies several of the motifs found in the *Reporter* throughout 2018 and beyond. One, just mentioned previously, is the desire to change canon law, reform the church, and include lay participation in decision making. Second is the expressed demand that women have equal representation in these processes. Third is the need for “cleaning house” of abusive priests and abusive or complicit bishops. Among these is a call to prayer:

The next time you go to Mass and as you kneel in that silence that envelops the church just before liturgy begins, utter a prayer for this battered and wounded body we call the church. Pray for a renewal and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, and pray for a reform of our broken system. Then glance to your left and your right. Kneeling beside you are likely the strongest allies you have in rebuilding a church so badly in need of reform.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Christine Rousselle, “PA Grand Jury Report Alleges Decades of Clerical Sexual Abuse,” *National Catholic Register*, August 14, 2018, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pa-grand-jury-report-alleges-decades-of-clerical-sexual-abuse>.

¹²⁸ NCR Editorial Staff, “Editorial: The Body of Christ Must Reclaim Our Church,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-body-christ-must-reclaim-our-church>.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Reform is central to the message coming from the *Reporter*, and this message is heightened following the Pennsylvania Grand Jury, which is made even more clear in Mary Hunt's op-ed in the same issue. In it she discusses the problem of clericalism, agreeing with Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, that the problem "is not whether the men are gay or straight (or, I would add, something beyond that binary), but that they have, by reason of their clerical status, access to privilege and power within the ecclesial community that can insulate them from accountability."¹³⁰ She goes on to say that while she agrees, she believes "the problem is deeper, indeed foundational, rooted in the very bifurcation of clergy and laity that grounds the Roman Catholic institution."¹³¹ The Second Vatican Council solidified the idea that the laity play an important role in the church, and here Mary Hunt is expanding on that idea that there should be no real hierarchical structure between clergy and laity, that this is central to the crisis the church is facing, especially in 2018. She states "It is the structure [of the clerical/lay system] and not just the abuse of it [clericalism]" that is the central problem.¹³² Hunt and the editorial writers agree on the Vatican II notion of equality among lay people and clergy, a notion put in writing by the global episcopate gathered in the Vatican in 1965. This gathering would soon be echoed by the announcement of the Vatican Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the church, calling all presidents of bishop conferences to Rome to discuss how they should address the global presence of sex abuse by priests.

¹³⁰ Mary E. Hunt, "Real Change against Abuse Starts with Church's Clergy/Lay Structure," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/real-change-against-abuse-starts-churchs-clergy-lay-structure>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

VATICAN ABUSE SUMMIT ANNOUNCEMENT

On September 12, Pope Francis announced the Vatican Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church (commonly known as the Vatican Abuse Summit), held from February 21-24, 2019.

Following the pope's announcement of the Vatican meeting on protection of minors, Edward Pentin summarized the *Register*'s sentiment on the announcement that would carry through to and after the event itself:

In the collective assessment of informed commentators who spoke with the *Register* following the announcement, the planned meeting will be effective only if its mandate includes the drafting of norms to hold bishops accountable and a discussion of how central homosexuality has been to the problem of clergy sexual abuse.¹³³

As will be seen, this claim that the effectiveness of the meeting will be determined by its inclusion of the issue of homosexuality in the priesthood remains the central focus of the writers and editors of the *Register*.

The *Reporter*'s discussion of the announcement focused first on how it came while scrutiny of Francis' handling of clergy sexual abuse was at its peak. Joshua J. McElwee notes that the heightened tension was due to Carlo Viganò's allegations of cover-up, which include "a host of unsubstantiated and ideological claims" and was "drafted with the help of several ultra-right-wing Catholic figures."¹³⁴ McElwee firmly places himself and the *Reporter* in opposition to Viganò's claims before discussing the event's significance. The significance is drawn from a statement from Villanova professor Massimo Faggioli (a regular voice in the *Reporter*) who

¹³³ Edward Pentin, "What Will the Pope's February Summit on Sexual Abuse Cover?," *National Catholic Register*, September 24, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/what-will-the-popes-february-summit-on-sexual-abuse-cover>.

¹³⁴ Joshua J. McElwee, "Francis Summons World's Bishop Presidents to Rome for Meeting on Clergy Abuse," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/francis-summons-worlds-bishop-presidents-rome-meeting-clergy-abuse>.

makes the argument that this announcement signals a “change of course” from the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in that it emphasizes the authority of bishop’s conferences rather than individual bishops.¹³⁵ For readers of the *Reporter*, this is likely read as a positive move by Francis, embodying the Vatican II concept of “collegiality,” the notion that the pope is no more than a bishop among bishops, a symbol of unity rather than an absolute ruler. Pope Francis’ twenty-first century predecessors, Benedict XVI and John Paul II, had vehemently fought this notion,¹³⁶ but here Francis appears to embrace it. For the *Reporter*, this is to be celebrated.

¹³⁵ McElwee, “Francis Summons World’s Bishop Presidents to Rome for Meeting on Clergy Abuse.

¹³⁶ Tomas C. Fox, “Vatican II ‘collegiality’ Remains Roadmap for Journey Ahead,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 4, 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/vatican-ii-collegiality-remains-roadmap-journey-ahead>.

US BISHOP'S ANNUAL MEETING

The annual national meeting of US bishops became another moment of disappointment, adding to the frustration held by both survivor advocates and conservative critics.

The meeting was highly anticipated by both hoping it would address issues of clergy sex abuse.

The hope of survivor advocates was that decisions would be made on creating “actionable steps” towards accountability of bishops. For conservatives, there was significant hope that more bishops would raise their voices to address gay clergy. During the meeting, the Vatican sent a request that the bishops delay any votes on measures to address the issue until the Abuse Summit in February. For many, this request was disappointing, and only further harmed the credibility of the Church.

For the *Register* and other conservatives, disappointment was expressed about the meeting's avoidance in discussing the issue of homosexuality.

WRAPPING UP 2018

As 2018 ended, both the *Reporter* and *Register* published articles looking back on the significance of the year.

The *Reporter* named Theodore McCarrick their “Newsmaker of the Year,” focusing on how McCarrick’s case reveals the systematic power of clerical secrecy, a system that needs radical reform or is doomed to corruption. The editorial points towards the upcoming bishop meetings, both in January for US bishops and in February for bishops globally, as two of a limited number of opportunities left to “begin rebuilding credibility and trust within the community.”¹³⁷

The *Register* names 2018 “the year of the whistleblower” running a piece that features many of the people who came forward with accusations in 2018.¹³⁸ It is notable that the *Register* chose to use Bishop Accountability’s list of whistleblowers, as Bishop Accountability had not been previously mentioned by the *Register*. While the story featured Carlo Viganò, it also names James Grein, whom McCarrick abused when he was 11 years old, and Juan Carlos Cruz, survivor at the center of the accusations against Juan Barros in Chile. James Grein came forward in 2018 with his chilling story of years of abuse under McCarrick. The story also included Richard Sipe and Fr. Boniface Ramsey. Sipe, a former Benedictine priest, is heralded as an early advocate for victims who reportedly sent letters to bishops warning them about McCarrick’s behavior. Ramsey claimed to have witnessed McCarrick’s behavior and sent letters to bishops, one as recently as 2015 to Cardinal Sean O’Malley, detailing his observations. O’Malley took full responsibility for failing to respond to Ramsey’s letter in 2015.

¹³⁷ NCR Editorial Staff, “NCR’s Newsmaker of the Year: Theodore McCarrick,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncrs-newsmaker-year-theodore-mccarrick>.

¹³⁸ Joan Frawley Desmond, “2018: The Year of the Whistleblower,” *National Catholic Register*, December 31, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/2018-the-year-of-the-whistleblower>.

For the *Register* to group these figures together, and to speak of them all in a positive manner, is noteworthy, and deserves more attention than I can give in this space. One interpretation attests to how the ongoing history of abuse in the church seems to cross political barriers that may exist in other instances.

VATICAN ABUSE SUMMIT

Both the *Reporter* and *Register* published articles on their expectations of the Abuse Summit leading up to the meeting. The *Register* even published an article written by Msgr. Charles Pope titled “3 Keys to Credibility at the Upcoming Sex Abuse Summit,” claiming that “There will be little real progress unless the summit tackles these three issues—including the ‘forbidden’ topic of homosexuality.” In it, Pope listed three criteria he felt needed to be accomplished for the Abuse Summit to claim any success:

1. The summit must focus on more than the sexual abuse of minors.
2. The summit must establish a way forward to establishing greater accountability for bishops.
3. The summit must speak to the link between homosexuality and sexual abuse by clergy.

As the Abuse Summit grew closer, the *Reporter* would begin to identify its expectations for what a successful Summit would look like. Building off Francis’ own focus, the *Reporter* spends much of its time discussing clericalism and a need for a change to Church structures. It would be difficult to characterize the diverse writings the *Reporter* publishes on the summit, but there are two articles that exemplify the moment well. First is Jamie Manson’s article, “Why the sex abuse summit accomplished nothing” where she is critical of the metaphorical rhetoric the pope utilizes to attribute sexual abuse by priests to “the devil.” She argues that “survivors were right to be disappointed that their demands were not met, but anyone listening to press briefings could hear that the bishops who went to Rome were nowhere near ready to take action.”¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Jamie Manson, “Why the Sex Abuse Summit Accomplished Nothing,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/grace-margins/why-sex-abuse-summit-accomplished-nothing>.

Second is an article by Tom Doyle, expressing how the greatest result from the summit was not whatever was discussed or accomplished among the bishops, but rather the “unprecedented gathering of clergy abuse survivors from all corners of the globe.”¹⁴⁰

Both Doyle and Manson agree that the strength and dignity of the church lies with the survivors.

Following the closing events of the summit, Pentin penned an analysis of the summit, outlining what was accomplished and what resulted in disappointment:

In addition to survivors’ disappointment regarding holding bishops fully accountable, others were also disillusioned by what they saw as the meeting’s failure to adequately tackle root causes beyond blaming such abuse on “clericalism.” The meaning and nature of sin was hardly raised, they observed; neither were breaches of the moral law, lack of trust in God’s grace, the serious problem of homosexuality, especially in the clergy, the procedures of episcopal appointments and the role of the bishops. Also omitted was what some see as the chief underlying cause of abuse: a collapse in upholding the Church’s moral doctrine, especially when it comes to sexuality and chastity.¹⁴¹

Looking back on the summit, Father Raymond J. de Souza commented on what he saw as “the danger of conflating sexual abuse with abuse of power,” stating that the summit marked a “shift in how the Church understands the phenomenon of clerical sexual abuse itself.”¹⁴² Echoing the words of Fr. Landry from the beginning of 2018,¹⁴³ de Souza focuses on what he sees as a deemphasis on the sexual aspect of sexual abuse to focus on the abuse of power. His concern is

¹⁴⁰ Thomas P. Doyle, “Abuse Summit Achieved Something, but Not What Pope or Bishops Expected,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/abuse-summit-achieved-something-not-what-pope-or-bishops-expected>.

¹⁴¹ Edward Pentin, “Vatican Summit Promises Course Change on Sexual Abuse, Concrete Actions Pending,” *National Catholic Register*, February 27, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/vatican-summit-promises-course-change-on-sexual-abuse-concrete-actions-pending>.

¹⁴² Raymond J. Fr. de Souza, “The Danger of Conflating Sexual Abuse With Abuse of Power,” *National Catholic Register*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/the-danger-of-conflating-sexual-abuse-with-abuse-of-power>.

¹⁴³ Landry, “Our Culture Is Wrong About Sex, and Chastity Is Needed Now More Than Ever.”

that it shifts focus away from the importance of sexual morality and the “virtue of chastity,” devaluing traditional Catholic sexual ethics in favor of a focus on power dynamics.

THE MCCARRICK REPORT

Both the tension and concordance between these papers can be seen over the next two years as the two papers anticipate the release of the Vatican's McCarrick Report that Pope Francis authorized in October 2018. Both papers express frustration at the time it took to provide such a report. Nearly two years after Francis accepted the resignation of McCarrick, the promised report had not yet been completed. An editorial in the *Register* on July 26, 2020 argues that the wait had been far too long:

The delay only aggravates the severe damage caused by this unclarity and lack of episcopal accountability, further compromises the trust Catholics need to have in their shepherds, and prolongs the healing process for McCarrick's victims. The whole ugly scandal seriously hampers the Church's basic mission of evangelization and service.¹⁴⁴

This editorial exemplifies several recurring themes found in the *Register*, specifically those of concern for accountability, loss of trust, and the need for healing for victims. Coming squarely within the COVID-19 pandemic, the editors conclude that while the Church had been unable to fulfill its global work because of the pandemic, “this McCarrick infection from within, if unchecked, will do even greater damage. The diagnosis—and the prescription for healing—must come soon, and it must be clear, concrete and credible.”

In mid-August 2020, a similar editorial appeared in the *Reporter*, titled “It's past time for Vatican report on McCarrick's shameful rise.”¹⁴⁵ In congruence with their regularly stated concern for survivors, the editors suggest that perhaps Francis questioned releasing a text “expected to reopen a multitude of old wounds for U.S. survivors of sexual abuse as Americans,

¹⁴⁴ The Editors, “Eradicating the McCarrick Virus,” *National Catholic Register*, July 26, 2020, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/eradicating-the-mccarrick-virus>.

¹⁴⁵ NCR Editorial Staff, “Editorial: It's Past Time for Vatican Report on McCarrick's Shameful Rise,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-its-past-time-vatican-report-mccarricks-shameful-rise>.

like others across the world, deal with an unprecedented era of death, suffering, and loss.” However, they insist that delaying doing so only harms the credibility of the Church even further. In keeping with their defense of Francis, they express concern that the “more time that passes, the more fuel for the Church’s right-wing ideologues to make unjustified claims of cover-up by Francis, who, as the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, simply had no part in McCarrick’s career.”

Upon release of the report on November 10, 2020, the *Register*’s Fr. Raymond J. de Souza wrote a commentary on how the McCarrick report represents how trust has changed and can no longer belong to bishops: “The ideal remedy for trust abused is trust restored. But if trust has been abused for too long and too grievously, the more likely remedy is trust abolished.” Citing how a culture of clerical privilege led to abuse of trust, he discusses how the necessary reform in the Church is the breakdown of trust between priests, bishops, and the Holy See. This is the first article I found where the *Register* takes up the theme of trust that the *Reporter* so often discusses. But it does so a bit differently, focusing on the trust between clergy rather than the break down of trust between the laity and the hierarchy.

J. D. Flynn includes an analysis that reads more like a personal narrative, and he presents it as such. He does so to discuss the irony he sees between the “crippling bias towards institutional self-preservation” in a Church that “follows a crucified Lord.”¹⁴⁶ He expresses the common disappoint that comes with being Catholic, and how these scandals are, at best, discouraging to those practicing the faith. He insists that the future of the Church is in the hands of the faithful

¹⁴⁶ J. D. Flynn, “Analysis: After McCarrick Report, Embracing the Cross,” *National Catholic Register*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/analysis-after-mccarrick-report-embracing-the-cross>.

who make the decision to maintain a spiritual life, to stay and help reform the church, despite the difficulty.

For the *Reporter*, the McCarrick report first and foremost affirms a critique of Saint John Paul II, showing how he accelerated and maintained McCarrick's career, appointing him as archbishop of Washington DC despite evidence and warnings against McCarrick's behavior. An editorial in the *Reporter* calls for US bishops to "suppress the cult of St. John Paul II," and acknowledge the repercussions of his decisions.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Reese argues that the McCarrick report shows that popes, like John Paul II, should not be canonized, stating a preference for canonization of lay people, married couples, and young people.¹⁴⁸

Ultimately for the *Reporter*, the McCarrick report is further evidence of the problem of clericalism. In fashion with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Lisa Fullam identifies unchecked clericalism as an infection:

Diagnosis is discerning in the pattern of symptoms a root cause or causes that, if addressed, will alleviate the symptoms. If the symptoms are treated but not the disease, these symptoms will come back, and like imperfectly exorcised demons, will bring seven times more problems with them. There may be other problems — comorbidities — that need treatment as well; ignoring them means the patient will still suffer.¹⁴⁹

The disease, she says, is unchecked clericalism. What are the co-morbidities? Mandatory celibacy and misogyny excluding married men and women from authority in the church.

¹⁴⁷ NCR Editorial Staff, "Editorial: US Bishops, Please Suppress the Cult of St. John Paul II," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-us-bishops-please-suppress-cult-st-john-paul-ii>.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Reese, "McCarrick Scandal Shows Why Popes, like John Paul, Should Not Be Canonized," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/signs-times/mccarrick-scandal-shows-why-popes-john-paul-should-not-be-canonized>.

¹⁴⁹ Lisa Fullam, "McCarrick Report Shows a Church Infected with Unchecked Clericalism," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/mccarrick-report-shows-church-infected-unchecked-clericalism>.

ANALYSIS

Differences

The differences that exist between the ways the two papers have narrated the story of sex abuse in the Church are mostly political. Given the history and political tendencies of the rhetoric employed by each newspaper, this should come as no surprise.

These motifs below will be mentioned again in the conclusion:

“Purification” is a motif that shows up in both the *Register* and the *Reporter*, but the term seems to mean different things in each paper. For the *Register*, purification is clearly laid out as ridding the priesthood of gay priests and the gay culture they see as maintaining a dominant presence within the clergy. For the *Reporter*, purification is understood as a need for resignations of bishops with involvement in cover up or abuse, as well as change or reinterpretation to church doctrine that maintains patriarchal power.

Trust is often a theme in the *Reporter*, particularly when discussing the loss of trust the laity has in the pope and bishops to make good decisions on their own without lay involvement, while the *Register* rarely speaks of trust. There was but one instance where trust became a question in the *Register*, when Msgr. Pope states that unless bishops and Vatican officials are willing to talk openly about the role of homosexuality in sex abuse by priests, trust and credibility will not be restored with God’s people.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Pope, “Reflections on Archbishop Viganò’s Courageous Third Letter.”

Homosexuality and secular sexual culture vs Catholic institutional structures

The *Register* insists that part of the solution to addressing sex abuse in the Church will be to acknowledge a correlation seen between homosexuality and sex abuse. The *Register* and its supporters point to an in-depth study at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, commissioned by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. The results show that most abuse victims are males predominantly between the ages of 11 and 17; and the *Register* prefers to interpret this as evidence that homosexuality is at the heart of the abuse in the church. The arguments made for this are shown throughout this paper.

It is important to point out that opponents of this interpretation point to the same document for the opposite argument. The study itself states that no correlation was found between sexual orientation and a tendency to abuse. The researchers even point out that the increase of gay-identifying clergy in and after the 1970s coincided with a decline in abuse cases. The report concluded that the high percentage of male victims and abusers is due to proximity and availability, and of course the fact that all priests are male.

Clericalism vs Clerical Culture

Clericalism as understood in the case of the church is the sense a bishop or priest may have that they are more important because of their position. The *Reporter* has been talking about clericalism as part of the cause of rampant abuse in the church for many years, but the *Register* starts to use this language in 2018.

While both papers discuss clerical culture as central to the cause of sexual abuse in the Church, it is important to distinguish this from how the *Reporter* talks about clericalism. For the *Reporter*, clericalism is about abuse of power and a higher concern bishops have for each other than for

victims, perpetuated by clerical culture. For the *Register*, clerical culture is described as the secretive culture that allowed the presence of a gay subculture in the clergy that corrupts seminarians and covers for one another in instances of abuse, or simply sexual behavior.

These are similar, in that they provide cover for abusive priests, but for the *Reporter* it is more about the bishop's or priest's sense of self-importance, while for the *Register* it is more about the perpetuation of a promiscuous gay subculture.

Furthermore, each paper sees one interpretation as a distraction from the importance of the other.

Here are two quotes that show the divide quite clearly. First from the *Reporter*:

Todd Salzman, a theologian at Creighton University who studies moral theology and sexual ethics, said focusing on the sexual orientation of abusive priests misses the issue, which largely has to do with clericalism "that has promoted the structural sin of the abuse of power" that led to both the sexual abuse of minors and the cover-up by bishops.¹⁵¹

And from the *Register*:

[W]hat is the root issue for the crisis? Some are claiming that it's "clericalism." Others the culture of toleration of unchastity among the clergy, especially sexually-active same-sex networks. Which is it? Both are important factors, but I've been noticing that "clericalism" and "abuse of power" seem to be the talking points of commentators who want to talk about reform while ducking the problem of priestly and episcopal unchastity in general and same-sex activity in particular.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Brian Roewe, "Bishop Morlino, Others Charge 'homosexual subculture' for Clergy Abuse Crisis," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/bishop-morlino-others-charge-homosexual-subculture-clergy-abuse-crisis>.

¹⁵² Roger J. Fr. Landry, "How to Stay Faithful as We Endure and Confront the Crisis," *National Catholic Register*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/how-to-stay-faithful-as-we-endure-and-confront-the-crisis>.

Survivor/Victim Debate

One clear difference between the papers is one of nomenclature. While the *Reporter* most often uses the term “survivor” when referring to those abused, the *Register* almost exclusively uses the term “victim.”

When and where it is appropriate to use either of these terms has been debated in feminist and advocacy circles for some time, particularly when discussing feelings of shame and guilt following something like sexual assault.

Some proponents of the term survivor argue that the term victim can take away some amount of agency of the person who endured some form of abuse. For many abused by priests, “survivor” signifies the prevalence of suicide in the community.

What likely keeps the *Register* from using the term “survivor” is its association with feminist critique, from which they would want to distance themselves. Indeed, the place the term shows up most is when Jennifer Roback Morse describes her work as helping “survivors of the sexual revolution,” which seems like an intentional choice to combine a nod to feminist critique with a clear criticism of a culture that championed that very critique.¹⁵³

Along these same lines, again which Jennifer Roback Morse makes exceedingly clear, is the choice to use the term “homosexual” when describing people with same-sex attraction. Her choice (and the choice of most writers at the *Register*) to use quotation marks when using the word “gay” or the acronym “LGBT” suggests she takes these terms as less seriously or finds them questionable. She details her reasoning for using the term “men who have sex with men” as

¹⁵³ Morse, “Pope Emeritus Benedict Is Right.”

a more scientifically correct term, while criticizing secular culture for its sensitivity to terminology.

Healing and Reform versus Radical Reconstitution

The *Register* has regularly stated that “healing” is key to church credibility. Professor Robert Orsi, discussing his experience working with survivors, talks about how survivor groups like SNAP regard the word “healing” as taboo, referring to it as the “H” word.¹⁵⁴ This is because the word suggests the need to move on, and for survivors, the pain never really goes away, especially when more news of misconduct and cover-up comes every day. Many survivors in SNAP and other advocacy groups aren’t seeking healing, especially from the Church, when it feels impossible. They want the Church, particularly the bishops, to sit in the pain of the moment, acknowledge their failures, and understand that for some, faith and trust is lost. For decades bishops chose to ignore the abuse of so many by brushing it aside, so bishops suggesting a need for healing feels hollow of remorse and more like a desire to forget. One can think of times where public figures or police have expressed the need to “move on” after moments of racial violence.

The *Reporter* suggested that ordination of women would help address the problem; the *Register* has never expressed support of such a major change, vehemently opposed to what they see as unchangeable church doctrine. This discussion is in a very similar vein to the conversations that come up surrounding the Amazon Synod later in 2019, where many (including the writers at the *Reporter*) were asking for the Church to revise priest celibacy to allow married men and women

¹⁵⁴ Karna Lozoya, “Crisis: Clergy Abuse in the Catholic Church,” n.d., catholicproject.catholic.edu/podcast.

to become priests and ministers to address a severe shortage of priests in Latin America. The debate intensified these questions of reform and church doctrine.

Similarities

Despite some seemingly polar differences between the two papers on some issues, there is one consistent theme throughout both papers' reporting: the need for swift action by the bishops and the Church to create and maintain accountability. The demand for accountability looks nearly identical for both the *Reporter* and the *Register*.

1. Accountability

The two news outlets have consistently called for transparency, so that all the facts are out, and no more behaviors of abuse will be kept in secret. They both agree this is a need not yet met.

2. Voluntary resignation

The two papers have called for the resignation of all leaders guilty of either abuse or covering up that abuse.

3. Concern for the credibility of the church

Both newspapers have demonstrated in their editorials a shared concern for credibility of the Church, publishing pleas for people not to leave the Church.¹⁵⁵ Part of the story here is of Catholic identity, an identity both newspapers claim. Both papers are clearly concerned for the Church, as they are very much a part of what makes up the body of the Church. However, as

¹⁵⁵ Landry, "How to Stay Faithful as We Endure and Confront the Crisis"; NCR Editorial Staff, "Editorial: The Body of Christ Must Reclaim Our Church."

discussed above, what it would take for the Church to regain credibility looks different for the *Register* and the *Reporter*.

Another similarity, which speaks to their shared identity as Catholic institutions, is a regular call to prayer and conversion.

Prayer frequently comes up in conclusory paragraphs in both the *Reporter* and *Register*.

Examples of this can be seen in the appendix.

CONCLUSION

A close reading of the language used by the *Register* and the *Reporter* on sexual abuse in the Church since the election of Francis reveals the stories they both tell about sexual abuse in the Church and how they believe the Vatican should address the phenomenon. While tracing these underlying expectations, it becomes clear that there is a conversation occurring between the two newspapers that reflects the complex political views of American Catholics.

The coverage I have presented here demonstrates that although the two newspapers differ in their coverage of the abuse in the church, they not only share common ground but maintain a conversation that includes a significant diversity. They are not as polarized as may be assumed at first glance. Even within the papers, there is a considerable diversity of opinions, even while keeping with the general tone and positionality of the paper.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF FURTHER ARTICLES

The Register and its Concern About Sexual Culture

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/mccarrick-the-bishops-and-unanswered-questions>

- But when a bishop behaves with sexual immorality, the effects ripple across his entire diocese. Priests and seminarians who object to that sexual immorality leave quickly, or find themselves marginalized. Those who rise to leadership positions are those who are left: those who are willing to accept the bishop's sexual immorality, those who are complicit in it, or those who are too naive to notice it. Those in the first two categories, being willing to accept some rejections of Catholic teaching, are usually also likely to accept other rejections of Catholic teaching. That can be reflected in their pastoral leadership and catechesis, and, consequently, an entire diocese can be formed with a theological perspective framed by relativism, tolerance of immorality or compromise. The effects of a bishop's sexual immorality can lead to spiritual and catechetical decline across an entire diocese.
- One notable facet of the present call for accountability is that, for the moment, it seems mostly free from ideological division.
- When Finn was being investigated for negligence, many conservatives assumed that he was being unfairly maligned by progressives, even before they learned the facts of the case. When Barros of Chile was under suspicion, even Francis blamed the "leftists." McCarrick was regarded by most as an avowed progressive, but few have seen criticism of him as ideological. The shock, at least now, seems to break the partisan divide.
- To be sure, some recent commentators have been quick to reject any correlation between homosexuality in the priesthood and allegations that a bishop engaged in predatory homosexual behavior with subordinates. But the Vatican in 2005 declared directly that those with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" should not be admitted to seminary formation, which seems an authoritative recognition that homosexuality amongst priests can have negative effects. Those arguing otherwise are unlikely to gain much traction, at least at the moment.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/sins-that-demand-justice-how-clerical-culture-failed-to-stop-sexual-predators>

- Once this investigation is completed, action from the pope must be immediate, practical, systematic and deep.
- The hoped-for result will be a sea change in how Church leaders address sexual immorality, including the grooming and victimization of adult seminarians and young priests by homosexuals within their ranks, in the priesthood and the episcopate as a whole.
- Over the past two decades, even as the US bishops sought to remove priests facing credible accusations of sexual abuse involving minors, there has been a tacit acceptance of sexual misconduct involving "adults" in many dioceses. This pattern reflects the

corrosive impact of secular norms that tolerate nonmarital sexual behavior as long as it is “consensual.”

- An example of such a culture is visible in the *Register's* July 25 story that reports in detail the allegations of an active homosexual network at the archdiocesan seminary in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. These allegations have come from seminarians themselves, who, in a letter of protest to their formators, have issued a heartfelt call for courageous action.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/honduran-seminarians-allege-widespread-homosexual-misconduct>

- Part of the impetus for the letter to bishops was that a seminarian from the Honduran Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán tried but failed to take his own life in April, after he had discovered his male lover in the seminary was in another relationship.
- The Register also obtained graphic photographic evidence of homosexual pornography, exchanged on WhatsApp between seminarians who did not sign the letter, as well as other obscene messages. The exchanges have been verified as authentic by computer specialists at the Catholic University of Honduras who searched computer memory and handed the exchanges to the country's bishops.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/albany-bishop-excoriates-incestuous-spiritual-fathers>

- The Catholic Church's #MeToo revelations are just beginning as current and former priests, seminarians, and even nuns across the globe, are finding their voice to come forward about the sexual abuse they have experienced at the hands of people in authority over them, including powerful cardinals.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/what-do-we-believe>

- I have written here extensively about the challenges we face in responding to an increasingly secular, permissive culture. However, it is especially disheartening when these challenges come from within the Church.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/what-would-a-brother-bishop-say-to-ex-cardinal-mccarrick>

- We bishops made an informal pact back in 2002 when the scandals first hit. We would move effectively on the sexual abuse of minors, and we could do that as a united body. We would set off to the side questions that would divide us — sexual morality in general, priestly celibacy, priestly infidelity with adults and, above all, homosexuality in the priesthood. Now that question and that of homosexual predation are no longer avoidable. Pope Francis has made that clear in his response to Chile, and it is surfacing again in Honduras. I would encourage you to tell us what you can about that. Sexual infidelity with adults too must come out, and be purified.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/the-laity-demand-justice-and-action>

- Some bishops are even refusing to make a statement of any kind regarding disgraced former Cardinal McCarrick, who beyond disbelief still holds a title in the Church as

Archbishop. While the statements that have been made are decidedly weak worded (even inspiring Bishop's Press Release Bingo), using vague language like "physical boundary violations" to describe sexual abuse or, even worse, blaming things like the sexual revolution, choosing to ignore the issue altogether is exactly the silence that's allowed the environment of predatory homosexual behavior to thrive within the cover of the Church.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/truth-is-needed-to-free-the-church-from-sacrilege-of-clergy-scandal>

- How bad is the problem of same-sex unchastity in the clergy? It varies among different dioceses and religious orders, and no hard numbers exist, but in various places, it's big enough to do serious damage.
- Seminarians in the 1980s often had to confront openly homosexual subcultures among faculty and seminarians. I was a seminarian in the '90s, when the problem had begun to get cleaned up, but I still personally encountered it without nuance at the beginning of my seminarian application process and then while studying languages during summer break in a foreign country, when the priest tried to make his move 10 minutes after picking me up at the airport. Many priests, at some time or other, have come face-to-face with this clerical depravity.
- God always seeks to draw good out of evil, and throughout Church history, he has shown this time and again. Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. Now is the time to cooperate—and cooperate fully—with his cleansing fire.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/no-half-measures-in-responding-to-clerical-crisis>

- Any sound analysis of the McCarrick scandal—and other cases now coming to light that similarly involve clerical abusers accused of preying upon seminarians and other clergy—must acknowledge two fundamental dimensions: an almost incomprehensible absence of effective structures of episcopal accountability; and, even more fundamentally, an appalling lack of fidelity to what the Church teaches with respect to sexual morality.
- In public statements, media appearances and in an interview with the Register, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington was silent about the problem of active homosexuals in chanceries, rectories and seminaries, despite the revelations involving Archbishop McCarrick.
- Meanwhile, in an interview with *America* magazine, Cardinal Blase Cupich went even further, asserting that it is "a diversion" to call attention to the homosexual dimension of the scandal, even though homosexual misconduct is known to have been preponderantly in play throughout the clergy-abuse crisis, and, indeed, it is exclusively involved when it comes to Church leaders who prey on seminarians and priests.
- The McCarrick case surely confirms that powerful forces have tolerated and even fomented sexual immorality within the priesthood, and will resist exposure. Those who downplay this fact should consider a troubling irony. Even as the Church is grappling with multiple scandals involving homosexual predation and the abuse of seminarians and

priests, well-placed Catholic leaders have signaled their sympathy and support for homosexual relationships as a legitimate alternative to the marriage of one man and one woman instituted by God.

- This is why a partial response to the unfinished business of the 2002 abuse crisis won't pass muster with active Catholics. The Body of Christ rightly demands a thorough housecleaning. Nothing less will do.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/pennsylvania-grand-jury-report-a-reminder-of-the-toll-of-failure>

- The scandal in Pennsylvania is but one small facet of the crisis facing the Church around the world over clergy sexual abuse, abuse of power, an active homosexual culture in seminaries, predatory prelates and widespread homosexual activity among the U.S. priesthood. Pope Francis is facing pressure from Chile, Honduras, Australia, France and elsewhere to act decisively. Transparency, accountability, credibility and responsibility are all needed now more than ever. But the grand jury also serves as a gut-wrenching reminder of the lasting physical and spiritual toll of failure.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/active-homosexuality-in-the-priesthood-helped-cause-this-crisis>

- And this of course leads to the most-avoided topic related to this scandal — the problem of active homosexuality in the priesthood. An *honest* discussion of this current crisis cannot avoid addressing the issue — shouts of homophobia, intolerance, bigotry and scapegoating notwithstanding.
- But the statistical evidence of the recent scandals shows a highly disproportionate level of homosexual involvement. The numbers are well-demonstrated in both experience and in the John Jay Report.
- All this demonstrates that seminaries and the priesthood are not good places for those with deep-seated same-sex attraction. It does not take an anthropology or psychology degree to figure this out. Putting a man with same-sex attraction in a seminary is no more advisable than putting a heterosexual man in a woman's dormitory where he shares shower facilities and close quarters with women. A man with same-sex attraction is going to face temptations in all-male settings that would test the strongest.
- Add to this the possibility that other men of same-sex attraction are there and soon enough a subculture sets up where temptations are fierce, and compromises and liaisons soon emerge. And this is what we have seen in the "gay" subculture that is demonstrably existent among a significant number of clergy in the Church.
- Nevertheless, any conversation that seeks to find real traction or solutions is going to have to include the connection to homosexuality — not as a single cause, but as an essential and highly important one. And honest discussion must also include analyses of institutional problems such as secrecy, unaccountability, abuse of power, and so on.
- In short, it is time for a truthful conversation free from political correctness and forbidden topics.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/harvey-weinstein-theodore-mccarrick-how-you-can-help-the-catholicmetoo-movement>

- It is truly astonishing how many people accept and live by the Sexual Revolutionary Creed, without considering that they themselves might one day be the “prey,” instead of the “predator.”
- I believe this is why the #MeToo movement, while producing many good fruits, has ultimately stalled. People are genuinely appalled by Weinstein’s abuses. But these same people don’t really know what to do about it. Do you recall the starlets’ inept protest at the Golden Globes? They made a pact to wear black as a protest of the objectification of women. But some of them choose black dresses, the immodesty of which, let us say, undermined their statement.
- The problem? These starlets wanted to protest the exploitation of women, without protesting the ideology that made objectification socially acceptable in the first place. These women are hanging on to things they should not be hanging on to. They want to keep their pills and their pornography and their view of themselves as progressive. They want to be “sex positive” and never be caught in the predatory trap that the sexual revolutionary ideology makes possible.
- But I believe you can actually do something to help, regardless of what the bishops choose to do or not do. My suggestion: Let go of any part of the sexual revolution that you are holding on to. Maybe you agree that abortion is wrong, but you think contraception is OK. Maybe you are one of those parishioners who complain if the pastor preaches on pro-life topics. Maybe you are one of the parents in a Catholic high school who thinks the “gay” gym teacher shouldn’t be fired just because she married her same-sex partner in a public ceremony.
- Stop cutting corners on Church teaching. Your witness against sexual abuse will be more compelling. You will be more motivated without the nagging hint of doubt dragging you down.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/how-to-stay-faithful-as-we-endure-and-confront-the-crisis>

- The report also showed, just as the 2004 John Jay Report detailed, that most of the abuse in these six Pennsylvania dioceses was of post-pubescent boys. This reinforces that the crisis of the same-sex abuse of minors has been predominantly one of homosexual molestation, something essential to confront candidly if we’re really going to provide an adequate remedy.
- Finally, what is the root issue for the crisis? Some are claiming that it’s “clericalism.” Others the culture of toleration of unchastity among the clergy, especially sexually-active same-sex networks. Which is it?
- Both are important factors, but I’ve been noticing that “clericalism” and “abuse of power” seem to be the talking points of commentators who want to talk about reform while ducking the problem of priestly and episcopal unchastity in general and same-sex activity in particular. As we see in the case of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and page after page in the Pennsylvania grand jury report, however, the two go together.
- To try to eliminate clericalism without eradicating clerical sexual infidelity would be like trying to address a rising river without stemming one of its major tributaries. The reform

of the Church requires fighting both, but it's a dangerous red herring to suggest that this crisis was caused mainly by priestly pride and not fundamentally by tolerated priestly unchastity and sexual sinfulness.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/a-scandal-of-silence-the-church-needs-swift-action-and-purification>

- This is far from over, but the answer begins as we kneel before God in prayer and fasting and then rise to action infused by his wisdom and grace. God will purify his Church — one way or another.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/cardinal-o-malley-takes-personal-responsibility-for-failing-mccarrick-whistleblower>

- Cardinal O'Malley has sounded the alarm about the gravity of the Catholic Church's situation, where the very credibility of the Church to propose anything, let alone the Gospel, is at stake. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has agreed. The Church is in the midst of a global Catholic #MeToo movement and (adult and child) sex abuse crisis. What makes this very different from 2002 is that the spotlight has turned to the bishops themselves for their role in the ongoing scandal.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/dublin-reflects-the-wages-of-the-abuse-crisis-writ-large>

- No doubt, Ireland's sharp decline in church attendance and priestly vocations, coupled with its recent legalization of abortion and same-sex "marriage," surely confirmed the need for evangelization and spiritual renewal in what was once thought of as the West's main bulwark of vital Catholicism.
- But the pain of the still-unfolding scandal won't be healed quickly. And the entrenched problems that have produced this crisis remain the subject of intense debate at the highest levels of the Church, with some prelates refusing to even acknowledge the impact of homosexual conduct in seminaries and the priesthood.
- The rejection of basic facts and the tone deafness on display as bishops defend their flawed legacies suggest that many Church leaders have not grasped the lessons of Ireland: A culture can change very rapidly, and in frightening ways, when shepherds fail to protect their flocks and lose all credibility.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/ex-nuncio-accuses-pope-francis-of-failing-to-act-on-mccarrick-s-abuse>

- He said it was "clear" that "from the time of Pope Francis's election, McCarrick, now free from all constraints, had felt free to travel continuously, to give lectures and interviews."
- Moreover, he added, McCarrick had "become the *kingmaker* for appointments in the Curia and the United States, and the most listened to advisor in the Vatican for relations with the Obama administration."

- “It was only when he was forced by the report of the abuse of a minor, again on the basis of media attention, that he took action [regarding McCarrick] to save his image in the media,” wrote Viganò.
- The former U.S. nuncio wrote that Pope Francis “is abdicating the mandate which Christ gave to Peter to confirm the brethren,” and urged him to “acknowledge his mistakes” and to “set a good example to cardinals and bishops who covered up McCarrick’s abuses and resign along with all of them.”

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/whistleblower-father-boniface-ramsey-reacts-to-archbishop-vigano-s-letter>

- Despite his long campaign against McCarrick, Father Ramsey also appeared uncomfortable with Archbishop Viganò’s strongly stated indictment of homosexual networks that sought to advance the careers and agendas of specific prelates. Thus, he stressed that a push for additional reforms to address unresolved sexual misconduct and abuse at seminaries shouldn’t turn into a “witch hunt” against homosexuals in the priesthood.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/vigano-testimony-receives-mixed-response-from-us-bishops>

- Furthermore, Viganò asserts that Cupich is “blinded by his pro-gay ideology” because he has stated that the main issue in the sex abuse crisis is clericalism, rather than homosexuality, which Viganò says ignores findings “that 80% of the abuses found were committed against young adults by homosexuals who were in a relationship of authority over their victims.”

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/cupich-dismisses-vigano-claims-as-a-rabbit-hole>

- Cardinal Cupich described the contents of Archbishop Carlos Maria Viganò’s 11-page testimony, published Aug. 25, as a “rabbit hole” that he does not think the Church should be going down.
- Archbishop Viganò’s testimony claimed that Pope Francis had removed restrictions on Archbishop Theodore McCarrick that had been imposed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. It also stated that McCarrick was instrumental in Cupich’s appointment as archbishop of Chicago in 2014.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/we-need-to-know-silence-is-not-an-option-in-the-abuse-crisis>

- If it’s true such homosexual networks are active in the Church, inside and outside of the Vatican, why that has been tolerated is a matter that must be investigated, both by the Vatican and by other relevant Church authorities.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/beware-these-3-lavender-mafias-outside-the-church>

- The coercive network of homosexualization that has gained so much power within the Catholic Church hierarchy is just one of a number. To understand more fully the current

crisis in the Church, we need to be aware of them all, since they all work together toward a homosexualization of the culture.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/chasing-the-devil-out-of-the-church>

- Dr. Ines Murzaku makes a colorful argument that the church has been in this same place of controversy many times, and requires the same rules that were made in the past.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/fr-james-martin-says-don-t-pray-fast-or-destroy-rainbow-flags>

- Father Martin's tweet claiming Father Paul Kalchik's burning a rainbow flag with a cross on it at Resurrection Catholic Church in Chicago was the "most homophobic act he could imagine short of beating up an LGBT person. Note that the pastor defied the archdiocese and took part in the 'exorcism.' And connecting it to the Easter Mass is a scandal: Easter is about love; this is about hate."
- We interpret things very differently. I say the act was not hateful but about love and courage.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/a-scandal-of-silence-the-church-needs-swift-action-and-purification>

- This is far from over, but the answer begins as we kneel before God in prayer and fasting and then rise to action infused by his wisdom and grace. God will purify his Church — one way or another.

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The Register and Healing

<https://www.ncregister.com/interview/healing-abuse-victims-is-key-priest-says-spiritual-start-paves-the-way-forward>

- Whatever the reason, after four years of a papal commission, there are no concrete measures to heal victims coming from the Vatican. Nor does the committee afford any comfort to the faithful who are devastated by the scale of the abuse crisis and the apparent inability of the Church to get close with it. Whatever it may be doing to safeguard minors, I would advise no one to anticipate any definitive course of action

from the commission in the key sphere of healing victims. Pope Francis' eagerly heralded committee on abuse has been a profound disappointment.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/aftershocks-from-a-spiritual-earthquake>

- I dedicate this piece to all of the victims of clerical sex abuse, praying for the healing to which they are entitled, and to the numerous faithful priests and bishops who have remained true to their vocations and vows, even amid facing collective calumny and an onslaught of backlash for others' grave sins.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/truth-is-needed-to-free-the-church-from-sacrilege-of-clergy-scandal>

- Light, however, is a great sanitizer. Just as the revelations of the thousands of cases of clerical sexual abuse of minors in 2002 was not the problem, but the abuse itself that had remained hidden for decades was, so the disclosures against Archbishop McCarrick and others in recent weeks, although nauseating and infuriating, are a necessary part of the healing process. The truth is needed in order to set the Church free of these sacrileges, which devastate individual victims and wound the whole Church.

<https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/true-healing-for-our-church-depends-on-what-the-us-bishops-do-next>

- We must continue to demand that the issues that caused this situation in the first place are rooted out once and for all. And we all must pray that our bishops carry their resolve to respond to the crisis from Baltimore to the Vatican next February. True healing for our Church depends on it.

The Reporter and Conversion

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/distinctly-catholic/mccarrick-verdict-latest-marker-road-conversion>

- The Holy See's verdict against McCarrick is another sad, but necessary, milestone along the road of conversion for the church. No matter what other issues challenge the church, no matter which personalities get embroiled in this sex abuse ugliness, let us never lose sight of the need to continue to pursue the path of conversion. Say a prayer for the cardinal, to be sure, but say a prayer first for his victim.

The Reporter and the Survivor Perspective

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/young-voices/face-scandals-abuse-power-listen-powerless>

- Though such a shift might lead some of us laypeople — and hopefully victims of abuse — to greater authority, we, too, can learn from those who have been most marginalized.
- I still do not know what it means to be a Catholic in this present moment, to faithfully live out our creed. But as I contemplate the question, these are the people I look to. It was

in betraying them that the church arrived at this dark hour and in turning to them that we might be saved.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/letting-abuse-commission-lapse-vatican-sends-disappointing-message>

- We cannot forget that less than 10 months ago, Marie Collins, an original appointee and a survivor of clergy abuse, resigned from the commission out of frustration with an intransigent Vatican bureaucracy.

The Reporter Statements on the Patriarchy, Trust, Humility

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-bishops-plan-address-abuse-falls-short-accountability>

- The revelations we have experienced this summer have brought us face to face with the clerical and patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church that made this outrage continue for so long. That is what must be addressed.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/young-voices/humility-can-be-key-moving-forward>

- If we can humble ourselves enough to recognize that we do not have all the answers and may in fact benefit and learn more from sharing and growing in relationship, then we open ourselves to the possibility of finding light in the darkness and emerging with a sense of solidarity and triumphant hope.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/open-letter-us-catholic-bishops-its-over>

- This, instead, is about a rot at the heart of the culture entrusted with leadership of the Catholic community. A rot so pervasive that it has touched every aspect of the community's life, disrupting all of the certainties and presumptions about who we are and who you are that helped hold this community together.

Reporter Defense of LGBT, Gay Priest

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/bishop-morlino-others-charge-homosexual-subculture-clergy-abuse-crisis>

- The 2011 John Jay College of Criminal Justice study, commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, found no correlation between homosexual identity and the sexual abuse of minors, or that homosexual priests were more likely to abuse minors than heterosexual priests — findings consistent with other studies. Likewise, it found the period of decline in incidents of priestly sexual abuse aligned with the timeframe when large numbers of gay men entered seminaries, beginning in the late 1970s and through the '80s.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/churchs-language-about-lgbt-people-must-end-irish-group-says>

- In their statement, New Ways Ministry notes that Francis has been meeting regularly with survivors of sexual abuse to listen to their stories, and calls on the pope to meet LGBT families, who they say "have long suffered from another form of clerical abuse."
- The group believes LGBT families should be invited to make presentations as part of the official program of World Meeting of Families so that the participants, and the whole church, can hear their stories.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/grace-margins/dublin-rejection-pope-was-reckoning-people>

- I spotted one of the young, green-vested volunteers ahead, and ran toward him in the hope he could set me back on course. Then came my next near collision, this time with longest liturgical procession I've ever witnessed.
- It began with dozens of altar servers. To my surprise, a number them were young women. But the brief female presence quickly gave way to a parade of patriarchs, walking two-by-two, purple zucchetos atop their heads.
- Like ants at a picnic, it was hard to see where the line began, and hard to believe that there could be so many of them. They donned matching cream-colored vestments detailed with a rainbow, a symbol that felt a bit ironic, given the barring of any LGBT groups from participating in the event.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/grace-margins/chasing-rainbows-world-meeting-families>

- If the organizers of the World Meeting of Families had any hope of playing down LGBTQ issues in the church, those aspirations were quickly and ably dashed by LGBTQ Catholic activists and their allies in Dublin this week.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-ouellet-vs-vigan-exposes-right-wings-anti-francis-strategy>

- Morlino and a range of other speakers at Busch's reform conference are convinced that the sex abuse crisis is rooted in clerical homosexuality, which, in turn, justifies unleashing torrents of ugly and perfectly inane assertions about members of the LGBT community within the church and at large.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/vigan-vatican-rebuke-proved-truth-mccarrick-cover>

- Several scientific studies have concluded that there is no link between homosexuality and clergy abuse. The 2011 John Jay Report, for example, cited instead a perversion of power and authority. The study was a deep investigation of the causes and context of clergy sex abuse and was commissioned by the U.S. bishops.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/why-im-not-leaving-catholic-church>

- I've been asked by friends who aren't Catholic, and some former Catholics over the years, how a progressive could stay in a church that doesn't allow gay people to marry or how I could be part of a patriarchal institution that refuses to ordain women.
- I sputtered out answers that were likely insufficient, not logically airtight, and probably unacceptable for some. For me, and I would guess for many Catholics, the church is not like a political party's platform that you parse for complete alignment with your preferred ideology or policy goals. My faith is more naturally compared to the complicated bonds of family and tribe, a place where you feel most at home even when the people in your own living room sometimes drive you mad.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/open-letter-us-catholic-bishops-its-over>

- Gay priests and bishops are certainly among us — probably a greater percentage of gays in the Catholic clergy, if anecdotal evidence and the private chatter of seminary rectors and heads of orders is to be believed, than one would find in the general population.
- The clergy culture is in deep need of serious conversation and education about that issue and much more regarding sexuality. That discussion is unlikely on any significant scale because too many bishops and too many priests, if they were honest, would have to admit to an orientation that the church still calls "disordered."
- Orientation is not a determining factor in abuse of children. If it were, we'd have to be investigating heterosexual orientation as a cause because a lot of abuse is perpetrated by heterosexual men upon boys and girls. So, take that path if you'd like, but be prepared to lose whatever bit of credibility might be left in the tank.

Prayer in the Register and Reporter

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/three-things-should-happen-now-mccarrick-no-longer-cardinal>

- But first, and in justice as well as in mercy, we must pray for the victims, whose lives have been so scarred, that they receive just compensation for the crimes perpetrated against them and that they, too, may find hope in the risen lord and in his church.

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/three-and-a-half-step-plan-for-reforming-the-church>

- You better believe we need to pray. The recently revealed sexual and financial corruption is far too deep to address through natural means alone. Yes, of course, we need to use all of our skills and knowledge. But these problems have a supernatural dimension to them. Don't be stupid: We can't get this done on our own.