



Confronting Corruption

As the secret life of ex-Cardinal McCarrick has come to light these past two months, a number of you have written me to express outrage, anger, and pain at his scandalous behavior--soon eclipsed in the headlines by news of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury's naming hundreds of priests as child abusers and more than a few bishops as their protectors. "My mind is still reeling," one of you wrote; "and every time I spend any amount of time thinking about this I feel fatigued. The weight of it is enormous." Indeed it is.

It gets heavier still, I've found, the more one tries to understand the extent of the disaster. What can be done to lighten the load of mounting frustration over unkept promises and failed episcopal leadership?

This past week Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, proposed a path to an answer. In a letter to American Catholics, the President of the Conference of Bishops outlined essential changes being developed by the Conference's Executive Committee "to avoid repeating the sins and failures of the past."

Toward this end the Committee has set three goals for the Conference of Bishops. The first is a thoroughgoing investigation into the case of Archbishop McCarrick, and it necessarily calls for cooperation with the Vatican. For we bishops have no authority to discipline or remove other bishops. Only the pope can do

that. Therefore, Cardinal DiNardo says, the Bishops' Conference will "invite the Vatican to conduct an Apostolic Visitation . . . in concert with a group of predominantly lay people identified for their expertise by members of the National Review Board and empowered to act" on what they find by virtue of the Pope's apostolic authority.

The second goal is to develop confidential and reliable third-party channels for reporting complaints of abuse and misconduct on the part of *bishops*--a task left undone in the first wave of child protection reform 15 years ago. This change would advance "the overarching goal" to put in place "protections that will hold bishops [just as much as priests] to the highest standards of transparency and accountability."

The third goal is to bring about changes in Church law to make canonical procedures to resolve complaints against bishops "more prompt, fair, and transparent."

The pursuit of these three goals, Cardinal DiNardo says, will be guided by three criteria: independence, authority, and lay leadership. Whatever structures or mechanisms we adopt "must preclude bishops from deterring complaints against them, from hampering their investigation, or from skewing their resolution."

By these criteria, then, the faithful must be able to bring a complaint against a bishop through a channel that is *independent* of his retaliatory authority. They can do so effectively only if the new process partakes of sufficient ecclesial *authority* to enforce decisions unfavorable to bishops in cases of sexual abuse or misconduct. "These are not administrative or clerical

matters," Jim Geraghty has observed, "they are crimes, and it is stunning that for so long they were treated as something less than that." That's why the third criterion--*lay leadership*--is crucial. Backed up with Church authority, experienced criminal investigators and prosecutors have the skills and tools to track down perpetrators and bring them to justice.

Cardinal DiNardo confesses in closing that he has "no illusions about the degree to which trust in the bishops has been damaged by these past sins and failures. It will take work to rebuild that trust."

Indeed it will. For trust comes at a price; it must be earned by our proven fidelity to the labor of shepherding souls.