

ASSESSING “THE McCARRICK REPORT”

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This is my analysis of the “Report on the Holy See’s Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick,” or what is commonly known as “The McCarrick Report.” Much of what follows is a summary overview designed to spare readers the necessity of reading the 461-page document. It also includes my assessment of some key events.

The “McCarrick Report” excels in providing abundant information about the ascent of Theodore McCarrick to the highest ranks of the Catholic Church. No other study comes close to providing such rich material, much of it heretofore unknown to the public.

If there is one outstanding flaw, it was the refusal to interview Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. This is especially unconscionable given that the Report mentions him 306 times, mostly to discredit him.[1] What makes this truly astonishing is that persons who were mentioned only a few times were interviewed. Thus, the decision not to interview Viganò was deliberate.

I never met Archbishop Viganò but I can attest to his integrity. In late 2015, after a notable Catholic contacted me about a bishop who refused to do anything about a rogue priest, I reached out to Viganò; at the time he was the Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S. He got right on it and acted responsibly. Indeed, he took my request to investigate this matter very seriously. This is important because he says the Report unfairly blames him for not investigating McCarrick, something which he vigorously denies.[2]

When I became president of the Catholic League in 1993, McCarrick was the Archbishop of Newark. At the time, our office was located in the Catholic Center at the Archdiocese of New York; Cardinal O'Connor was kind enough to move our office to the 20th floor, next to his office, so I got a chance to know him well.

I was only in the job for a few years when I received a call from McCarrick. I remember two salient comments he made. He was very kind, praising my work combating anti-Catholicism. But he also said something that rocked me: He said it was his desire to come across the Hudson and succeed Cardinal O'Connor as the next Archbishop of New York. Why, I thought, would he tell me this?

McCarrick's quest to assume this post apparently consumed him. As we learned from the Report, while talking to two bishops in 1990, he "pounded the table and blurted out 'I deserve New York.'" [3] His sense of entitlement was appalling.

It now becomes clear from reading the Report that one of McCarrick's characterological weaknesses, present from the beginning, was his excessively ambitious nature. It was in 1968 that McCarrick, then a monsignor, was first considered for elevation to the episcopate. Those charged with assessing his credentials were impressed by his multiple skills, but "several informants expressed concern that McCarrick might be overly 'ambitious.'" [4]

He was made Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of New York in 1977. Four years later, he was being considered to head a newly created diocese, the Diocese of Metuchen in New Jersey. He again impressed everyone. Yet there was a "sole concern," that being his "obvious ambition to be promoted in the ecclesiastical hierarchy." [5] He was a careerist, a priest whose quest for a red hat (to be a cardinal)—in one of the nation's most prestigious dioceses—proved to be an unhealthy preoccupation.

The first signs of trouble became apparent in the 1980s. That is when his homosexual escapades became known. At least three of the four bishops in New Jersey at the time failed to act responsibly: they allowed him to continue his predatory behavior unchecked.

McCarrick's penchant for seducing seminarians is well documented in the Report. His house in Sea Girt, down the Jersey Shore, was a favorite spot for him to lure these young men. He intentionally invited more men than he had beds for, and he did this with regularity. He didn't just sleep with these young men: He either attempted to have sex with them, or succeeded in doing so.[6]

What McCarrick did was not simply wrong—it was evil.

Evil is a strong word. It should not be used promiscuously. In a book that I have written about this subject, *Disabling the Catholic Church: The Truth about Clergy Sexual Abuse* (to be published later next year by Ignatius Press), I make it clear that while the molesting priests—the vast majority of whom were homosexuals—were sick men, it would be inaccurate to label most of them evil. The same cannot be said of McCarrick. Let's be honest: Any bishop who would stain young men preparing for the priesthood has the hand of the Devil on him.

McCarrick had some help from other priests. For example, Monsignor Anthony Joseph Gambino, after listening to a priest who told him what McCarrick did to him, Gambino had the nerve to admonish him.[7] Just as disconcerting, after Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, the Apostolic Nuncio, learned from Father Boniface Ramsey in 2000 about McCarrick's sexually abusive behavior at his beach house, sharing beds with seminarians, Montalvo never got back to him.[8]

After McCarrick was appointed Archbishop of Newark in 1986, Bishop Edward T. Hughes succeeded him as the Bishop of Metuchen. When a priest came to Hughes relaying how McCarrick

abused him, he listened carefully but never got back to him.[9] In fact, he never said a word to anyone in the U.S. or Rome. Hughes did the same to every other priest who confided in him.[10]

McCarrick not only abused seminarians at his beach house, he preyed on them at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. One of them told Hughes—to no avail—that McCarrick “tried to convince me that priests engaging in sexual activity with each other was normal and accepted in the United States, and particularly in that diocese.”[11] To the extent this is true, it is proof of the homosexual network in the Catholic Church in the 1980s.

What did Hughes do when he heard this? Amazingly, he told the priest “to forget about McCarrick’s misconduct and to forgive McCarrick ‘for the good of the Church.’”[12] No one speaks this way simply to protect a fellow bishop. I have read too much about this issue to know that there was something else going on in Hughes’ life that explains his response.

On January 25, 1990, soon after Bishop James McHugh was appointed to head the Diocese of Camden, he had dinner with three other priests: Monsignor Dominic Bottino, Newark Auxiliary Bishop John Smith, and a young cleric. In front of everyone, McCarrick started rubbing the crotch of the cleric. The young man froze while the others looked away. No one said a word.[13]

We know this because in 2018 Bottino finally admitted what happened. Neither bishop found what McCarrick did objectionable. In fact, McHugh even commended Bottino for the way he “handled” the incident.[14]

If the New Jersey bishops were delinquent, the Archbishop of New York proved to be meritorious. It was Cardinal John O’Connor, a man whom I worked with and greatly admired even before reading the Report, who had the courage to blow the

whistle on McCarrick. Regrettably, he ran into opposition, both in the U.S. and in Rome.

In the early 1990s, Cardinal O'Connor started receiving anonymous complaints about McCarrick.[15] O'Connor knew McCarrick for many years, and he also knew how common it was to field all sorts of false complaints about priests, so he understandably passed the letters on to McCarrick. Then more letters of this sort reached O'Connor's desk. Also receiving copies was the Nuncio, Rev. Agostino Cacciavillan.[16] The Report notes that no investigation took place.[17] But things were only heating up.

In 1999, Cardinal O'Connor engaged the new Nuncio, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, in a conversation about McCarrick's suitability to succeed him as Archbishop of New York. O'Connor warned him that there are "some elements of a moral nature that advised against" consideration of McCarrick's candidacy.[18] Influencing O'Connor were psychiatric reports on one of McCarrick's seminarian victims; a graphic account of McCarrick's behavior was provided.[19]

At the same time that McCarrick was being considered for the New York archdiocese, he was being assessed as a candidate to assume the duties at two other dioceses. He received the support of several bishops, who rallied to his side. Washington Archbishop James Cardinal Hickey named McCarrick as his number one choice for promotion.[20] Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston, was also supportive of McCarrick's candidacy, admitting, however, that "from time to time 'a cloud' appeared over McCarrick's head regarding what he termed a 'misplaced affection.'" [21] Others might call it sexual abuse.

O'Connor proved his chops when he wrote a six-page letter to Nuncio Montalvo; the letter was dated October 28, 1999.[22] It was so personal and confidential that the Archdiocese of New York does not have a copy of it.[23] But the Vatican does.

The case made against McCarrick was sober and convincing. O'Connor relied on the findings of Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist from Pennsylvania, and Monsignor James Cassidy, a psychologist from the Archdiocese of New York.[24] I did not know Cassidy (he died in 2015), but I have spoken to Fitzgibbons, and I am well aware of his outstanding work. I hold him in high regard. O'Connor did as well.

At the end of his letter, O'Connor said that he could not "in conscience, recommend His Excellency, Archbishop McCarrick for promotion to higher office..."[25] As we know, McCarrick had a wide network of allies, and they proved to be decisive, but not before McCarrick had a chance to weigh in against O'Connor.

On August 6, 2000, three months after O'Connor died, McCarrick wrote to Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, particular secretary to Pope John Paul II, addressing O'Connor's allegations against him.[26] McCarrick admitted that friends of his in the Curia came across O'Connor's letter and "tipped me off about it." [27]

McCarrick accused O'Connor of "deeply attacking my life as a bishop," saying he knew O'Connor "did not want me as his successor." [28] He was apparently clueless as to why. Worse, he lied when he said, "I have never had sexual relations with any person, male or female, young or old, cleric or lay, nor have I ever abused another person or treated them with disrespect." [29]

It is a source of great disappointment that Pope John Paul II believed McCarrick, not O'Connor.[30] Whether it was his experience in Poland of hearing malicious lies about priests, as some have suggested, or his being surrounded by dupes, it is not clear. Perhaps both. According to Archbishop Viganò, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, was the one most responsible for convincing the pope to side with McCarrick.[31]

McCarrick did not succeed O'Connor but he was appointed Archbishop of Washington. He served from 2001 to 2006, without new accusations being made against him.[32] But he was confronted by Susan Gibbs, the archdiocese's communications director, and CNN reporter Connie Chung, about past allegations. He denied them all, admitting only to sharing beds with seminarians (as if this wasn't a problem in itself).[33]

On the eve of his 75th birthday, McCarrick submitted his required resignation to Pope Benedict XVI. Nuncio Montalvo wanted McCarrick to stay on for another two years, and Benedict agreed.[34] But then new information about McCarrick's homosexual advances came to the pope's attention, and he quickly reversed his decision. McCarrick was told of the Holy Father's desire that he "immediately resign as Archbishop of Washington." [35] On May 16, 2006, Benedict accepted McCarrick's resignation.[36] His problems, however, were only beginning.

A month later, an attorney representing a priest who said McCarrick abused him met with Vatican officials. The priest described a fishing trip in upstate New York that took place in 1987. McCarrick invited him and two other priests to go with him. They had dinner and then went back to a local hotel to watch TV. Shortly after going to bed, the priest "rolled over and noticed the Archbishop and another priest having sex on another double bed. At that point the Archbishop noticed that I was looking and invited me to be 'next.' The other priest laughed and joked at the Archbishop's invitation for me to have sex with him." [37] Though shaken, he did not accept the invitation.

The priest subsequently offered more testimony about another incident. The Diocese of Metuchen reached a settlement with his claims in November 2006.[38]

More problems emerged when Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine

monk and psychotherapist, sent a letter to Pope Benedict about McCarrick's sexual misconduct, providing a lot of information, including reports by Catholic journalist Matt Abbott.[39] Though Sipe's letter was posted on the internet, it received little attention by the media. Fortunately, it wasn't ignored in Rome.

In 2006, and again in 2008, Archbishop Viganò sent a memorandum to Pope Benedict XVI about what Sipe had said, and what he himself had learned about McCarrick.[40] The evidence of McCarrick's misconduct was mounting, becoming ever more difficult to deny, though some still tried to defend him. Among them was Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who lived with McCarrick for 6 years in Washington. He claims he never heard of any wrongdoing, and indeed "never suspected, or ever had reason to suspect, any inappropriate conduct in Washington." [41] That would make him unique.

McCarrick proved to be shameless. He was asked many times not to present himself in public and to quietly retire. As stubborn as he was self-serving, he blew everyone off. He even claimed victim status, contending that the proposed restrictions amounted to "persecution." [42]

If there is one big mistake Benedict made, it was not laying down the law in writing.[43] When it comes to manipulative and self-absorbed people like McCarrick, the door must be shut firmly in their face, otherwise they will exploit any remaining opening.

This explains why McCarrick refused to abide by every request to curtail his public appearances—he saw the lack of teeth in the requests as evidence of their flatulence. He traveled all over the world under Benedict, and did so with greater ease under Pope Francis.[44]

When Pope Francis was elected in 2013, he said he never heard of any rumors related to McCarrick's past sexual conduct.

Similarly, he professed not to know of any restrictions on his travelling.[45] He said he assumed that allegations against McCarrick must have been without foundation, otherwise Pope John Paul II would have treated him differently.[46]

On June 23, 2013, Pope Francis agreed to meet with Archbishop Viganò; they met again on October 10. Five years later, on August 22, 2018, Viganò claimed that Pope Francis asked him about McCarrick during the June meeting. Viganò says he told him about “a dossier this thick” on McCarrick. “He corrupted generations of seminarians and priests and Pope Benedict ordered him to withdraw to a life of prayer and penance.” Viganò added that McCarrick had committed “crimes” and was a “serial predator.”[47] Viganò says he discussed McCarrick’s exploits again at the October meeting.

According to the Report, Pope Francis “does not recollect what Viganò said about McCarrick during these two meetings.” In fact, he says he never knew a thing about McCarrick until the Archdiocese of New York revealed allegations against McCarrick in 2017.[48]

On June 8, 2017, the Archdiocese of New York received a complaint about McCarrick abusing a teenage male in the 1970s. Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan had established an Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program to deal with past cases of priestly sexual abuse, and it was this mechanism that proved to be McCarrick’s last straw. This was the first time anyone had heard of McCarrick abusing a minor.[49]

An investigation of this matter concluded that the allegations against McCarrick were “credible and substantiated.”[50] Following the archdiocese’s policies, Dolan recommended that the case be made public. That was done on June 20, 2018, and on July 28, Pope Francis accepted McCarrick’s resignation from the College of Cardinals.[51]

This sad chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in the U.S. is now over. Most of the sexual abuse took place between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. Media reports, however, continue to poison the public mind, having the public believe it is still ongoing. What they are reporting, in almost every instance, are past cases of abuse. Most of the bad guys are either dead or out of ministry.

Had the New Jersey bishops acted responsibly, McCarrick would not have been able to continue with his predatory behavior. How could this happen? Lurking behind all of this is the overwhelming presence of a homosexual network of priests, both in the U.S. and in Rome. They are very good at covering for their own. Until and unless this web of deceit and perversion is owned up to—which it hasn't—lay Catholics will continue to be wary of the hierarchy.

We should not forget the heroes. Pope Benedict XVI has written with great clarity and honesty about the “filth” in the Church. Significantly, he understands the social and cultural dynamics that brought about the scandal as well as anyone. This has angered so-called progressive Catholics.

Their interest is not in telling the truth. Their interest is in diverting attention away from the homosexual origins of the scandal. They, and their allies in the media, continue to talk about the “pedophilia” scandal, when the fact is it has been a homosexual scandal all along. When we fail in the diagnosis, we fail in combating the malady.

Cardinal O'Connor, as we have seen, proved to be heroic. He should be a role model for every priest, regardless of rank. Had it not been for another New York archbishop, Cardinal Dolan, McCarrick might have gotten away with it. How many other institutions in our society, secular as well as religious—many have been plagued with sexual abuse—have ever brought charges against one of their own offenders at the top rungs of their organization? There are none.

There will be much more written on this subject, but for now at least, we have in “The McCarrick Report” a much better understanding of how the breakdown in accountability happened. What still needs to be addressed is why it broke down, and what steps can be taken to make sure it never happens again. That is something I discuss in my new book.

ENDNOTES

1 Archbishop Vigano made this comment on the Nov. 12 episode of Raymond Arroyo’s EWTN show, “The World Over,” Nov. 12, 2020.

2 Ibid.

3 “The McCarrick Report,” p. 91.

4 Ibid., p. 23.

5 Ibid., p. 27.

6 Ibid., pp. 70-71.

7 Ibid., p. 73.

8 Ibid., p. 190.

9 Ibid., p. 76.

10 Ibid., p. 77.

11 Ibid., pp. 84-85.

12 Ibid., p. 87.

13 Ibid., p. 92.

14 Ibid., p. 93.

15 Ibid., pp. 95-99.

16 Ibid., pp. 101-10

17 Ibid., p. 111.

18 Ibid., p. 129.

19 Ibid., pp. 117-23.

20 Ibid., p. 130.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p. 131.

23 Ibid., p. 140.

24 Ibid., pp. 134, 137.

25 Ibid., 139.

26 Ibid., p. 169.

- 27 Ibid., p. 170.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 169-70.
- 29 Ibid., p. 170.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 173-74.
- 31 "The World Over," EWTN
- 32 "The McCarrick Report," p. 211.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 215-219.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 230-31.
- 35 Ibid., p. 232.
- 36 Ibid., p. 246.
- 37 Ibid., p. 251.
- 38 Ibid., p. 260.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 279-81.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 282-86.
- 41 Ibid., p. 290.
- 42 Ibid., p. 308.
- 43 Ibid., p. 298.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 370-72.
- 45 Ibid., p. 394.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 401-02.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 403-04.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 404-05.
- 49 Ibid., p. 433.
- 50 Ibid., p. 434.
- 51 Ibid., p. 435.