

RE: A letter that AMERICA declined to publish

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Drew Christiansen, S.J.
America
106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803

Dear Father Christiansen,

AMERICA has done a disservice to its readers, the Church, and the priesthood in recent articles on the sex abuse scandal and its aftermath. The assault on civil liberties implied in Ms. Marci Hamilton's call to retroactively apply revised statutes of limitation has continued in your more recent article by Kathleen McChesney ("Meaningful Work for Accused Priests," Nov. 20).

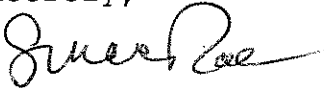
Ms. McChesney's assertion that "[f]alse reporting of sexual abuse by children is very rare," is likely demonstrably true. It is, however, disingenuous to suggest that this assertion reflects the context of The Scandal. The John Jay study indicates that 70% of the accusations against priests were not brought by children, but by adults with claims that were often two or more decades old. Virtually all such claims were accompanied by demands for monetary compensation after the practice of "blanket settlements" became well established. Barring corroboration by those accused, it is simply not possible to always distinguish legitimate victims of tragic abuse from those using the Church's public relations nightmare to commit fraud and larceny.

Ms. McChesney uses some verbal gymnastics to suggest that a "credible accusation," the standard established for the permanent removal, and perhaps even forced laicization, of accused priests, includes not only what can be substantiated, "but also includes what cannot be substantiated but is clearly not false." In many cases, "credibility" is determined with no more evidence than a decision to avoid publicity and settle a monetary demand without any attempt at honest substantiation.

The call for "meaningful work" for those accused appears on its face to be revolutionary, for it is far afield from what is actually taking place. Many priests have been cast aside and adrift by their bishops, shunned by their peers, and forcibly laicized by the Church with no semblance of what a civilized society would call due process. Ms. McChesney's true motive for this call for fair treatment becomes clearer, however, in her suggestion that a priest accused in a 30-year-old claim should be afforded such niceties as "monitored travel" lest he "have the time to seek out new victims."

In a discussion on NBC's "Today," (10-13-05) Dr. William Donohue, President of the Catholic League for Religious & Civil Rights, stated: "There is no segment of the American population which has less civil liberties protection than the average American Catholic priest." Only priests face the impossible task of defending themselves against accusations that are many years or decades old, usually brought without evidence or corroboration, and with a guarantee of financial gain for accusers. Under the guise of "protecting children," a mantra used in many a witch hunt, even a pretense of equal protection under the law has given way to hysteria, and, quite often, greed.

Sincerely,



Gordon J. MacRae

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