

July 21, 2007 – LETTERS, NY Times: Church Sex Abuse Crisis Isn't Over
Re "A Settlement in Los Angeles" (editorial, July 17)

The sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is far from over. In far too many dioceses throughout this country and the world, the church hierarchy's attitude of denial and stonewalling, which persisted for decades in Los Angeles, remains cruelly in operation today.

As Americans we are proud, but as Catholics we are appalled, that it took the intervention of our secular legal system to impose upon our spiritual shepherds the obligations that their own moral standards should have required long ago.

Anne Wilson

Edward Wilson

Brooklyn, July 18, 2007

The writers are members of Voice of the Faithful, an international Catholic reform organization.

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To the Editor:

After Cardinal Roger Mahony's apology for sexual abuse of young people by members of the clergy, John Manley, a lawyer for some of the victims, questioned why the cardinal could pay enormous settlement sums of other people's money and not face accountability for his handling of the issue.

Had the church's canon law been followed, bishops who knowingly reassigned miscreant clergymen would have been held accountable. Canon 1395 provides that a cleric who commits a violation of the Sixth Commandment with a person under 16 can be punished by removal. Canon 1389 states that one in authority who performs or omits an act of governance to the harm of another can be punished by removal.

The bishops shielded themselves from accountability in their Dallas Charter of June 2002, formulated to protect young people in the future. Quick action to remove an abuser was rightly promised. But not a word was said about any bishop who in the future would secretly reassign an abuser.

It was precisely these reassignments that exponentially multiplied the abuse and damage to children.

(Msgr.) Harry J. Byrne

Bronx, July 18, 2007

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To the Editor:

California was the first state to place the interests of victims ahead of perpetrators and their enablers by enacting "window" legislation, which eliminated the statute of limitations in child sex abuse cases for a year. Delaware has now followed that lead by abolishing its statute of limitations for personal-injury lawsuits by victims of child abuse.

These laws give the victims their day in court and the ability to compel those responsible to come to the table. And those responsible can be forced to reveal their dark secrets.

That accountability benefits all of society. Citizens can only gain from learning who has taken advantage of their trust and put children at risk.

The sorry truth is that the majority of child sex abuse victims are locked outside the courthouse before they are even capable of coming forward. The states hold the key to unlocking these doors.

Marci A. Hamilton

New York, July 17, 2007

The writer, a professor at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, is an adviser for abuse victims across the country.

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To the Editor:

Your editorial about the sexual abuse cases had a resigned, mournful tone of sadness in place of the outrage that I think is warranted. Particularly disturbing is the use of the perpetrators' own language in referring to what happened as "sin," which fits neatly into the church's ideology that we are each born in sin.

What occurred was a systematic series of crimes. Sin is a private matter; crime is a public one. Adopting the language of sin affords the perpetrators a dignity and privacy they do not deserve.

Peter Turman, Santa Monica, CA, July 17, 2007

