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Reflections on the Report on the Holy See’s Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. Credits and Doubts

“Woe! It is so shameful to even speak about it. The cancer of sodomite unchastity spreads throughout the clergy,” cries Peter Damiani at the beginning of his letter-treatise written circa 1051 A.D.¹ The author of “*Liber Gomorrhianus*” points out that he knows the problem well as it concerns the milieu he is familiar with, or with which he corresponds. Without a doubt, Damiani observed such sinful behavior in his own monastery and hermitage. Therefore, he could define and characterize such pathologies among the clergy. He also rebuked Church authorities for considering the removal of a sinner from the priesthood only in the case of anal intercourse, while tolerating other sodomite behavior. Damiani enumerates types of conduct that breach the natural law as only man’s attraction to a woman is natural. He also criticizes certain provisions of the canon law as, according to him, they meant excusing the sins of sodomy.

¹ Cf. P. Damiani, *Księga Gomory* [The Book of Gomorrah], transl. by Elwira Buszewicz, in: K. Skwirczyński, *Mury Sodomy. Piotra Damianiego “Księga Gomory” i walka z sodomią wśród kleru* [The Walls of Sodom. Peter Damian’s *Liber Gomorrhianus* and His Fight with Sodomy Among the Clergy], Wyd. Historia Iagiellonica 2011, p. 261.

With his treatise which is rich in arguments and passionately written, Damiani tried to draw the attention of Pope Leo IX and later Alexander II. Pope Leo IX, a true reformer at the Holy See, thanked Damiani in a special letter.² However, he found that sodomite misdemeanors should be punished more leniently than the author of “*Liber Gomorrhianus*” had proposed. The Pope’s words justifying his stance – “we act in a more humane way” – are symptomatic and well-known in historiography.³

This event took place in the 11th century which was groundbreaking: the time of the formation of the European civilization, social stratification, and reshaping the relations between the secular power and the spiritual one. The transition from the oral culture to the civilization of writing was another distinctive feature of the epoch.

The story of Peter Damiani and Leo IX seems worth mentioning as an introduction to the problems of the contemporary Church. On the one hand, they concern the eternally sinful part of the human nature, on the other, they are embedded in the dynamic civilization and cultural context. The moral revolution of 1968 resulted in fundamentally undermining the distinction between pathologies and norms in the moral sphere.

I do not attempt to seek direct analogies between the above-mentioned event from the 11th century and the history of the Church at the turn of the 20th and 21st century. And yet this historical point of reference seems worth signaling – it may be a distant background for analyzing the history of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the Report of the Secretary of State of the Holy See regarding his case.

The report, undoubtedly significant or even a landmark in the contemporary history of the Church, has become the subject of manifold comments, especially in the media. I attempt to recall the essence of the Report as well as draw attention to certain questionable, if not doubtful, issues. This critique of the Report is meant to emphasize the necessity to refine certain actions that are absolutely proper and aimed at healing the community of the Church of Jesus Christ.

² *Biskup Leon, sługa sług Bożych, [życzy] radości wiecznej szczęśliwości umiłowanemu snowi w Chrystusie, Piotrowi pustelnikowi*, in: K. Skwierczyński, *Mury Sodomy*, op. cit., pp. 310–312.

³ *Biskup Leon, sługa sług Bożych, [życzy] radości wiecznej szczęśliwości umiłowanemu snowi w Chrystusie, Piotrowi pustelnikowi*, op. cit., p. 311.

1. Presentation of the Report Related to Former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick

The Report related to former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick was compiled under the Vatican Secretary of State and published on November 10, 2020.⁴ It is a collection of essential information and description of the decision-making processes regarding the former hierarch. For the most part it covers the period from McCarrick's nomination as bishop until 2020. This chronological record has been enriched with testimonies from a variety of sources: the Holy See, the American dioceses, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Seton Hall University as well as the families who had close relations with the former cardinal. The data was obtained during interviews and through the analysis of the submitted documents.

Thus, the Vatican account is a set of information concerning the career of the former hierarch, nomination procedures as well as the functioning of papal diplomacy and the Catholic Church in the United States. The Report is 461 pages long.

The remark in the introduction of the document is significant: "This Report does not examine the issue of McCarrick's culpability under canon law, since that question has already been adjudicated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. While the Secretariat of State's examination was not focused on discovering the precise nature of McCarrick's misconduct, numerous individuals who had direct physical contact with McCarrick were interviewed in connection with the Report. During extended interviews, often emotional, the persons described a range of behavior, including sexual abuse or assault, unwanted sexual activity, intimate physical contact and the sharing of beds without physical touching. The interviews also included detailed accounts related to McCarrick's abuse of authority and power. The individuals' full accounts, which proved extraordinarily helpful to the examination, were carefully reviewed, were made available to Pope Francis and are preserved in the Holy See's archives."⁵

The collected and analyzed factual evidence implies that acts committed by Theodore McCarrick fall into three categories: a) improper behavior and

⁴ The Report on The Holy See's Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick (1930 to 2017) https://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_rapporto-card-mccarrick_20201110_en.pdf (12.02.2021).

⁵ Report on The Holy See's, pp. 2-3.

sexual abuse of minors b) sexual abuse of subordinate seminarians c) maintaining homosexual relationships.

The entire report includes a summary of decision-making processes of the Holy See initiated by Paul VI's nomination: "Following an extensive examination of McCarrick's background, Pope Paul VI appointed Monsignor Theodore McCarrick Auxiliary Bishop in New York in 1977. Most informants consulted during the nomination process strongly recommended McCarrick for elevation to the episcopate. No one reported having witnessed or heard of McCarrick engaging in any improper behavior, either with adults or minors."⁶

The Report includes a fairly detailed reconstruction of the biography of Theodore McCarrick. He was ordained to priesthood in 1958 by Cardinal Francis Spellman and sent to the Catholic University of America to obtain his PhD in social studies. During these studies he started cooperating with the Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. In 1963, having received his PhD, he was appointed Assistant to the Rector of the Catholic University of America and the first Director of Development for the University (a fundraising position). Two years later, in 1965, Theodore McCarrick became President of the University in Ponce and held the post for four years. In 1967 he joined the signatories of Land O' Lakes Statement in which the chancellors of Catholic universities distanced themselves from the authority of the Church and the Magisterium. This did not prevent him from obtaining the episcopal dignity, even though the issue of his signing the letter was known and raised in the nomination procedures. According to the documents, Theodore McCarrick was on the Episcopal list of candidates three times, in 1968 1972 and 1977.

Among the questions posed to the candidate, there was also one regarding his obedience to the Holy See and the Magisterium of the Church. The answers, as the Report shows, were positive and did not raise any doubts. The only doubtful trait of the candidate, pointed out by the opinion-makers, was his ambition. In 1969 Theodore McCarrick returned to New York and started working in the Curia where he became one of two secretaries to Cardinal Terrence Cook. He again engaged in fundraising, this time for the benefit of the diocese. In 1977, at the age of 47, he became Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of New York and was very active in the structures of the Conference of the American Episcopacy from the very beginning. His commitment, assiduity and efficiency were characteristic features of his personality that had been noticed in various

⁶ Report on The Holy See's, p. 5.

periods of his activity. Four years after being ordained as bishop, he was nominated Bishop to the new diocese of Metuchen, and five years later Archbishop of Newark. Again, his diligence, efficiency, leadership and managerial skills played a huge role in making these decisions. The Report shows that after his return to New York, McCarrick made friends with several families, developing close relationships with their teenage boys. He called them his “nephews,” they called him “uncle Ted.” Only one of the mothers considered his behavior inappropriate and threatening. She was the author of the first anonymous letters which presented McCarrick as a clergyman who posed a potential threat to teenage boys.

An important part of the Report is the data concerning the appointment of Theodore McCarrick as Archbishop of Washington at the end of 2000. A year later he was nominated a cardinal. “The evidence shows that Pope John Paul II personally made the decision to appoint McCarrick and did so after receiving the counsel of several trusted advisors on both sides of the Atlantic.”⁷

The Report shows that, at the time, there were already accusations regarding McCarrick that fall into four categories:

1. “Priest 1, formerly of the Diocese of Metuchen, claimed that he had observed McCarrick’s sexual conduct with another priest in June 1987, and that McCarrick attempted to engage in sexual activity with Priest 1 later that summer;
2. a series of anonymous letters, sent to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Apostolic Nuncio and various cardinals in the United States in 1992 and 1993, accused McCarrick of pedophilia with his “nephews”;
3. McCarrick was known to have shared a bed with young adult men in the Bishop’s residence in Metuchen and Newark; and
4. McCarrick was known to have shared a bed with adult seminarians at a beach house on the New Jersey shore.”⁸

According to the Report, “These allegations were generally summarized in a 28th October 1999 letter from Cardinal O’Connor, the Archbishop of New York, to the Apostolic Nuncio, and were shared with Pope John Paul II shortly thereafter. Information regarding McCarrick’s conduct led to the conclusion that it would be imprudent to transfer him from Newark to another See on three occasions,

⁷ Report on The Holy See’s, p. 6.

⁸ Report on The Holy See’s, pp. 6–7.

namely Chicago (in 1997), New York (1999/2000) and, initially, Washington (July 2000).”⁹

Despite the above-mentioned allegations, summarized in the letter of October 28, 1999, and addressed to the apostolic nuncio, it is assumed that in August or September 2000 Pope John Paul II changed his mind and appointed Theodore McCarrick as Archbishop of Washington. The authors of the Report point out six reasons that may explain the Pope’s decision.

Firstly, as a result of the explanatory proceedings conducted by the apostolic nunciature, the allegations were relativized when three bishops provided false or partial information. Second, in August 2000 Theodore McCarrick wrote a letter to Bishop Stanisław Dziwisz in which he rejected the accusations assuring him that he had never had any relationships of sexual character. At that point the Holy See did not have any written testimony from the aggrieved party. The authors of the Report suggest that John Paul II may have acted under the influence of his experience from Poland when the secret service tried to discredit the inconvenient clergymen and hierarchs by spreading false information concerning their morals. The authors point out that McCarrick had enjoyed a good reputation for two decades and was deeply engaged in the Papal foundation. They also mention McCarrick’s acquaintance with Cardinal Wojtyła since 1976.

Another important stage in the case of Cardinal McCarrick is the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. At that time, the Holy See did not have any new information nor irrefutable evidence. The ministry of McCarrick was still evaluated positively. The situation “took a turn for the worse” only in 2005 when the charges brought up by the so-called Priest 1 saw the light of the day. The Vatican supposedly asked McCarrick to resign after Easter 2006. The case of the allegations remained unresolved for the next two years. At that time the then apostolic nuncio in the United States, Archbishop Viganò sent two memoranda to the Vatican.

Although the Holy See did not deploy legal-canon proceedings, it appealed to McCarrick not to attract public attention. This order was given to the cardinal orally in 2006, and two years later in writing. Cardinal Re took actions regarding McCarrick, though they were not officially approved by the Pope due to the lack of sufficient evidence. This is important as according to the canon law a cardinal may be tried only by the pope.

⁹ Report on The Holy See’s, p. 7.

Similarly to the assessment of John Paul II's actions, the authors of the Report describe the probable motives behind Benedict XVI's stance. The key issue was the lack of legal canon proceedings due to the shortage of reliable proof regarding the American hierarch. He swore "as a bishop" that the allegations were baseless. New accusations saw the light of the day only at the end of Benedict XVI's pontificate: the imputation made by a former presbyter from the Diocese of Metuchen. He informed the nunciature that he had filed a lawsuit regarding sexual harassment he had suffered in the 90s. Archbishop Viganò notified the then Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops about the case, who ordered that the charges be verified.

The Prefect allegedly ordered the nuncio to verify the accusations. According to the Report, "Viganò did not take these steps and therefore never placed himself in the position to ascertain the credibility of Priest 3. McCarrick continued to remain active, traveling nationally and internationally."¹⁰

The subsequent part of the Report reveals that the restrictions informally imposed on Cardinal McCarrick were not withdrawn or altered.

The last period described in the Report refers to the pontificate of Pope Francis. We can read that "On a few occasions, McCarrick's continued activities, and the existence of prior indications, were raised with Pope Francis by Substitute Becciu and Secretary of State Parolin. Nuncio Viganò first claimed in 2018 that he mentioned McCarrick in meetings with the Holy Father in June and October 2013, but no records support Viganò's account and the evidence as to what he said is sharply disputed. Pope Francis recalled a brief conversation about McCarrick with Substitute Becciu and did not exclude the possibility of a similarly short exchange with Cardinal Parolin. Before 2018, the Holy Father never discussed McCarrick with Cardinal Ouellet, who was the Prefect of the dicastery with primary competence over the matter, or with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI."¹¹

The Report shows that until 2017 no hierarch gave Francis any documents that would substantiate the allegations against the Metropolitan of Washington. Therefore, the Pope could have only heard rumors and gossip regarding inappropriate or immoral behavior of Cardinal McCarrick prior to his ministry in Washington. The Pope must have thought the allegations were known to his predecessors and found it unnecessary to change the situation.

¹⁰ Report on The Holy See's, p. 12.

¹¹ Report on The Holy See's, p. 13.

In June 2017, the first accusations were presented regarding sexual harassment of a minor in the beginning of the 70s. It was then that Pope Francis was to order explanatory proceedings. As a result, he made McCarrick withdraw from the College of Cardinals. Later the proceedings were handed over to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In June 2018 other victims of the cardinal came forward and on January 11, 2019 the Congregation concluded that McCarrick had committed serious offences against the sixth commandment against both minors and adults. It was also said that he abused power and incited sexual behavior during the sacrament of confession. Thus, the Congregation resolved to expel the American from the priesthood. The appeal by the former cardinal was rejected on October 19, 2019. The decision was approved by Pope Francis.

2. The Report: Doubts and Mistakes

The Report on Theodore McCarrick has excited an understandable number of comments. It has revealed the *mysterium iniquitatis* within the Church. It has shown the drama of the problem of homosexuality in which certain members of the clergy, including bishops and cardinals, are involved. The scope of this phenomenon, which is still being revealed, is terrifying.¹²

The mere fact of the existence of a sin, which may be perceived as structural, may be horrifying. Moreover, this is accompanied by mechanisms of corruption which allow, as one may conclude from the Report, the holding of high-profile positions in the Church. Undoubtedly, the unmasking of evil is an essential element of the self-purification of the Church on condition that it is undertaken consistently and clearly. The Report may be the reason for special analyses, legal and canon lawsuits aimed at purifying the Church and thus making Her credible as “the holy Church of sinful men”.

The Report has also met with criticism as, despite its length, it lacks several crucial issues.

A few American commentators emphasize that the Report ignores the problem of homosexuality among Catholic priests. In fact, one may even conclude,

¹² An example of such unmasking is the book by Dariusz Oko, *Lawendowa mafia, Z papieżami i biskupami przeciwko homoklikom w Kościele* [The Lavender Mafia. With the Popes and Bishops Against Homosexual Cliques in the Church], Wydawnictwo AA, Kraków 2020.

that the document diminishes the crimes of the former Archbishop of Washington.

Richard Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist, made it clear: “My opinion, based on over forty years of experience working with priests and religious (experience affirmed by an appointment as a consultant to the Congregation for the Clergy at the Vatican, 2008–2013), is that the massive cover-up of the homosexual abuse of minors, seminarians, and priests by those in authority positions in the Church, such as Theodore McCarrick, is present in a major way in the McCarrick Report.

Contrary to the Executive Summary, significant credible evidence has been presented in this Report from laity, seminarians, priests and members of the hierarchy that Theodore McCarrick engaged regularly and repeatedly in intense grooming behaviors and physical crossing of boundaries with adolescent males and seminarians.

Such behaviors are most often the result of an earlier lack of secure attachment in male friendships. In my professional opinion, McCarrick has significant but unconscious psychological wounds due to the lack of a secure father relationship (resulting from the death of his father when McCarrick was three), the lack of a secure mother relationship (because of her need to go back to work to support the family), the lack of a secure sibling relationship (not having a brother or sister), and questionable secure attachments in male friendships. These should have been identified when McCarrick was young – uncovered and treated, both psychologically and spiritually.”¹³

Richard Fitzgibbons’ opinion is important for several reasons. He is the psychiatrist who treated the consequences of sexual relations that one of the molested clerics had suffered. He also had his own observations regarding McCarrick’s behavior which he shared with the Congregation for Bishops. However, his remarks were not included in the Report.

His opinions point out an essential problem connected with the etiology of homosexuality and its conditions. One may be surprised that the problem of pressure exerted by the homosexual culture has not been reflected in the Report.

Edward Pentin, of the National Catholic Register, indicates that among certain American hierarchs there is a sort of conspiracy of silence, or lack of courage

¹³ *The McCarrick Report and the need for new protocols* (Part 1), <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/11/11/the-mccarrick-report-and-the-need-for-new-protocols-part-1/> (12.02.2021).

to bear witness to the truth. He gives a telling example: “It [the Report] documents that two bishops witnessed for themselves the inappropriate activity. Bishop James McHugh of Camden and Bishop John Smith of Trenton were present at a dinner in 1990 when McCarrick started physically abusing a young cleric by groping him. Also present was Msgr. Dominic Bottino, a diocesan tribunal judge and hospital chaplain in the diocese of Camden, who was interviewed for the McCarrick investigation.

Bishop McHugh and Bishop Smith, both of whom have now died, saw what was happening, Msgr. Bottino said in the report’s interview. ‘McHugh then immediately and abruptly stood up, in a sort of panic, and said, *We have to leave,*’ Msgr. Bottino recalled.

But when asked in 2000 by the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, to give factual information of any ‘serious moral weakness shown by Archbishop McCarrick’ to judge if he was suitable to be appointed to Washington, D.C., Bishop McHugh denied witnessing ‘improper behavior.’ Bishop Smith, for his part, advised the nuncio that he did not have ‘any evidence of serious moral weakness shown by Archbishop McCarrick.’¹⁴

“Dominican Father Boniface Ramsey, who wrote to Archbishop Montalvo in 2000 warning him of rumors he’d heard concerning McCarrick’s inappropriate conduct with seminarians, said he was shocked to learn that two bishops had witnessed McCarrick’s abuse and then were ‘not entirely frank’ about what they had seen.

‘This isn’t a question of rumors but something evident to them which they chose not to mention,’ he told the Register Nov. 11.

When asked whether this was because of a culture that largely turned the other way regarding homosexual behavior, Father Ramsey said, ‘That’s part of it.’¹⁵

Another intriguing issue is the role that Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò plays, or rather does not play, in the Report. The way he is present in the Report implies manipulation. Viganò himself evaluated the Report as a “continuation of the Vatican fiction.” On November 12 in an interview with Raymond Arroyo

¹⁴ E. Pentin, *Critics Say McCarrick Report Evades Issue of Pervasive Homosexuality in Catholic Clergy*, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/critics-say-mccarrick-report-evades-issue-of-pervasive-homosexuality-in-catholic-clergy> (12.02.2021).

¹⁵ E. Pentin, *Critics Say McCarrick Report Evades Issue of Pervasive Homosexuality in Catholic Clergy*, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/critics-say-mccarrick-report-evades-issue-of-pervasive-homosexuality-in-catholic-clergy> (12.02.2021).

in the program “The World Over” by EWTN the former nuncio expressed his surprise at a peculiar reference made to him by the authors of the Report: “I am surprised to discover that a report in which I am mentioned 306 times accuses me of not having presented myself to testify in this Vatican inquiry of Theodore McCarrick. But according to the norm of the canon law, the calling of witnesses is the responsibility of the one who is in charge of the process.”¹⁶

He also admitted that “it is completely incomprehensible and anomalous that it was not considered opportune to call upon me to testify, but even more disturbing that this deliberate omission was then used against me. Let it not be said to me that I have made myself untouchable, because the secretary of state has my personal email address, which is still alive and has never been changed.

Furthermore, it is also significant to me that James Grein – the only victim of McCarrick’s sexual molestation who had the courage to denounce him publicly – does not appear in the report and that there is no trace of his testimony, in which he would also have reported the trip he made with McCarrick to St. Gallen at the end of the 1950s.”¹⁷

Michał Skwarzyński in his preliminary study of the Report underscores its methodological errors.¹⁸ He emphasizes that in the case of such a study it is essential to confront the documents collected by the American secret service, the nunciature in Washington, the data sent to the Secretary of State and further on to the Congregation for the Bishops as well as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Last but not least, the Report should also analyze the documents held by both of these Congregations. There is no analysis of the documents and their circulation, as the Report is, in fact, a list of the examined witnesses.

Any legal document requires a factual source. In the case of the Report, the quality of the sources and the way they are given may be demonstrated by the following excerpt: “Upon his return from New York, Cardinal Sodano, already aware that Pope John Paul II wished Archbishop McCarrick to be included in the Washington terna, was received at his regular weekly audience by Pope John

¹⁶ Exclusive: EWTN’s *Raymond Arroyo Interviews Archbishop Viganò About McCarrick Report*, <https://www.ncregister.com/interview/arroyo-vigano-interview> (12.02.2021).

¹⁷ Exclusive: EWTN’s *Raymond Arroyo Interviews Archbishop Viganò About McCarrick Report*, <https://www.ncregister.com/interview/arroyo-vigano-interview> (12.02.2021).

¹⁸ Cf. M. Skwarzyński, *Raport McCarricka – Komentarz do “sensacyjnych” zarzutów medialnych wobec Kardynała Dziwisza* [The Report on McCarrick. “Sensational” Media Allegations Against Cardinal Dziwisz] <https://ordoiuris.pl/dzialalnosc-instytutu/raport-mccarricka-komentarz-do-sensacyjnych-zarzutow-medialnych-wobec> (12.02.2021).

Paul II on 11 September 2000. At the audience, Pope John Paul II imparted to [Sodano] certain venerated instructions regarding Archbishop McCarrick's candidacy for Washington." The footnote reads: "583 18 ACTA 15630."¹⁹

From this paragraph one may conclude that Cardinal Sodano on his way from New York to Rome learned about the will of John Paul II, and when in Rome he knew what the Pope wished.

Ignoring the structure and competence of the Roman Curia is another methodological error of the Report. The process of nominating Archbishop of the US capital city must have required the cooperation of several centers of the Holy See: the Washington Nunciature which transferred the documentation from the Secretary of State to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (which conducted proceedings regarding sexual crimes), and the Congregation for the Bishops which deals with nominations. The Congregations through the Secretary of State applied to the nunciature in the country to proceed. Then the Nunciature sent the results of its work to the Congregations via the Secretary of State. Finally, it was the Secretary of State that controlled the outgoing and incoming documents which were decisive for the nomination.

And yet the role played by the Secretary of State and the then Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, is basically missing in the Report. This is no coincidence.

Michał Skwarzyński draws attention to even more fundamental issues that may raise doubts in relations to the Report. A starting point for compiling such a document should be defining its purpose. It seems that one of the aims of such a report should be answering the question: Who would benefit from promoting an active homosexual to Archbishop of Washington? In other words, who would turn to their advantage such a nomination and possible blackmail of Archbishop of Washington? These are relatively simple questions and answers to them should be the heart of the story that explains McCarrick's career. Had the Pope known about McCarrick's homosexuality, would it have been in Pope's interest to expose him to such a prestigious post? It is obviously a rhetorical question. The media have suggested that McCarrick was a brilliant businessman and that he collected a huge amount of money for the Pope thanks to fundraising. Had it been so, it would have been inconsistent to "publicize" such a figure. Whose interest then was it to promote such a person? This question still needs to be answered.

¹⁹ Report on The Holy See's, p. 174.

The authors of the Report do not attempt to answer this question, and yet they accidentally suggest where to search for the answer. They mention the secret service in the People's Republic of Poland: how it gathered information about priests' homosexuality so as to discredit or blackmail them. One may sense at least a possible analogy with McCarrick's case. We may be certain that the secret service, the American in particular, must have known about McCarrick's homosexuality. The American secret service must have been interested in nominating to Archbishop of Washington someone whom they may influence and blackmail.

The already resounding footnote 127 of the Report seems to question such a possibility as rather it suggests that the American hierarch may have been a KGB agent.²⁰

As Michał Skwarzynski writes, "Enlisting Archbishop of Washington by the secret service would mean having an agent who – under the Vatican's flag – would work for the benefit of another country. His engagement in Russia and China proves it. The scope of his actions and influence in the USA may be explained by the shield of the secret service. This also sheds light on his impunity for sexual crimes against adults and minors under the American law. This all prompts us to ask obvious questions and yet no-one asks."²¹

It is worth underscoring another important issue. In the United States, so emblematic to the Western culture, one can hardly overlook the general character of contemporary civilization permeated by liberalism, pluralism and axiological relativism. Other religions have basically adjusted their teaching to the expectations of the mainstream, only the doctrinal attitude of the Catholic Church is still "a problem".

It is impossible to change the doctrine of the Church which was in recent years confirmed and strengthened by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. Therefore, the authors of the Report, indirectly and yet dexterously, try to discredit those who represent this doctrine. The following narrative, not necessarily factually correct, should be endorsed: John Paul II and Benedict XVI covered pedophilia up, whereas the liberals fight with it. Of course, one cannot start with such a violent thesis. Hence the authors ask

²⁰ Cf. Report on The Holy See's, p. 34.

²¹ M. Skwarzyński, *Raport McCarricka – Komentarz do "sensacyjnych" zarzutów medialnych wobec Kardynała Dziwisza*, <https://ordoiuris.pl/dzialalnosc-instytutu/raport-mccarricka-komentarz-do-sensacyjnych-zarzutow-medialnych-wobec> (12.02.2021).

questions, raise doubts, vet the milieu or even defend, claiming that it is “the milieu” and not John Paul II or Benedict XVI who are to blame. At the same time, one must reinforce those on whom one pins their hopes for change. If we manage to label John Paul II and later Benedict XVI as connected to pedophilia, then we may announce their *damnatio memoriae*. This is a Roman tactic used since Caligula: the previous emperor was “banned”, erased from official documents; his monuments were demolished as if he had never lived. His legacy was considered non-existent.²²

This tactic comes to one’s mind when one sees the way in which John Paul II (and his role in McCarrick’s story) was depicted in the Report.

3. John Paul II the Indicted

The Vatican Report has been treated by many journalists and certain political milieus, especially in Poland, as tangible proof that John Paul II played a negative part in the pedophilia cover-up in the Church. The argumentation of the former Jesuit, Prof. Stanisław Obirek, is very telling here. He said: “It is all clear now. John Paul II did have a part in covering up pedophilia in the Church. The Report is a decisive blow to those who tried to defend the Polish pope at all costs (‘The Pope was a good tsar, only his boyars were bad’). Unfortunately, the tsar was also involved.”²³

The above words comply with the entire sequence of narratives which lately link John Paul II’s pontificate to pedophile scandals whose fallout affects the contemporary Church. So, for many years some people have tried to prove John Paul II’s guilt by pointing out the fact that during his pontificate certain priests, who were later exposed as leading a double life, had made huge careers. The examples are: the Primate of Austria Cardinal Hermann Groer or the founder of the Legion of Christ, Marcial Maciel Degollado.

²² M. Skwarzyński, *Raport McCarricka – Komentarz do “sensacyjnych” zarzutów medialnych wobec Kardynała Dziwisza*, <https://ordoiuris.pl/dzialalnosc-instytutu/raport-mccarricka-komentarz-do-sensacyjnych-zarzutow-medialnych-wobec> (12.02.2021).

²³ Quoted after: J. Schwertner, *Prof. Stanisław Obirek: wina Jana Pawła II w tuszowaniu pedofilii jest niewątpliwa; ten raport to ostateczny cios* [Prof. Stanisław Obirek: John Paul II’s Blame for Covering up Pedophilia is Certain. This Report is the Ultimate Blow], <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/prof-stanislaw-obirek-wina-jana-pawla-ii-w-tuszowaniu-pedofilii-jest-niewatpliwa-ten/622qx26> (21.02.2021).

Critics of his pontificate present three modes of characterizing John Paul II's attitude towards pedophile cases. According to the first one, the Pope knew about everything, though as a man living in celibacy, he was not able to "empathize fully with the enormous pain felt by parents who had found out that their child had been raped by someone whom they had trusted more than anyone else, a Catholic priest" (prof. Arkadiusz Stempin).²⁴

According to the second mode, the trace of which can be found in the Report, the Pope may have been distrustful of the accusations towards priests or bishops regarding sexual misconduct as he knew from his experience (as bishop in Poland) that spurious allegations were meant to discredit the clergy and the whole Church.

The third mode suggests that facts about pedophile scandals have never reached the Pope as they had been blocked by his environment sometimes called "the other party."

It is not difficult to notice that each of these "variants" implies a different kind of responsibility of John Paul II. Recently the dominant version implies that the Pope was passive, insensitive and ignorant of the pain felt by the victims of pedophilia. These opinions are popular in the media and as a result one can witness intensifying actions, "de-wojtylizacja", aimed at destroying the heritage of the Pope.

Traces of this attitude and actions are visible in the Vatican circles, which is a disturbing phenomenon. For example, Andrea Tornielli and Gianni Valente's have written "The Day of Judgement. Abuses, Scandals, Struggle for Power. What is truly Going On in the Church?"²⁵ The book is a voice in the debate on the famous testimony of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. On August 26, 2018 the former apostolic nuncio in the USA accused Pope Francis (among others) of tolerating Theodore McCarrick, "a homosexual predator" for five years. The author also laid the blame for covering up pedophile scandals on two Secretaries of State: Cardinal Sodano and Cardinal Bertone.

²⁴ Quoted after: G. Górny, *Czy Franciszek obciążył Jana Pawła II odpowiedzialnością za tuszowanie skandali seksualnych?* [Has Pope Francis Accused John Paul II of Being Responsible for Covering up Sex Scandals?], <https://wpolityce.pl/kosciol/433294-czy-franciszek-obciazyl-jana-pawla-ii-odpowiedzialnoscia> (21.02.2021).

²⁵ A. Tornielli, G. Valente, *Dzień sądu. Nadużycia, skandale, walka o władzę. Co naprawdę dzieje się w Kościele?* [The Day of Judgement], Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2019.

Polemizing with Viganò's thesis, the authors of "The Day of Judgement" emphasize that pedophile scandals are as old as John Paul II's pontificate. Important Church figures, who were later disclosed as pedophiles, owed him their careers. The authors suggest that perhaps the infallibility of the canonization should be undermined.

In response to this postulate as well as similar ones, it is worth recalling the statement of the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato, who

supervised the beatification and canonization processes of John Paul II. In an interview for KAI he explained: "Accusing John Paul II of covering up sexual abuse scandals is unfair. It is John Paul II who with his *motu proprio* 'Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela' of 2001 categorically intervened in order to solve these matters. It is not true that he covered anything up. On the contrary, he was very strict in this regard. One must remember that the sanctity of John Paul II concerns his person. He is not responsible for the sins of his associates or other circles. Just like one cannot blame someone who lives in a family for the sins of his cousin or some other relative. Fortunately, in general, sins are personal. What is more, the Holy Father did not know these facts. If he had known them, he would have ordered a special inquiry. Let us bear in mind, that it was him who asked Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to learn about these facts and accusations, and check what was going on."²⁶

Thus, Cardinal Amato reminds us that it was John Paul II who began the fight against pedophilia in the Church, first in the United States in 1993 and later in Ireland. The moment it turned out that it is a broader phenomenon, he announced the famous *motu proprio* "Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela" in April 2001 where he raised the age of protection of minors to 18 and ordered that all cases of justified suspicions must be immediately sent to Rome, both to the Congregation for the Clergy and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith so that a bottom-up solution of the problem is adopted. Then Fr Charles Scicluna, an uncompromising hunter of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy, joined the Congregation.

²⁶ Quoted after: Jan Paweł II and Benedykt XVI wobec nadużyć seksualnych duchowieństwa [John Paul II and Benedict XVI Against Clergymen Sexual Abuse], <https://ekai.pl/dokumenty/jan-pawel-ii-i-benedykt-xvi-wobec-naduzyc-seksualnych-duchowieństwa/> (12.02.2021).

In 2002 John Paul II again summoned the American bishops to the Vatican. He criticized them for acting tardily. The same year he spoke to them condemning sex scandals and emphasizing that in the face of “this shocking crime [...] people must know that in the priesthood and religious life there is no place for those who would harm minors.”²⁷

4. Conclusion

The Report on Theodore McCarrick is undoubtedly an important document. It portrays a man who made a career in the Church making use of his cynicism and dishonesty of opinion-forming circles as well as excessive faith in goodness and honesty exemplified by John Paul II. It is an example of a phenomenon which is not rare in the Universal Church, which should be strongly emphasized. As such, the Report is of high value as it illustrates a specific *misterium iniquitatis*, which ought to be a serious warning in the Church.

However, according to the Introduction of the Report, it was not even meant to be a moral evaluation of the phenomenon, but an analysis of the procedures that led to such a pathological situation and sustained it. In this regard, it seems that the Report is full of inaccuracies. Moreover, it does not cover the fundamental question: Who was interested in promoting Theodore McCarrick in the Church and why? The Report does not deal with certain relevant sources (state and Church documents) which certainly exist and are of prime importance. Instead, it draws from witnesses’ testimonies which are treated in a selective and incomplete manner.

It is hardly possible to escape the impression that the Report is an attempt at polarizing the attitudes of the popes. John Paul II and Benedict XVI were passive, whereas Pope Francis is active and committed. However, it ignores the fact that it was Pope Francis who designated Cardinal McCarrick to a prestigious diplomatic function: establishing an agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China. It was a mission that has sparked a lot of controversies within the Church.

²⁷ Quoted after: M. Zięba, *Jan Paweł II, pedofilia i zasada nieoznaczoności* [John Paul II, Pedophilia and the Indeterminacy Principle], <https://wiedz.pl/2020/10/09/jan-pawel-ii-pedofilia-i-zasada-nieoznaczonosci/> (12.02.2021).

Last but not least, one must point out that for many readers of the Report and those who learned about it superficially from the media, it is a key argument for de-canonization of John Paul II, which is postulated by certain milieus.

However, in the light of the above-mentioned imprecision and lack of methodological reliability of the document, one must dispel such suggestions with full convictions. St. John Paul II defended dignity of every man, including children, in an uncompromising manner. He unequivocally remonstrated about sexual pathologies revealing the splendor of the truth of love and responsibility. He began his fight against pedophilia in the Church with his documents and, which is worth underscoring, he expressed critical evaluation of homosexuality. Its connection with pedophilia is not particularly emphasized in the Report.

Thus, it seems that the most reasonable way of defending John Paul II and his heritage is to return to his teaching. Certainly, we should also postulate a thorough historical and doctrinal analysis of John Paul II's attitude to sexual pathologies whose tragic expression has been Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

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