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Peggy Noonan gets religion

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

If former Reagan speechwriter keeps writing like she has done over the past couple of weeks, she may get invited to write for the *National Catholic Reporter*. Noonan, a longtime fawning apologist for everything "Pope John Paul II," wrote in her April 2 column:

"... John Paul the Great, about whom I wrote an admiring book which recounts some of the scandals -- I spent a grim 2003 going through the depositions of Massachusetts clergy -- one fact seems to me pre-eminent. For Pope John Paul II, the scandals would have been unimaginable -- literally not imaginable. He had come of age in an era and place (Poland in the 1930s, '40s and '50s) of heroic priests. They were great men; they suffered. He had seen how the Nazis and later the communists had attempted to undermine the church and tear people away from it, sometimes through slander. They did this because the great force arrayed against them was the Catholic church. John Paul, his mind, psyche and soul having been forged in that world, might well have seen the church's recent accusers as spreaders of slander. Because priests don't act like that, it's not imaginable. And he'd seen it before, only now it wasn't Nazism or communism attempting to kill the church with lies, but modernity and its soulless media."

The darling of the Republican right-wing Catholic circuit, Noonan seems to be changing her reportorial tune.

In today's column, Noonan is beginning to write what many have known for years: that the truth will win out, eventually, that the *National Catholic Reporter* has been at the forefront of reporting on this tragedy, and that the Vatican needs women and new blood leading it.

Noonan writes about how the truth, as found in "information," has beaten the Vatican in its latest attempt to re-write history:

"Once, leaders of the Vatican felt that silence would protect the church. But now anyone who cares about it must come to understand that only speaking, revealing, admitting and changing will save the church.

The old Vatican needs new blood.

They need to let younger generations of priests and nuns rise to positions of authority within a new church. Most especially and most immediately, they need to elevate women. As a nun said to me this week, if a woman had been sitting beside a bishop transferring a priest with a history of abuse, she would have said: "Hey, wait a minute!"

Like George Weigel, another right-wing Pope John Paul II cheerleader, who is running as fast as he can to distance himself from that "efficacious leader of youth," Legion of Christ founder and sociopath, Fr. Marciel Maciel Degollado, Noonan appears to finally get it. Better late than never, I suppose.

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