NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Those involved in the Los Angeles cover-up should be held accountable

Mario T. García | Feb. 6, 2013 NCR Today
LA abuse cases

This is my first blog of the new year because of other deadlines as well as the start of the winter quarter at UC Santa Barbara, where I teach Chicano studies, and this is always a hectic time. I thought my first entry this year would be on the second inauguration of President Barack Obama, and I have to say that I was very moved by his inspiring speech aimed at bringing about needed reforms on immigration, gun control, the environment, and dealing with the growing gap between the rich and middle classes and the poor. I am very hopeful that progress along these lines will occur, though Republicans seem to remain intransigent on many if these issues. Obama will have to be more forceful in his second term to push his agenda, but it will also require those of us who believe in that agenda to pressure from below for these reforms.

But I also want to write in my first blog of 2013 about the recent and startling revelations of the priest sexual abuse cases in southern California, where I live. A little more than a week ago, a court order forced the Los Angeles archdiocese to reveal all of its previously unreleased records on these cases, including the information as to how church officials dealt with them.

The church has stonewalled for a number of years in doing so, arguing that it would serve no purpose and only refuel the controversy. In fact, as these released records reveal, the intent was shamelessly to protect not only the abusing priests, but also Cardinal Roger Mahony and his top aides on this matter. One of his top aides -- in fact, his major aide in these cover-ups and accessory to the crimes committed -- was Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Curry of Santa Barbara.

We knew that in the 1980s and early 1990s, Curry had served as vicar of priests in the archdiocese and was responsible for the parish assignments of priests. Hence, he has always been under suspicion of being responsible for reassigning the pedophile priests at that time. The newly revealed records substantiates not only this but that Curry actively and consciously sought to block the administration of justice by doing whatever he could and getting Mahony to approve hiding evidence from the police and prosecutors to assure that the criminal priests were not arrested or subjected to prosecution. The records are absolutely clear on this.

In one documented case, Curry reported to Mahony that it would be best for a psychologist who was also an attorney to treat one of the criminal priests so attorney-client privileges would prevent the psychologist from possibly reporting the priest to the police.

In another case involving Fr. Michael Baker, who had admitted in 1986 to Mahony that he had abused young boys, Curry wrote to Mahony:

> "I see a difficulty here, in that if [Baker] were to mention his problem with child abuse it would put the therapist in the position of having to report him ... [H]e cannot mention his past problems."

In response, Mahony hand-wrote on Curry's typed memo, "Sounds good -- please proceed!!"

Curry's memo with Mahony's note was part of the recently released records and was printed by the *Los Angeles Times* [1].

In still another case involving Msgr. Peter Garcia, another priest reported Garcia had been abusing young boys, including tying one up and raping him. Curry and Mahony did not report this to the police.

The horrors of these abuses go on and on and will only be further augmented by another court order that forced the church on Jan. 31 to release thousands of additional pages of the records of priests and church officials involved in these abuses. This apparently forced the hand of Archbishop José Gómez, the head of the archdiocese, who forbade Mahony to perform any more public duties. In addition, he literally fired Curry. My question is why both Mahony and Curry weren't fired much earlier and why the facts had to reach the public to force the issue.

Gómez isn't himself innocent in all this. Surely after a couple of years of being head of the archdiocese, he must have known about these secret documents and chose to do nothing. I suspect the order to in effect fire both Mahony and Curry came from much higher up, and Gómez was given his marching orders.

But these actions should have occurred long ago, and the records should have been released long ago, as well. What is most disturbing is not just the cover-up but also the fact that church officials like Mahony and Curry, as proven by these new documents, were aware they were breaking the law. They were co-conspirators in these criminal acts. It is deeply disturbing and hypocritical for clergy who preach to the rest of us as lay Catholics that it is wrong to sin and to break the law yet don't apply these principles to themselves. This is intolerable!

Yes, I know the argument that church officials have made that some of this cover-up had to be done in order to protect the integrity of the church, but the fact is that the cover-ups and the participation in criminal acts has hurt the integrity of the church immensely more. All of this because church officials such as Mahony and Curry were more concerned about themselves and the criminal priests than they were about the young boys who were forever victimized and scarred by these criminals, the pedophiles and those like Mahony and Curry who knew what they were doing was wrong and sinful.

It also greatly saddens me that the hard-earned dollars people of the archdiocese put in Sunday collection baskets have been used through the archdiocesan tax on parishes to hire high-powered lawyers to drag the issue on for years. These lawyers tried to aid the hierarchy in covering up crime, stonewalling for six years after the 2007 settlements to prevent the names of Mahony, Curry and others from being released. These bishops went on confirming Catholic youth and distributing Communion year after year as if nothing had ever happened. Even at the last appearance in court, lawyers for the archdiocese proposed that only a list of hierarchy and their dates of service appear at the beginning of each abusing priest's file, with the supervising clergy's names blacked out in the evidence itself. Fortunately, the wise judge denied this.

Lastly, I have to say that I have personally known Curry here in Santa Barbara and have worked with him on some issues that brought together Catholic studies at UCSB with his office. I've always had a cordial relationship with him, but whatever respect I might have had for him or at least his position has been totally damaged and lost. He allowed these crimes to go unpunished by aiding and abetting the criminal priests and even reassigning them to other parishes, where they continued their crimes. Curry not only deserved to be fired, but he should face criminal prosecution with Mahony. In order to come clean now, the church not only in Los Angeles but everywhere must vigorously cooperate with civil officials in these prosecutions. We can begin this cleansing by having our pastors address these issues immediately from the pulpit. But will they to have the courage and ethics to do so?

Source URL (retrieved on *02/13/2016 - 07:28*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/those-involved-los-angeles-cover-should-be-held-accountable

Links:
[1] http://touch.latimes.com/#section/718/article/p2p-74110690/