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by Thomas Reese

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December 7, 2017

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I never thought that anyone could be more stupid than the U.S. Catholic bishops in dealing with sexual abuse of minors, but the Republican Party has done it.

Before the sex abuse crisis began to be exposed by the National Catholic Reporter in the mid-1980s, bishops would move an abusive priest to another parish and try to cover up the crime. This does not happen today. Now any accusation is referred to the police and, if the accusation is credible, the priest is suspended until an investigation has taken place.

President Trump and the Republican National Committee, on the other hand, are supporting an accused child molester for the U.S. Senate. It is as if the Catholic bishops were promoting a child abuser for bishop.

Sadly, the Republican Party has not learned from the mistakes of the Catholic bishops. True, some Republicans are appalled by Moore's candidacy, but the leader of the party and its national committee have publicly endorsed Moore.

Moore supporters are operating out of the same playbook as the bishops did before they wised up and changed their policies. The accusations are denied. The credibility

of the victims is challenged. “Why did they not come forward earlier? Why did they wait so long?” Then the actual offense is minimized. “She was consenting.”

Bishops, because of the shortage of clergy, were often persuaded to keep a priest in ministry because there was no one to take his place. Likewise, the Republicans faced with a narrow majority in the Senate are willing to compromise their ethics in order to maintain their power.

The bishops’ foolishness seriously hurt the Catholic Church in America, and they still have not recovered the trust of their people. For short-term gain, Republican leaders are doing the same thing to their party. Will the public respond with the same outrage that hit the Catholic bishops?

[Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a columnist for Religion News Service and author of *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*.]

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