

CRISIS

MAGAZINE

Is Msgr. Burrill the Tip of the Iceberg?



Gene Thomas Gomulka

As a sex abuse victims' advocate and a former Catholic seminary instructor and formator, I am led to question the validity of arguments put forward by [Rev. James Martin, SJ](#), [Steven P. Millies](#), and others in defense of Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill. For example, in response to [Burrill's resignation](#) as the now-former General Secretary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Millies wrote, "This is the hook on which the 'story' hangs, a long-discredited link between sexual abuse and homosexuality. It is hard to call that something other than a slur and a sin against the LGBTQ+ community." Fr. Martin wrote on Facebook that the article "repeatedly conflated homosexuality with pedophilia" and accused *The Pillar* of engaging in a witch hunt.

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While some argue that there is no “link between” pedophilia—the sexual abuse of pre-pubescent children—and homosexuality, various studies show there certainly is a “link between” ephebophilia—the sexual abuse of teenagers—and homosexuality. The 2004 John Jay Study found that over 80 percent of clerical sex abuse victims since 1950 were young men and not pre-pubescent children. According to [The Gay Report](#), a study by gay activists Karla Jay and Allen Young, “73 percent of homosexuals acknowledged having preyed on adolescents or younger boys.” It is because of this and other reports that the late [Dr. Judith Reisman](#) warned the Boy Scouts of America not to allow gays to serve as scoutmasters. If Reisman was wrong and Millies and Martin are right, how does one explain the [95,000 lawsuits](#) that have been filed against the Boy Scouts that have devastated their membership and have led them to [file for bankruptcy protection](#)?

According to a [2018 study by Rev. D. Paul Sullins](#) of The Catholic University of America, the number of sex abuse cases increased beginning in the 1960s in direct proportion to the percentage of homosexuals in the episcopacy, priesthood, and seminaries. It is because of this development, similar to what happened with the Boy Scouts, that [almost 30 U.S. Catholic dioceses and religious orders](#) have filed for bankruptcy protection. Sullins’ conclusions, supported by a 2011 study, “[Sex Abuse of Minors by Catholic Clergy](#),” co-authored by Richard Fitzgibbons and Dale O’Leary, refuted arguments that the abuse crisis has nothing to do with homosexuality.

What Millies, Martin, and others also omit in their commentaries is that [Burrill worked from 2009-2013](#) at the Pontifical North American College (NAC) in Rome, first as director of apostolic formation and then as the Carl J. Peter chair of homiletics, formation advisor, and director of media relations. While accusing *The Pillar* of engaging in “[homophobic innuendo](#),” Millies fails to question if a priest like Burrill who leads an active homosexual lifestyle was really suited for forming future priests at the NAC. Seminarians, like children, learn more from what those in charge of them do than what they say.

Millies, an associate professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, also ignored that the case of Burrill represents only one of many instances of the Church’s ongoing struggle with homosexual misconduct by highly-placed clerics, which often targets vulnerable subjects. Much in line with Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò’s 2018 “[Testimony](#),” which uncovered a crisis of inconceivable depths, present-day testimonies from [seminarians in the U.S.](#) and [around the world](#) bear witness to a “pandemic” of sexual abuse still ongoing in the Church.

Among one of many examples, Burrill’s successor at the NAC, now the current rector, Fr. Peter Harman, and the vice rector, Fr. Adam Park, are both named in 2021 lawsuit filings alleging, among other offenses, homosexual predation, nonconsensual sexual behavior with or in the presence of vulnerable seminarians, and massive cover-up. One motive posited for their retaliating against [Anthony Gorgia](#), a heterosexual seminarian, is that Harman and Park feared being outed which would have harmed their chances of future promotions in the Church. The Burrill case confirms that they had had good reason to fear exposure, especially with a former [FBI Special Agent in Charge](#) (SAC) finding “entirely credible” numerous witnesses’ accusations that Harman engaged in graphic sexual acts at an orgy with Archbishop George Lucas in the presence of seminarians; and that Park committed multiple acts of sexual harassment and misconduct toward seminarians.

With Burrill’s Ordinary, La Crosse Bishop William P. Callahan, presently on the NAC Board of Governors, observers question why Callahan swiftly suspended whistleblower priest Fr. James Altman but has yet to indicate if the same disciplinary action will be sought against Burrill, as well as Harman and Park who face grave charges and damning evidence against them in the New York State Supreme Court. Callahan is also spotlighted as [one among more than thirty U.S. and Vatican prelates](#) who received and failed to act upon misconduct and cover-up accusations against NAC officials, a failure which left seminarians such as Gorgia no choice but to prepare to bring [damning testimony before the Court](#) as the only means of addressing allegations Church officials chose to ignore.

The news of Burrill, the highest-ranking U.S. priest who is not a bishop, being himself accused while tasked with overseeing the USCCB's response to sexual misconduct, calls into question the USCCB's credibility on the sexual abuse crisis. This comes amid revelations that USCCB officials, [including members of the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations](#) such as chairman and former NAC rector Metuchen Bishop James Checchio and executive director Fr. Luke Ballman, had been informed of and covered up reports of sexual predation at the NAC.

In light of the fact that [numerous seminarians](#) have been coming forward with recent allegations of retaliatory homosexual subcultures plaguing seminaries across the country, one can only question the arguments advanced by Millies and Martin that attempt to excuse misconduct not only on the part of Burrill but also hundreds of other priests who may be next to be outed.

[Photo Credit: Unsplash]

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