

Two editorials from the New York Times are worthy of your consideration. The first, from the Times blog on July 10, considers the Vatican's response to President Obama's visit, through the eyes of four observers: John Allen from the National Catholic Reporter; James Martin, S.J.; M. Cathleen Kaveny, professor of law and theology; and Colleen Carroll Campbell, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. The column is entitled, "Does Obama Have a Friend in the Vatican?" and is available at <http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/10/does-obama-have-a-friend-in-the-vatican/?em>

Why does the American Catholic leadership seem to be focused on abortion, while the Vatican appears willing to view that issue as merely one among many on which to judge a political leader?

- [John L. Allen Jr.](#)
 - [James Martin](#)
 - [M. Cathleen Kaveny](#)
 - [Colleen Carroll Campbell](#)
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The next editorial, July 12, sheds light on the Vatican investigation of women religious.

What the Sisters Are Up To

By Francis X. Clines

Across 30 years, the modern version of the Sisters of St. Joseph has been revolutionizing the treatment of imprisoned women in New York. Thanks to the nuns' efforts, mothers are now allowed to care for their infants on the inside and remain close to their children in creative visitors' programs. Once they are paroled, these women and their children can find a year's shelter in one of nine Providence House sanctuaries the nuns created in defunct city rectories and convents.

The order has never lacked courage: five members were guillotined in the French Revolution for giving shelter to the hunted. Now it is the bewildered community of American nuns that is the subject of two sweeping Vatican investigations. The question is whether the sisters are "living in fidelity" to the religious life — a question being put to nuns in no other nation.

Vatican investigations called "visitations" usually focus on serious flaws like the pedophilia scandal. So, what are nuns doing wrong? That is the question being asked by the sisters and legions of Catholic laypeople.

“Well, it’s all nonsense,” says Bob Bennett, a lawyer who led the church’s lay inquiry into the priest pedophilia scandal — which, he says, the church has still not fully addressed. He is amazed that American nuns, of all good people, are suddenly being scrutinized. “They are the jewels, the church’s class act,” he says.

The sisters won’t talk publicly about fears that the Vatican’s goal is to push them back toward a more submissive veil-and-wimple past. At the Providence House programs last week, they talked instead about the myriad problems of their ex-con mothers trying to get a grip on life. As ever, the nuns labor at the brink, begging alms to keep their mission going. “Look, none of us are marching to get women ordained,” one sister said in putting down the cliché that they seek to undermine Rome.

Tom Fox, editor of The National Catholic Reporter, suspects the inquiries are steeped in patriarchy and male chauvinism. “Next time, let’s have our women religious study the quality of life of our male clerics,” is Mr. Fox’s advice.

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