

[Opinion](#)
[News](#)
[Vatican](#)



A wooden statue of a pregnant woman is pictured in Santa Maria Traspontina Church as part of exhibits on the Amazon region during the Synod of Bishops in Rome Oct. 18. Several copies of the statue were stolen from the church and thrown into the Tiber River Oct. 21. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Jamie Manson

[View Author Profile](#)

jmanson@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at [@jamielmanson](https://twitter.com/jamielmanson)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 23, 2019

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

When the Catholic alt-right first began clutching their pious pearls about the presence of an Amazonian indigenous sculptures of bare-breasted, pregnant women used at ceremony hosted by Pope Francis earlier this month, I could only shake my head at the ironies.

This cabal of mostly-male, radical conservatives who are fixated on sexual purity were sexualizing a statue.

This faction, who believe that a woman's mandatory vocation in life is motherhood, were disgusted by a pregnant belly.

These extremists, who have as one of their ultimate goals the control of women's fertility, were scandalized by a symbol of fertility.

These "militants," who claim to be fervently pro-life, were revolted by a symbol of the gift of life.

But then on Monday, Oct. 21, things shifted from theater of the absurd to violence against the sacred.

LifeSite News and EWTN, both of which are among the archconservative Catholic outlets that have been publishing a litany of laments about how disgraceful the statue is, somehow came into possession of a four-minute video of two men stealing the statues from Santa Maria Traspontina Church (just steps away from St. Peter's Square), lining them up along balustrade of the Bridge of Angels, and batting them, one by one, into the muddy Tiber below.

At Monday's press conference when the issue of the video was raised, the response from Paolo Ruffini, the Vatican prefect of the Dicastery for Communications, was underwhelming to say the least. As NCR's Joshua J. McElwee [tweeted](#) at the time, Ruffini called the act a "stunt ... against the spirit of dialogue."

Before this incident, Pope Francis has made thinly veiled critiques of the Catholic alt-right's fundamentalist antics. More recently, he has criticized them more directly.

For example, when one of the alt-right characters complained about the feathered headdresses worn by some of the indigenous people at a papal Sunday Mass, [Francis said](#), "I was pained to hear, right here, a sarcastic comment about a pious man with feathers on his head who brought an offering."

"Tell me: What's the difference between having feathers on your head and the three-peaked hat worn by certain officials in our dicasters?" he added, referring to the three-pointed red birettas worn by cardinals.

Monday's disgraceful action demands a clearer, more direct and unequivocal condemnation. These iconoclastic men, whose behavior was another way to boast about their high holiness and unquestionable piety, must be called out for the hypocritical thugs they are.

These men's misdeed was not a "stunt"; it was a desecration. If someone had entered that church and stolen a cross or a statue of Mary, and done the same thing, how different would the Vatican's response be?

This desecration wasn't an act against a "spirit of dialogue," it was act of religious violence that undoubtedly terrorized a people who already [live in constant fear](#).

This act of terrorism was also profoundly racist and misogynist, and reasserts the neocolonial, white supremacist mentality that is at the root of the destruction of the Amazon and its native peoples.

Advertisement

It was also a crime. Will those men be sought out and arrested? The Vatican has not said.

I understand that the Catholic alt-right crave constant attention, and that acknowledging their fundamentalist antics gives them credibility that they certainly do not deserve, but what happened Monday turned what has been a sideshow into something far more sinister.

Anyone with a sense of the sacred who is listening to the voices of the indigenous people of the Pan-Amazonia knows that few people and few places reflect the body of the crucified Christ in the way this land and its people do.

These people have come humbly to the Vatican asking for justice. They were led to believe that this place would be a sanctuary for them. To let this vile act go without denunciation not only deepens their wounds, it compounds the injustices that already afflict them, and shatters whatever sense of dignity and safety they may have been given in their welcome here.

At Tuesday's press conference, not a word was said about this crime. And there is no sense that the Vatican will be offering any further statement.

But on Wednesday morning, [George Weigel called](#) these criminals "bold souls."

It time for the Vatican to act boldly and denounce both this crime and the increasingly unhinged, anti-Christian zealots who incited it.

[Jamie L. Manson is NCR books editor and an award-winning columnist at the National Catholic Reporter. Follow her on Twitter: [@jamielmanson](#).]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Jamie Manson's column, "Grace on the Margins," is posted to [NCRonline](#). Sign up [here](#).

[Read this next: Editorial: Desecration of Amazonian mother statues was a racist act](#)

This story appears in the **Synod for the Amazon** feature series. [View the full series](#)