

Clerical Sexual Abuse of Minors: An Ecclesial Response

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Thoughts on Clerical Sexual Abuse

by Michael P. Joyce, C.M.

1) Historical Development of Conscientiousness in the Church

- a) In U.S. began in 1984
- b) American bishops addressed it and came to particular law in 1994
- c) Prior to 2002, priests sent to psychological treatment were frequently assessed to be able to return to public ministry and were reinstated by their ordinary
- d) Reached apex in Boston in 2002 with allegations against bishops of “cover up”
- e) Outcry from Christian faithful about the assignment of offending clergy
- f) Meeting of American bishops in Dallas, June 2002, resulting in *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (revised 2005)
- g) *Charter* followed by *Essential Norms*: particular law for the Church in the U.S. effective for three years in 2003

2) Penal law for clerics who sexually abuse minors

- a) *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*: universal law for violations of the Eucharist, the sacrament of penance, and sexual abuse of minors
- b) *Essential Norms* promulgated as particular law indefinitely in 2006
- c) This use of penal procedures is new and being developed, “making it up as we go along”
- d) Responses (or reactions) different by bishops and by superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

3) Some challenges

- a) Distinction between sexual abuse of pre-pubescent children (*Pedophilia*) and sexual abuse of adolescent minors (*Ephebophilia*)
- b) Seriousness of offense related not only to violation of natural law, but also to psychological and emotional harm done to victim
- c) John Paul's statement to American cardinals in 2002 that there is no room in the priesthood or religious life for sexual abusers of children
- d) Finding useful employment for those who have been accused
- e) "One strike, you're out"
- f) A priest is regarded as guilty when accused, even if he later is found to be innocent

4) Distinction between scandal and crisis

- a) **Scandal** caused by sexual misconduct of clerics and religious
- b) **Crisis** caused by the way that religious leadership (i.e., bishops, chancery officials, provincials) addressed the sexual misconduct
- c) In USA, scandal is now moving to the administration of temporal goods
- d) Different directions must be taken for the treatment of the scandal and the resolution of the crisis

5) Forgiveness

- a) Beyond canonical procedures
- b) Gospel response

Talking Points for Ray Dlugos

by Raymond F. Dlugos, O.S.A., Ph.D.

6) Issues needing to be addressed in the internal life of the Church

1. Addressing and acknowledging the shadow realities always present in the life of an Institution, with enormous power over others, charged with a sacred trust.
 - a) The Church, at every level of its life (Universal, Institutional, Local, Parochial, Community, and Individual) has an equal capacity for sin as for holiness.

- i. "Pride lurks even in good works, seeking to destroy them" (*Rule of St. Augustine*).
 - ii. It is not possible to eliminate the shadow realities, but they can be effectively integrated and redeemed, if they are acknowledged with rigorous honesty and not just lip service.
 - iii. Addressing and integrating shadow realities does not require structural change (which seems to terrify the Church), but does require a change in the self-understanding of the Church as safe, good, powerful, and holy.
 - iv. Address the reality that the cause of abuse of any kind at any level is enormous power in the hands of extremely immature persons.
 1. Be realistic in acknowledging the power inherent in Church ministry, especially priesthood.
 2. Develop the idea of human formation in priestly formation and find ways to integrate it in every aspect of initial and ongoing formation.
2. Withdraw from all tendencies to scapegoat individuals or groups as the ones responsible for this scandal.
 - a) There should be no distinction between "good and holy priests" and "perverts, predators, and pedophiles."
 - b) Scapegoating never leads to healing and conversion.
 - c) The elimination of offending individuals from the community will not bring healing and holiness to the community.
 3. Develop systems of accountability and transparency at every level of the life of the Church.
 - a) Shadow realities exert their power most effectively in darkness and in secret.
 - b) Systems of accountability and transparency for individuals require huge cultural shifts in clerical and religious life.
 - c) Ministerial supervision that increases priest's self-awareness and awareness of his impact on those he serves (provide forum for accurate interpersonal feedback).
 4. Deal honestly and realistically with all of the complex aspects of human sexuality and sexual maturity.
 - a) Too much darkness in which shadow realities can thrive.
 - b) Explore how the mission of the Church has been derailed by its acceptance of society's desire for it to be the regulator of marriage and procreation.
 - c) Broaden and deepen the sacramental nature of sexuality; normalize and sanctify the genuinely holy nature of sexuality.

7) Responses by the Church to the External Realities of Clergy Sexual Abuse

5. Creatively and prayerfully engage the tension between the call to be responsible stewards and the demands of justice and compassion for the victims.
 - a) Listen to the Gospel as much as to the advice of lawyers, accountants, and insurance agents.
 - b) Be less concerned about being victimized by false accusations and more concerned about repenting and redressing the wrongs for which we are guilty.
 - c) Find ways for the stories of victims to be told and heard by the Church community without expectation of receiving forgiveness.
 - d) Open the possibility of reconciliation only for the sake of the victim and on the terms of the victim rather than for the easing of distress for the Church or its ministers.
6. Find prophetic and responsible ways to include offending priests within the community of the Church rather than expel them.
 - a) Mennonite Response to criminal sexual abusers whose prison terms have ended: Circles of Accountability and Transparency.
 - i. Include the laity in the process but do not force offending priests on anyone.
7. Proclaim God's outrage toward the epidemic of sexual abuse, child trafficking and slavery, the degradation of women and children through pornography and prostitution, etc.
 - a) Sexual Abuse is an inherent shadow reality of Patriarchal societies, where children and women are viewed as the property of men to be used for the purposes of men.
 - b) Find a way for a Patriarchal Church to challenge the shadow reality of Patriarchy.
 - c) Repentance is only repentance when it leads to conversion of ways.