

Official Church Response to Recent Allegations Against The Pope

VATICAN CITY, 9 APR 2010 (VIS) - Given below is a text entitled "Following Holy Week, Holding Our Course", written by Holy See Press Office Director Fr. Federico Lombardi S.J. and published today on the website of Vatican Radio.

"The debate concerning sexual abuse, and not only that committed by the clergy, continues with news items and comments of various kinds. How can we sail through these stormy waters while maintaining a secure course and responding to the evangelical motto 'Duc in altum - Put out into the deep'?"

In the first place, by continuing to seek truth, and peace for the victims. One of the most striking things is that today so many inner wounds are coming to light, wounds that also date to many years (sometimes decades) ago, but evidently still open, many victims do not seek financial compensation but inner assistance, a judgment on their painful individual experiences. There is something that we have yet to fully understand; perhaps we need a more profound experience of events that have had such a negative impact on the lives of individuals, of the Church and of society. One example of this at the collective level, is the hatred and violence of conflicts between peoples which are as we see, so difficult to overcome in true reconciliation. Abuse opens wounds at a deep inner level. For this reason, certain episcopates were right when they courageously resumed developing ways and places in which victims could express themselves freely, listening to them without taking it for granted that the problem had already been faced and overcome by the workshops established sometime ago. For this reason also other episcopates and individual bishops were right to intervene paternally, showing spiritual, liturgical and human concern for victims. It seems certain that the number of new accusations of abuse is falling, as is happening in the United States, but for many people the road to profound healing is only now beginning, and for others it has yet to start. In the context of this concern for victims, the Pope has written of his readiness to hold new meetings with them, thus sharing in the journey of the entire ecclesial community. But this journey, in order to achieve profound effects, must take place in respect for people and the search for peace.

Alongside concern for victims we must continue to implement, decisively and truthfully, the correct procedures for the canonical judgement of the guilty, and for collaborating with the civil authorities in matters concerning their judicial and penal competencies, taking the specific norms and situations of the various countries into account. Only in this way can we hope effectively to rebuild a climate of justice and complete trust in the ecclesiastical institution. It has happened that a number of leaders of communities and institutions, through inexperience or unpreparedness, have not had a ready understanding of the protocols and criteria for intervention which could have helped them intervene decisively even when this was very difficult or painful for them, also because they were often surprised by the accusations. But while civil law intervenes through general norms, canon law must take account of the specific moral gravity of an abuse of the trust placed in persons who hold positions of responsibility within the ecclesial community, and of the flagrant contradiction with the conduct they should show. In this sense, transparency and rigour are urgent requirements if the Church is to bear witness to wise and just government.

The formation and selection of candidates for the priesthood, and more generally of the staff of educational and pastoral institutions, is the basis for an effective prevention of the risk of future abuses. Achieving a healthy maturity of the personality, also from a sexual point of view, has always been a difficult challenge, but today it is particularly so, although the best psychological and medical knowledge is of great help in spiritual and moral formation. It has been observed that the greatest frequency of abuses coincided with the most intense period of the 'sexual revolution' of past decades. Formation must take account of this context and of the more general context of

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secularisation. In the final analysis, this means rediscovering and reaffirming the sense and importance of sexuality, chastity and emotional relationships in today's world, and doing so in concrete, not just verbal or abstract, terms. What a source of disorder and suffering their violation or undervaluation can be! As the Pope observed in his Letter to Irish Catholics, a Christian priestly life today can respond to the requirements of its vocation only by truly nourishing itself at the wellspring of faith and friendship with Christ.

People who love truth and the objective evaluation of problems will know where to seek and find information for a more overall comprehension of the problem of paedophilia and the sexual abuse of minors in our time in different countries, understanding its range and pervasiveness. Thus they will be able to achieve a better understanding of the degree to which the Catholic Church shares problems that are not only her own, to what extent they have particular gravity for her and require specific interventions, and, finally, the extent to which the experience the Church is going through in this field may also be useful for other institutions or for society as a whole. In this context, we truly feel that the communications media have not yet worked sufficiently, especially in countries in which the Church has a stronger presence and in which she is more easily subject to criticism. Yet, documents such as the national US report on the mistreatment of children deserve to be better known in order to understand what fields require urgent social intervention, and the proportions of the problem. In the U.S.A. in 2008 alone, 62,000 people were identified as having committed acts of abuse against minors, while the proportion of Catholic priests was so small as not to be taken into consideration as a group.

The protection of minors and young people is, then, an immense and unlimited field, which goes well beyond the specific problem concerning certain members of the clergy. People who sensitively, generously and attentively dedicate their efforts to this problem deserve gratitude, respect and encouragement from everyone, especially from the ecclesial and civil authorities. Theirs is an essential contribution for the serenity and credibility of the education and formation of young people, both inside and outside the Church. The Pope rightly expressed words of great appreciation for them in his Letter to Irish Catholics, though naturally with a view to a vaster horizon.

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI, a coherent guide along the path of rigour and truth, merits all respect and support, testimony of which is reaching him from all parts of the Church. He is a pastor well capable of facing - with great rectitude and confidence - this difficult time in which there is no lack of criticism and unfounded insinuations. It must be said that he is a Pope who has spoken a lot about the Truth of God and about respect for truth; and he has become a credible witness of this. We accompany him, learning from him the constancy necessary to grow in truth and transparency, continuing to open our horizons to the serious problems of the world and responding patiently to the slow and gradual release of partial or presumed 'revelations' which seek to undermine his credibility, and that of other institutions or individuals of the Church.

This patient and solid love of truth is necessary, in the Church, in the society in which we live, in communicating and in writing, if we wish to serve rather than confuse our fellow men and women".