

Catholic church and child sexual abuse



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There is nothing more innocent than a child. Mark 10: 15-16 is a daily reminder of how pure and unblemished a child is. To understand the faith and trust we rely on in the Catholic community, it makes you question kind of Catholic community we live in. A community where the protector becomes the perpetrator. A reality where the life of a choir boy is transformed into a staircase of therapy appointments and legal trials. How did we go from confusing power as opportunity? Trust is a strength as much as it is a weakness. Abusing trust with a child who doesn't comprehend the concept affects all future prospects involving trust. Those who were your protectors are now your attackers. Once that threshold of holiness and sacredness is demolished, what is left of the human soul? Unfortunately, we live in a reality where some individuals of the Catholic clergy are corrupt. The leaders we are supposed to model and look to for guidance, are false. They are wolves hiding in sheep's clothing. Another surge of attacks on the Catholic church has exposed these wolves. The outcome and punishment of these cases have overshadowed the critical factor, the victim. Many times over the victim has been forgotten or paid off to keep quiet. No money or gift or promise is worth something to someone where the damage is already done. From the first realization of sexual abuse in the clergy to the ongoing trials and investigations currently, how long will it be till we can return the faith and trust instilled in the Catholic Church back to the victims?

The first entity every problem solver tries to identify is to where the issue first started. Now there is no clear indication as to when it first occurred but there is some insight as to when many allegations were first publicized and strokes of justice was enforced. " As the new millennium was starting, the

Irish Government had established a number of Commissions of Investigations and particularly the Church. Similar inquiries in Australia and litigation in the United States revealed the cover up. Victims were taking their complaints to the police and priests were going to jail. The abuse of children is a serious crime in anyone's laws and language, but the Church was not reporting well-founded allegations against its priests to the police for investigation. These priests were never excommunicated, and rarely dismissed from the priesthood. They were often shifted around to other parishes or dioceses where they continued to prey on children. The striking thing is that the pattern of behavior by bishops in covering up clergy sexual assaults on children seemed to be the same everywhere." [1] The sex abuse by the clergy is not limited in just one location but many therefore revealing a repeating occurrence in the Catholic culture globally. The shifting and moving of these alleged priests show that from higher up in the chain there is acknowledgement of the identification of these offenders yet no legal action was taken place. Victims were minimized and forgotten because after every arrest there was a new allegation or case to investigate. Although the cases had similar factors and events, the victims were all different individuals whose strength and courage allowed their nightmare of a reality be shown and all Catholic Church had to offer were their condolences and a different person to replace that empty slot at that certain church.

As time went on, more discoveries were being made and more cover ups were being revealed. In " 1962 Holy Office Doctrine Shows Church Policy Was Aiding and Abetting, Cover up, and Secrecy, from the Vatican to Bishops, Re Sex Crimes Among Priests"- BishopAccountability. org For

various legal suits lawyers have been trying to get a document admitted into evidence to provide some support for the clients allegations but time after time it became rejected which protected the accused. The Catholic Church had a special document in only accessible to Bishops. It was highly confidential and was not allowed be commented on to be more specific it was named The Crimen Sollicitationis. Established in 1962 until 2001 when an altered version was released. Contained in the 1962 document was information regarding the Vatican's strict set of instructions and procedures on how to properly deal with priests who broke profound canonical laws. In this situation, the proper proceedings of a priest committing sexual abuse to a minor would be explained by this document. The issue pertaining to this document was that it was to be kept hidden from anyone who was not a priest clearanced to handle the investigations. A dominican priest by the name of Thomas Doyle wrote a document containing the instructions and proceedings, " Clergy sexual abuse issues are handled by the Congregation For the Doctrine of Faith..... This has been the case since the 18th century." A lot has changed since the 18th century and yet there was no progress being made. Those priests who were commissioned with investigating accusations of sexual abuse were sworn under secrecy to not discuss details pertaining to that case to the outside world. The public were in the dark, the victims were not given answers. Instead of using the Crimen document to punish and dismiss priests, diocese investigators used it to silence the accusers. Any accusation against a priest for pedophilia, as long as the alleged crime wasn't more than 10 years ago, would trigger a church trial. The rub, however, was that the lawyers and jurors would all be priests sworn to secrecy. " Appeals," is what they called them and these " appeals would

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go directly to a holy court in Rome” in which Cardinal Ritzinger had authority over. Another instance where the Catholic Church failed the victim. With each stride taken further from justice, the foundation and morale the church was built on was being hindered by the Catholic leaders’ decision in protecting their reputation.

Through the enforcement of a 10 year gag order, the Catholic Church kept on finding new loopholes to protect their righteous image. “ Since, however, in dealing with these causes, more than usual care and concern must be shown that they be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and that, once decided and the decision executed, they are covered by permanent silence (Instruction of the Holy Office, 20 February 1867, No. 14), all those persons in any way associated with the tribunal, or knowledgeable of these matters by reason of their office, are bound to observe inviolably the strictest confidentiality, commonly known as the secret of the Holy Office, in all things and with all persons, under pain of incurring automatic excommunication, ipso facto and undeclared, reserved to the sole person of the Supreme Pontiff, excluding even the Sacred Penitentiary. Ordinaries are bound by this same law, that is, in virtue of their own office; other personnel are bound in virtue of the oath which they are always to swear before assuming their duties; and, finally, those delegated, questioned or informed [outside the tribunal], are bound in virtue of the precept to be imposed on them in the letters of delegation, inquiry or information, with express mention of the secret of the Holy Office and of the aforementioned censure.” [2] Namely, priests who took place in the proceedings would not be allowed to talk about it until 10 years later. With cases such as issues concerning rape and sexual

abuse, time is of the essence. Overtime evidence deteriorates and details get lost. With these proceedings dragging on year after year, the cases weaken and with the protection of the church, the priests involved in the allegations continue to practice and sometimes repeat the offense therefore silencing the victim and preventing other victims to come forward. From the 1916-1980s there was a significant increase in sexual abuse of children worldwide Catholic Clergy and religious. If you look at the past decade you can see the same increase of survivors and testimonies being released to the public pertaining to the same issue. By this time the damage has impacted their lives immensely. Some victims resort to substance abuse, some become self- destructive, many have anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder some never see the light of day. There are endless outcomes of how victims let one event transform the rest of their lives but the foremost transformation seen in one who has experienced this specific form of abuse is their loss of complete faith in god.

When discussing to what extent did the Catholic Church try to investigate the sexual abuse occurring within their walls, there was some hostility. In 1997, The Vatican released a letter addressing the alliance the police has formed with the Catholic Bishops in Ireland regarding the investigations. “ The text, however contains ‘ procedures and dispositions’ which appear contrary to canonical discipline and which, if applied could invalidate the acts of the same Bishops who are attempting to put a stop to these problems. If such procedures were to be followed by the Bishops and there were cases of eventual hierarchical recourse lodged at the Holy See, the results could be highly embarrassing and detrimental to those same Diocesan authorities.”

The policy that was put in place allowed Catholic Bishops to work with the police in to help identify suspected pedophile priests. This letter was sent a little while after that policy was embraced and it suggests that this policy is violating church's canon law. The Vatican is considered a sovereign state the jurisdictions of U. S, and other courts are not allowed to cross those boundaries. This letter is useless for the plaintiffs and if one would try to sue the Vatican they would have a less probable chance of winning the case. With this limitation, a victim's case would be considered weak when going against a great institution such as the Vatican. With no validity in a courtroom, many victims thought it pointless to bring their cases to trial due to those cases being ignored. “ I urge you to examine your conscience, take responsibility for the sins you have committed, and humbly express your sorrow. Sincere repentance opens the door to God's forgiveness and the grace of true amendment. By offering prayers and penances for those you have wronged, you should seek to atone personally for your actions. Christ's redeeming sacrifice has the power to forgive even the gravest of sins, and to bring forth good from even the most terrible evil. At the same time, God's justice summons us to give an account of our actions and to conceal nothing. Openly acknowledge your guilt, submit yourselves to the demands of justice, but do not despair of God's mercy.” ^[3] This was a statement addressed to the priest in the Pastoral Letter to the Irish Catholics by Pope Benedict XVI. There was backlash concerning the content of the letter. Pope Benedict addressed the Irish Bishops and commented on how they failed at addressing the issue. “ It cannot be denied that some of you and your predecessors failed, at times grievously, to apply the long-established norms of canon law to the crime of child abuse.” ^[4] Nowhere did he mention a <https://assignbuster.com/catholic-church-and-child-sexual-abuse/>

cover up or the past allegations that the Catholic Church help assisted in the protection of these priests. With the Canon Law being superior and the head of the church disregarding he predecessors and their mistakes, the victims of these horrendous acts were at a standstill. Then he began what was called the Apostolic Visitation. “ The Visitation will identify whether the mutual relationship of the various components of the local Church, seminaries and religious communities is now in place, in order to sustain them on the path of profound spiritual renewal already being pursued by the Church in Ireland. It also has the goal of verifying the effectiveness of the present processes used in responding to cases of abuse and of the current forms of assistance provided to the victims. It will not be an investigation into individual cases of abuse nor a trial to judge past events. The Visitors will have to identify the explicit problems which may require some assistance from the Holy See.” [5] Importantly the press release noted that “ The Visitation does not seek to replace the legitimate authority of the local Bishops or Religious Superiors, who maintain responsibility in the handling of cases of abuse” The Vatican released a Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland. Through this revelation and by meeting the victims and overseeing the catholic community in Ireland there began a shift in how things were to be handled. To an extent, the victims were finally getting the representation and acknowledgement they deserved.

In 2001, Cardinal Ratzinger gained sole jurisdiction for such cases for his Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and began taking every instance of clerical abuse seriously. Then in 2005 Cardinal Ratzinger who was now even more conscious of the severity of the problem, having sifted through

the avalanche of troublesome personnel files coming from the US became Pope Benedict XVI. Since his election there have been no more examples of Vatican sympathy for priestly abusers and their defenders in the hierarchy. After Benedict XVI's papacy some efforts were taken but no serious action was enforced. With Pope Francis currently being the head of the church there is hope that justice will prevail. Pope Francis spoke at the Vatican Summit on Child Protection, with a closing speech many of the audience believed he didn't project what they hoped for. He shed light on statistics regarding child abuse and how many children are victimized year round. "The Church has now become increasingly aware of the need not only to curb the gravest cases of abuse by disciplinary measures and civil and canonical processes, but also to decisively confront the phenomenon both inside and outside the Church. She feels called to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of her mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the little ones and to protect them from ravenous wolves." [6] With this statement Pope Francis introduces the initiative that he is willing to persecute and cleanse the Catholic Church of the corrupted. At the end of his summit 190 bishops were charged on clergy abuse. During the four-day summit, the pope and prelates focused their discussions on three main themes: responsibility, accountability and transparency. Through this summit, the Catholic Church finally allowed the voices from the victims be heard. Their suffering was released and there was an emphasis on the defenseless victims of all, the children. Most of the victims coming forward were adults remembering their past, but the ongoing sexual violence that occurs in the church is predominantly done to the minors. Through this awareness it brought an

emphasis to open your eyes. What goes on beyond the brick walls of a church cannot be ignored no longer.

To further progress his mission Pope Francis wasted no time in releasing his thoughts on this issue. By adding legal changes and enforcing new procedures, Pope Francis has shown he will not put sexual abuse in the clergy on the back burner. By releasing a Motu Proprio which is when a pope releases a document by his own motivation. Pope Francis has taken special interest in this crisis and declared Vatican City State will also receive its own new child protection law and the Vicariate of Vatican City will receive new child protection guidelines. They sanctioned mandatory reporting of sexual abuse to Vatican judicial authorities and extend the statute of limitation to 20 years after the victim is 18. With hope for some progress, advocates and victims continue to fight for justice for the wrongdoings of the church.

The media and news reporters have made it a mission for the victim's voices not to be silenced. In the past, it was perhaps more common to cover up the alleged scandals, but in modern day society, cases are slowly unraveling.

The Catholic Church cannot overlook the proclamations of these survivors.

Documentaries, books, and movies are being made so that their voices can enlighten the world of this darkness hidden deep in the Catholic Church.

Many Bishops placed the interests of priests and the institution above those of victims. By overlooking and ignoring the facts, it demoralized the actions of the Catholic Church leaders. What was once a sacred haven for many Christians to pray and worship, it has now been transformed into a painful memory for victims. Many survivors left the church and their faith. Many strengthen their faith and forgive their offenders, while others continue to

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pursue justice . No one can really know what the future holds, but one thing is for certain. If the Catholic Church ceases to repair the damage that has been done, any hopes of increasing the Catholic community will be futile. Not only will this affect the Catholic Community, but the potential community members considering conversion. God grants you free will. How you determine what to do with that free will is placed on the individual. The Church needs to stop supporting those that abuse authority within the church and let them face the repercussions of their sins with the help of the law. The Church will morally deteriorate if these perpetrators are not penalized for their actions.

” You are the physicians of the soul and yet, with rare exceptions, you have been transformed, in some cases, into murderers of the soul, into murderers of the faith,” spoken by the words of a Survivor telling his testimony at the Vatican Summit it left the audience with one thing in mind. Justice. Justice for everything taken away from these survivors. Canon law and Civil law may have different standings when it comes to what should be done, but in cases like these, there should be no difference when protecting the innocent is at risk. We are still trying to resolve issues that occurred seventy years ago. Although the cases have been reduced significantly since proper procedures have been put in place, there will always be a victim with their story to tell, because although the church may think not all sins are crimes; In the civilization we live in today, a sin such as sexually abusing a child or any individual in that manner will always be a crime so we should treat it as one. What occurs beyond the walls only God knows and although in the afterlife justice prevails, in this life we owe it to the victims to hear them out,

investigate the case, and act accordingly.” I said to myself, “ God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.” Ecclesiastes 3: 17

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[1] Potiphar's Wife : The Vatican's Secret and Child Sexual Abuse by Kieran Tapsell pg 10

[2] Crimen Sollicitationis 11 Vatican Polyglot Press, 1962

[3] Pastoral Letter of The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland No. 7

[4] Press release on the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland

[5] Press Release of Ireland Visitation

[6] Meeting” The Protections Of Minors In The Church”

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