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THE CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS AND THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

At a global level, much valuable research has been published on clerical sexual abuse in the Catholic church. Critical insights gained have highlighted the extent of the problem, and assisted the overall efforts to provide healing to victims. Pope Francis has been particularly active in encouraging the whole Church to confront the issue, and seek for much needed healing remedies. In the Asian context, the issue of clerical sex abuse is rarely approached. This is in line with a general continental avoidance of discussions in any way connected to problems regarding sexuality. This essay will first review some general considerations of clerical sexual abuse on the global scale before looking more closely at the issue in the context of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. Whilst some progress has been made in the Philippines setting, efforts are largely stifled by the cultural taboo of speaking out, the shame of revealing such episodes, the high esteem shown to the Clergy, and the reticence of the Church to vigorously investigate and pursue any such allegations. The recent legislation of Pope Francis (*Vos estis lux mundi*), which makes reporting of clerical

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sexual abuse mandatory, could hopefully go some way in encouraging the Church in Asia to respond more adequately in its mission of protecting minors and vulnerable adults.

Keywords: Clergy Sexual Abuse; Filipino Church; Protection of Minors; Sexual Abuse Crisis; Victims of Sexual Abuse

The first part of this essay addresses some global considerations of the worldwide sexual abuse scandal involving clergy. The second part focusses on the Philippines context and the response of the Church.

1. General Global Considerations

In an apostolic letter on 26 March 2019, Pope Francis wrote, “The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world.”¹ This tells us that the safeguarding of children enters into the mainstream mission of the Church. It can no longer be swept under the carpet, or relegated to the concern of a select few. Rather, this specific mission involves all of us.

One of the main reasons that makes the issue difficult is that abuse is not easy to talk about it.² There is a certain shame surrounding it. But this silence surrounding the issue has been one of the main forces driving the epidemic. We need to speak about this issue, in the appropriate forum, and find the right language and words to express what is going on. Before venturing further into this delicate theme, let us first remind ourselves of how Jesus himself interacted with children, showing his loving respect for them, and expecting his Church to do the same.

1.1. The Ministry of Christ with Children

In an era when children held little sway in society, our Lord showed his loving reverence for them. He closely identified himself with the little ones as Luke’s gospel records: “But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name

¹Francis, Apostolic letter “On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable persons,” (26 March 2019), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326_latutela-deiminori.html

²The Cameleon NGO, which takes care of girls who have been abused, notes that victims generally remain silent as “such incidents “tarnish” the family’s reputation... Most victims adopt the culture of silence and suffer without saying a word.” Cameleon Association, “The Keys to Understand.” Available at <https://www.cameleon-association.org/contexte-aux-philippines/?lang=en>

receives me'" (Lk 9:47). In another moment he cautioned, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven," (Mt 18:10) as well as giving a clear warning, "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone around his neck" (Mt 18:5-7). Christ loved and cared for the children and would have expected his Church to do the same.

1.2. Extent of the Problem

The worldwide media has highlighted the seriousness of the abuse crisis. At times, some journalists have used the crisis to take a swipe at the Church, but over and above this, we would have to humbly recognize the "mea culpa" of the Church, and laud the journalistic integrity of the media in seeking the truth. Specific reports exist from different countries such as the John Jay report (USA)³ or the Murphy report (Dublin, Ireland)⁴ outlining the extent of the abuse that occurred, as well as the more recent Pennsylvania Grand Jury report (USA)⁵ and the "MHG" report (Germany).⁶

Overall, the approximate percentage of priests accused in the USA was 4.0%. The majority of cases were perpetrated by priests ordained from 1950-1980 (although it would be naïve to consider that the problem no longer exists.) Cases of abuse were higher in those decades due to poor screening of seminary candidates, as well as limited formative guidance. The 1960s was also period of sexual promiscuity generally and this lax atmosphere may have exacerbated the problem somewhat. Although many priests abused only one person, a large number had multiple victims.

³John Jay College, "The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950-2002," Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004. Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/The-Nature-and-Scope-of-Sexual-Abuse-of-Minors-by-Catholic-Priests-and-Deacons-in-the-United-States-1950-2002.pdf>

⁴Irish Government, "Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," Available at <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504>

⁵"40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury REPORT 1 Interim—Redacted," Available at <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/>

⁶"Sexual abuse of minors by catholic priests, deacons and male members of orders in the domain of the German Bishops' Conference." Summary in English available at https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Study-eng-Endbericht-Zusammenfassung.pdf

In an interview with then Monsignor (now Archbishop) Charles Scicluna, when he was the “promoter of justice” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he explained:

Overall in the last nine years (2001-2010) we have considered accusations concerning around three thousand cases of diocesan and religious priests, which refer to crimes committed over the last fifty years. We can say that about sixty percent of the cases chiefly involved sexual attraction towards adolescents of the same sex, another thirty percent involved heterosexual relations, and the remaining ten percent were cases of paedophilia in the true sense of the term; that is, based on sexual attraction towards prepubescent children.⁷

The statistics cited by Monsignor Scicluna show that the abuse crisis in the Church was not primarily one of paedophilia, despite what the media might say.⁸

1.3. Contributing Factors

Further insights into factors contributing to the sexual abuse crisis were given by Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, in his pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland in 2009.

Only by examining carefully the many elements that gave rise to the present crisis can a clear-sighted diagnosis of its causes be undertaken and effective remedies be found. Certainly, among the contributing factors we can include: inadequate procedures for determining the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and the religious life; insufficient human, moral, intellectual and spiritual formation in seminaries and novitiates; a tendency in society to favour the clergy and other authority figures; and a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person. Urgent action is needed to address these factors, which have had such tragic consequences in the lives of victims and their families, and have obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing.⁹

⁷Charles Scicluna, “Interview of Msgr. Charles Scicluna conducted by Gianni Cardinale on the Strictness of the Church in Cases of Paedophilia,” 2010. Available at http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_mons-sciicluna-2010_en.html.

⁸Actually, technically speaking, paedophilia refers to abuse of prepubescent children (less than 11 years old) but the majority of victims were older than this. A more correct term, when the victim is adolescent or post puberty, approximately 11-17 years old, is ephebophilia from the Greek word “ephebos” (youth) and “philia” (love).

⁹Benedict XVI, “Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, to the Catholics of Ireland” (19 March 2009), Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100319_church-ireland.html

If one looks at this list of contributing factors one can see many of them present in the Philippine Church today especially the tendency in society to favour the clergy and authority figures, as well as a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal.

1.4. Profile of the Abuser

What makes the issue of abuse challenging is the incorrect perception that may exist regarding the profile of a priest perpetrator. This is well expressed in the Ferns report (from the Diocese of Ferns, Ireland) when it stated:

One of the most striking aspects of the profiles of the clerical abusers that emerged from the Ferns Inquiry and from the Expert Group was that, in certain respects, many of these men were successful, spiritual and even caring human beings. Some were known to be excellent teachers who elicited high academic standards from the young people they taught; most were considered pious and holy; some were outstanding managers and fund raisers while others were described as gentle and inoffensive. Many of these priests were readily accepted in their communities and befriended the families of their victims with ease. The verbal or pictorial portrayal of the perpetrator as a man of unmitigated evil is frequently inaccurate and often misleading, resulting in parents failing to appreciate that the child abuser may be someone with a kind and pleasant appearance, capable of warmth, affection and generosity and of intellectual and professional worth. This benign and unthreatening image can be applied to many men who abuse, not just clergy, and is a key factor in abuse being allowed to continue undetected for long periods of time.¹⁰

1.5. Nature of the Abuse

The crisis of abuse in the Church involved minors and those termed “vulnerable persons.” The apostolic letter of Pope Francis defines “minor” as “any person under the age of eighteen, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent of a minor” and a “vulnerable person” is “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.”¹¹

¹⁰Francis D. Murphy, Helen Buckley, Laraine Joyce, “The Ferns Report: Presented to the Minister for Health and Children,” October 1995. Dublin: Stationery Office, <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/560434/thefernsreport> October 2005.pdf;jsessionid=489B8F866AFD13CC984629AD209B4A4B?sequence=2

¹¹Francis, “*Vos estis lux mundi*,” Apostolic letter issued Motu proprio, 7 May 2019, Art.1, § 2a & 2b, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html

Dr Gabby Dy-Liacco, current member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, explains that sexual abuse can be defined as “hands-on” or “hands-off.” Hands-on involves physical contact such as: rape, sexual assault, production of child pornography (images of child sexual abuse), and inappropriate touch. Hands-off does not have physical contact, but is abuse all the same: watching child sexual abuse (e.g., child pornography), sex talk, sex jokes, sexual comments, and exhibiting sexual acts to others (sexual corruption). Hands-off abuse often maintains and induces hands-on physical sexual violence.

1.6. Effects in Victim of Abuse

Abuse has a myriad of repercussions on the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual welfare of the victim.

Some behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse include:¹²

- Unexplained changes in sleeping patterns; like insomnia or increased sleeping.
- Recurrent nightmares or sudden fear of the dark.
- Crying or complaining for no apparent reason.
- Unexplained fear of adults or certain people and/or increased dependency on a few safe, non-abusing adults.
- Use of explicit language, acting out of sexual behaviours with other children or playthings, and/or creating sexually themed drawings or writings.
- Sudden unexplained drop in grades or skipping of class.
- Not keeping clean or caring about hygiene.
- Overly mature appearance – dressing like an adult or dressing provocatively.
- Indiscriminate sexual activity and seductive behaviour.
- Withdrawal from friends, isolation from peers, preference for adult companionship.
- Increased anger, aggressiveness, moodiness or hostility.
- Poor self-esteem or image.
- Excessive bathing.

¹² Cited by Dr Gabby Dy-Liacco, “Understanding Victims/Survivors,” Basic Orientation Workshop on Safeguarding of Minors (BOWS), Catholic Safeguarding Institute (CSI) of the Emmaus Center for Psycho-Spiritual Formation, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, Philippines, 27-31 May 2019, using sources from the “National Catholic Risk Retention Group.”

- Contemplation of suicide or suicide attempts.

Some physical indicators of child sexual abuse include:

- Bruising or discharge around the mouth, vagina or anus.
- Recurring urinary tract infections or a sexually transmitted disease especially in a young child.
- Wet or soiled bedding.
- Torn or soiled undergarments.
- Rashes, itching, or other signs or trauma in the genital area.
- Unusual odour around the genital area.
- Frequent touching or scratching of the genital area.
- Touching themselves sexually or touching others sexually in public – this especially applies to young children.
- Difficulty walking or sitting.
- Self-abuse where children deliberately inflict pain on themselves.
- Unexplained increase in health-related complaints, such as headaches, vomiting, stomach aches, and other physical complaints.

The devastating consequences of abuse cannot always be grasped just by reading the list above. This is why the Church has been attempting to listen to the testimony of victims who have the courage to speak out. A closer reading too of a few reports from the thousands of documented cases can sometimes jolt us out of any complacency.

One complainant told the Commission that Fr Gallagher would abuse her in confession by putting his hand down her trousers. She was nine years old at the time. He would have an altar bowl and a napkin at one side. When he had finished abusing her he would wash his hands in the altar bowl and dry them with the napkin.¹³

An additional example will suffice to give one an idea of the depravity of the abuse that took place.

Stephen was a boarder in St Peter's in the 1970s and alleged sexual abuse by Sean Fortune who was a seminarian there at the time. Stephen was 13 years old when the abuse started. Inappropriate touching and sexually explicit conversations led to oral sex and masturbation and eventually, after 3 or 4 months, to full and violent rape. The first such rape occurred in a shower cubicle in St Peter's and subsequently five or six incidents occurred in a bedroom in the College. Sean Fortune made Stephen swear

¹³Murphy report, Ireland. Part 2, 354.

on a bible not to tell anyone and warned him that if he did, he would be expelled from St Peter's which would cause great hurt to his parents.¹⁴

1.7. Victim First Approach

In any pastoral response, the underlying principle is to attend to the victim first. In 2012, Archbishop Tagle pointed out, "the first element of a response is the pastoral care for the victims and their families. Pastoral care encompasses justice for them, compassion for them, protection for them, and even restitution in some cases."¹⁵ Unfortunately, in the past there was too much misplaced concern on attending to the perpetrator, to the detriment of the victim's welfare. Often the victim was overlooked, and not believed. Too much emphasis was given to "forgiveness" or "reconciliation" of the perpetrator, forgetting that abuse of a minor is not only sinful, it is also a crime. God is not only merciful, he is also a just God. That is why Pope Francis emphasized that "the crimes of sexual abuse offend our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful."¹⁶ Monsignor Rosetti underlined "when we focus on perpetrators and not on victims, there are devastating consequences. Perpetrators almost universally minimize, rationalize, project blame and deny the truth about their crimes. It is difficult for them to face the truth about their behaviour."¹⁷

1.8. Warning Signs in Perpetrator

There are some warning signs, known as "red flags" which can indicate a person is at risk of offending, or who is already behaving in an abusive way. Although not hard and fast signs (neither is the list exhaustive), the following categories of soft, warning and emergency danger signals may be helpful.¹⁸

1.8.1. Soft Signs

- Lack of peer relationships.
- Uncomfortable with peers.

¹⁴Ferns report, Ireland, 86.

¹⁵Luis Antonio Tagle, "Clergy Sexual Misconduct: Some Reflections from Asia," 5. Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/Reflections-from-Asia-Tagle.pdf>

¹⁶Francis, *Vos estis ...*

¹⁷Stephen J. Rossetti PhD DMin, "Learning From Our Mistakes: Responding Effectively to Child Sexual Abusers," Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/Rossetti-Learning-from-our-mistakes.pdf>

¹⁸With thanks to Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, PhD DMin, for this material.

- Comfortable with minors.
- Interest in child/adolescent activities/games.
- Uncomfortable/denial regarding own sexuality.
- No observable problematic behaviours or complaints.

Where these signs are present, the person warrants greater attention and more frequent accompaniment. These initial signs may point to what is known as “grooming” where the perpetrator is preparing the child for future abuse.

1.8.2. Warning Signs

- Hangs around minors a lot, more than necessary.
- Unusual gifts to minors.
- Keeps “secrets” with minors.
- “Befriends” minors on social media platforms.
- Some minors find him to be “creepy.”
- Adults feel increasingly uncomfortable with him.
- Stuffed animals, children’s games, toys in his room.
- Speaks of children/teenagers as though they were adults; or their relationship as though an adult relation.

The response here is the person needs close monitoring / support, scrutiny and psychotherapy.

1.8.3. Emergency Danger Signals

- Takes children on private vacations/ into private quarters.
- Has hundreds of photos of children.
- “Wrestles” with children.
- Hands “all over” children and vice versa.
- Increasingly intrusive touching of minors.
- Increasingly intrusive suggestive sexual talk with minors.
- Giving alcohol/drugs to minors.

Here immediate intervention is mandated involving removal from formation context, ministerial restrictions, treatment in restricted setting, and upon results of investigation may need to refer to proper authorities.

2. The Church in the Philippines

Looking at the Asian context, Archbishop Tagle noted that “because the Church is a tiny minority in most Asian countries, the

reported cases of sexual abuse of children and other sexual misconduct among priests are fewer compared to the national averages.”¹⁹ There is scant data available in the Philippines Church context. Without this basic information it is not easy to get an idea of the extent of the problem. Referring to clergy sex abuse in the Philippines, CBCP executive secretary Fr Jerome Secillano said in an interview, “Compared to other countries, it’s not that prevalent.”²⁰ But how can one talk of prevalence if there is no data? Bishop Buenaventura Famadico of San Pablo, south of Manila, and president of the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy, told *La Croix* international Catholic news agency that in the Philippines, “no member of the clergy has been convicted or imprisoned for sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults.”²¹ The reporter reacted strongly, seemingly in a tone of disbelief:

This is all the more striking in a country that figures among the primary global destinations for pedophile tourism and which is among the main world providers of child pornography on the web. Moreover, according to UNICEF, one child in four is a victim of sexual violence and incest remains a massive problem.

“All we have are actual cases but no official effort or initiative has been made in trying to get a summary of the data on the national level,” said Monsignor Ramon Masculino Jr, facilitator at the Catholic Safeguarding Institute (CSI) that runs programmes to develop children’s advocates in the Church. “There seems to be an absence of an officially sanctioned body in the national level entrusted to gather all the data regarding the number of cases of child sexual abuses perpetrated by the clergy in the Philippines,” he added.²² On a more transparent note, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, the then President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), wrote in 2016, “With sadness, shame and contrition, we must acknowledge that some members of the clergy have committed these offenses” and later “among our sins of omission we must count as most serious, failing to pay heed to complaints of abusive conduct by members of

¹⁹Luis Antonio Tagle, “Clergy Sexual Misconduct ...,” 2.

²⁰Ferdinand Patinio, “Priests in Sexual Abuse Cases being Probed: CBCP,” *Philippine News Agency*, 22 February 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1062723>

²¹Claire Lesegretain, “Few Sex Abuse Scandals in the Asian Church to Date,” 13 February 2019. Accessed at <https://international.la-croix.com/news/few-sex-abuse-scandals-in-the-asian-church-to-date/9448>.

²²Buena Bernal, “How the Catholic Church in the Philippines Deals with Clergy Sex Abuse of Children,” 22 Feb 2019, CNA Asia, Accessed at <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/how-catholic-church-philippines-deals-clergy-sex-abuse-children-11279602>.

the clergy, and our failure to act decisively against the errant and protectively towards their victims.”²³

When one begins to inform the general public about these issues, the true scale of the problem may start to emerge. I gave one formation about Child safeguarding to a group of around 12 lay people. Afterwards in the group discussion, they revealed to me 4 allegations of priestly misconduct that they were aware of: 3 priests who fathered a child, and a case of a sexual harassment where the priest used sexually provocative language (a form of “hands-off” abuse as noted above) to a young woman. At least one of the impregnated girls was a minor, aged 17 years of age. According to the lay person who shared, the other priests were aware of what happened, as was “the whole town.” Out of “shame” the girl had to leave the town, yet the priest carried on in ministry in the same parish, until today.

In their comprehensive review of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, Cahill and Wilkinson note “an enduring resistance by Filipino bishops to punishing and exposing offending priests”²⁴ although more recently, prominent Bishops here have made explicit calls for persons who have been abused to break the culture of silence. Bishop Pablo Virgilio David said “If there are people in this kind of situation, please do not hesitate to talk directly to your bishops. Do not be quiet about it.”²⁵ Archbishop Tagle explained succinctly the cultural aspect of silence noting,

the relative “silence” with which the victims and Asian Catholics face the scandal is partly due to the culture of “shame” that holds dearly one’s humanity, honor and dignity. For Asian cultures, a person’s shame tarnishes one’s family, clan and community. Silence could be a way of preserving what is left of one’s honor.²⁶

2.1. Exacerbating Factors in Filipino Society

In 2003, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) published pastoral guidelines on sexual abuses and

²³Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “You did it to me!” Pastoral Exhortation on the Pastoral Care and Protection of Minors, 22 January 2016, 1 & 6, <https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/you-did-it-to-me-matthew-2540/>

²⁴Desmond Cahill and Peter Wilkinson, “Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: An Interpretive Review of the Literature and Public Inquiry Reports,” Centre for Global Research School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, 2017, 91. Available at <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/139234/170913-child-sex-abuse-and-the-catholic-church-reaserch.pdf>

²⁵Joe Torres, “Philippine Bishop Tells Sex Abuse Victims to Speak out,” *UCANews*, 19 February 2019. Available at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/philippine-bishop-tells-sex-abuse-victims-to-speak-out/84541>

²⁶Luis Antonio Tagle, “Clergy Sexual Misconduct ...,” 2.

misconduct by the clergy.²⁷ They identified some elements of the Filipino culture that might contribute to situations of sexual abuse, especially by the clergy and religious.²⁸

- Touching is common in Filipino culture but can be problematic when boundaries are not clear.
- Much respect is given to adults and authority figures who could then abuse their position.
- A lack of awareness of the rights of children.
- Family is open to welcome cleric and may let their defences down.
- Clergy seen as possessing extraordinary powers and their humanity is overlooked.
- Silence of victims.

The guidelines pertinently note that “there is, therefore, a great necessity for purifying and renewing the culture of Filipinos and our ecclesiastical culture.”²⁹

2.2. Laws Exist but not always Enforced

A plethora of child protection laws exist in the Philippines but they are not always known, or enforced. Republic Act No. 7610 that the Philippines enacted in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies the forms of child abuse.³⁰ Child abuse is statutorily defined to include:

- a. Psychological and physical abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment;
- b. Any act by deeds or words which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being;
- c. Unreasonable deprivation of his/her basic needs for survival such as food and shelter;

²⁷Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Guidelines on Sexual Abuses and Misconduct by the Clergy,” 1 September 2003 (*ad experimentum* for 3 years), http://bishop-accountability.org/Philippines/news/2003_PASTORAL_GUIDELINES_ON_SEXUAL_ABUSES_AND_MISCONDUCT_BY_THE_CLERGY.pdf

²⁸Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Guidelines on Sexual Abuses and Misconduct by the Clergy,” paragraph 19.

²⁹This is in line with the reminder in *Gaudium et spes* (no. 37) that all human activity “must be purified and perfected.”

³⁰Philippine Commission on Women, National Machinery for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, Republic Act 7610, “Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act,” <https://pcw.gov.ph/law/republic-act-7610>

d. Failure to immediately give medical treatment to an injured child resulting in serious impairment of his/her growth and development or in his/her permanent incapacity or death.

Child abuse in the form of sexual abuse in the home is commonplace. A UNICEF supported study here in the Philippines in 2016 reported that nearly 1 in 5 Filipino girls have been sexually abused.³¹

2.3. Profile of Abuse Cases

The approximate breakdown of abuse cases worldwide is:

- 60% involve sexual attraction towards adolescents of the same sex
- 30% involve heterosexual relations
- 10% are cases of true paedophilia

If 60% of cases involve sexual attraction towards adolescents of the same sex, one could legitimately reflect on whether homosexuality in the priesthood played any role. Monsignor Stephen J. Rossetti PhD DMin astutely observes:

A hotly contested issue today is the relationship of child sexual abuse and homosexuality. There are two positions on either end of the spectrum: one end says that child sexual abuse is primarily a problem of homosexuality; the other end says the two are not related at all. Research has only begun to address this question. But there are some things we do know. First, most child abusers in the world are not homosexual and most homosexuals do not molest minors. However, there is a subgroup of men who identify themselves as homosexual who are at high risk. In two sets of data on priest-perpetrators in North America, the largest group of victims was post pubescent boys. When the perpetrators were asked to identify their sexual orientation, homosexuals or bisexuals were disproportionately represented compared to heterosexuals. Dr. Martin Kafka concluded that while homosexuality is not a cause, it is a “likely risk factor” for abusing young males. The relationship between homosexuality and child sexual abuse is complicated and not fully understood.³²

³¹Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF, 2016. “National Baseline Study on Violence against Children: Philippines.” Executive summary, October. This UNICEF study reports that 18.2% of girls experienced sexual violence: Available at <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/sites/unicef.org.philippines/files/2019-02/phl-nbsvac-resultssummary.pdf>. Other studies report lower rates such as that of Ramiro et al, who state that 6% of girls have experienced prior sexual abuse by the time they are 18 years old. See Laurie S. Ramiro, Bernadette J. Madrid, David W. Brown. 2010. “Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Health-risk Behaviors among Adults in a Developing Country Setting,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34, 11 (November 2010) 847, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213410002243>

³²Rev. Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti PhD DMin, “Learning From Our Mistakes...,” 8-9.

Rev. D. Paul Sullins in a recent article entitled “Is Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy Related to Homosexuality?” in the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, (from the prestigious National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia, USA), wrote “the proportion of homosexual men in the priesthood is correlated almost perfectly with the percentage of male victims and with the overall incidence of abuse.”³³ Rev. Sullins also comments on the existence of distinct homosexual subcultures within seminary formation.

The rise of homosexual subcultures in seminaries accounted for about half of the incidence of abuse but none of the preference for male victims, suggesting that the abuse of male victims was perpetrated by homosexual abusers who were encouraged by the presence or activity of the subcultures to abuse more than they otherwise might have. After accounting for the influence of seminary subcultures, an increase in the proportion of homosexual men in the priesthood by a factor of two relative to their proportion in the general population approximately doubled the incidence of abuse.³⁴

In light of the above, we could ask in our Philippines context: What is the percentage of priests or seminarians in the Philippines with same sex attraction?³⁵ Do we have a homosexual subculture in our seminaries and houses of formation? If yes, what might be the possible deleterious consequences? What screening and formation, both initial and on-going, is required to help the living out of chastity and celibacy?

2.4. “Consensual” Relationships with Adult Women

Five percent of the allegations in the Pennsylvania grand jury report involved adult sexual misconduct. Sometimes sexual relationships with adult women are termed “consensual.” However, this masks the fact that in any relationship with a cleric, a power differential will exist, even if the priest denies or does not acknowledge it. The current understanding of abuse in the Catholic Church considers the category of “vulnerable persons” who are defined as “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.”³⁶ The CBCP pastoral guidelines of 2003 explicitly addresses the problem.

³³ Rev. D. Paul Sullins, “Is Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy Related to Homosexuality?” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 18, 4 (Winter 2018) 671.

³⁴Sullins, “Is Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy Related to Homosexuality?” 697.

³⁵ For a summary overview of the issue see James McTavish, “Same Sex Attraction and the Priesthood,” *Ethics and Medics* 44, 4 (April 2019) 1-4.

³⁶Francis, *Vos estis ...*, Art.1, § 2b.

That some clients in ministry feel attracted to those in church leadership position is not uncommon. This never excuses, however, any form of sexual misconduct. Clergy who engage in any form of sexual misconduct are violating their vows and the ministerial relationship. They are misusing their authority and power and are taking advantage of the vulnerability of those who are seeking spiritual guidance.

The respect and reverence with which people approach the Church's ministers necessarily denotes an imbalance of power and, hence, for clients a vulnerability inherent in the ministerial relationship. This is true to some degree even of sexual relationship with a consenting adult partner, already sinful in itself. This imbalance of power makes sexual behaviour in a ministerial relationship unacceptable and unjust. It is the primary responsibility of the clergy to maintain appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries with those whom they work with or serve.³⁷

It would be helpful to know what percentage of abuse cases in the Philippines involve relationships with adult women.

2.5. Fathering a Child³⁸

When a priest fathers a child, he is guilty of sin, and often scandal, as usually many come to know about his misdemeanour and their faith in the priesthood diminishes. Suspension of the priest should be considered according to canon law for violating perfect and perpetual continence (Canon 277) and for causing scandal (Canon 1395). The child should be supported financially and the mother helped. The priest should be assessed if he is able to live celibately. If it was a one-off mistake, the ministry of the priest may be saved but if the priest is unable to live celibately, the priest should request for dispensation from clerical duties.

If a "priest-father" is allowed to remain in the ministry he must undergo a renewal program. He should not continue to work in the place where he has caused public scandal. Regrettably, this author has heard a personal testimony where the one moved was not the priest, but the girl who became pregnant. Previous guidelines from the CBCP stated that if a "priest-father" who remains in ministry has a second child he will be dismissed from the ministry.³⁹

2.6. Response of Bishops in the Philippines

The Church response here initially seemed slow, but it is now gathering pace. Cardinal Tagle, when he was still an Archbishop, in a

³⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Guidelines ..., Paragraphs 15 & 16.

³⁸ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Guidelines ..., summarizing paragraph 43, B, 1-8.

³⁹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Guidelines ..., 43, B, 7.

speech given at the “Towards Healing and Renewal” symposium organized by the Gregorian University, offered some key elements in the directions offered by the Bishops of the Philippines.⁴⁰ As well as priority attention to the victims mentioned above, the Church response includes:

- Pastoral care for the hurting community, whether a parish, diocese or congregation. The community will be hurt by the sins and crimes of its priests. The community also needs pastoral care.
- The priest offender needs pastoral care. He cannot simply be released into the community as he may continue to offend there. The pastoral care may need to be extended to the priest offender’s family.
- Pastoral care of the non-offender clergy who are often shocked and scandalized to hear of the misbehaviour of fellow priests. The non-offenders may be angry that the image of the priesthood is being severely tainted.
- Superiors and Bishops need pastoral care as they often bear the brunt of bringing perpetrators to justice.

2.7. Formation Issues

The abuse crisis has highlighted the urgent need for formation—formation for candidates for priesthood, and on-going priestly formation. Cardinal Tagle draws attention to the following areas of formation:⁴¹

- Human maturity including responsible relationships, sensitivity to women and children, understanding one’s human and sexual development, and working in teams.
- Ministerial accountability arising from clarity of purpose and identity.
- Purification of motivation for becoming a priest. Is it for the grandeur, the financial rewards?
- Formation in spirituality to discern God’s calling at every moment and to respond in service to God.
- To take preventive steps in the ongoing formation of the clergy. We need to revitalize the community life of priests, common prayer, sharing of resources, spiritual direction, simplicity of lifestyle, and academic renewal among other things.

⁴⁰ Luis Antonio Tagle, “Clergy Sexual Misconduct ...,” 5-7.

⁴¹ Tagle, “Clergy Sexual Misconduct ...,” 7.

2.8. Improve the Liturgy for Children

The crisis makes us reconsider general societal attitudes towards children and their welfare. A CBCP pastoral exhortation on the pastoral care and protection of minors entitled “You did it to me!” in 2016 notes:

children are not seriously listened to, nor are their concerns considered worthy of serious consideration, nor does their condition as children get factored into different forms of human and social planning. Family decisions are made by adults, children’s views set aside as insignificant and deserving scant attention. Put most succinctly, children are not taken seriously at all!⁴²

The attitude in society is often mirrored in the Church with few priests carrying out any form of faith apostolate with children, and few liturgies dedicated solely for young ones.

In the life of the Church, we find this disturbingly verified. Few priests relish an apostolate with and for children. Even the opportunities offered by liturgies for children are hardly optimized in the Philippine church. In most parishes, there is often hardly anything that differentiates children’s Masses from adult Masses, except perhaps for children serving at Mass and doing the readings.⁴³

Some further helpful advice is also given in the CBCP exhortation on the pastoral care and protection of minors: to listen to the voice of children and parents in apostolic planning.

When the apostolate for children and the involvement of children in the life of the parish is planned, parish priests and parochial vicars will do well to include children, especially of a more mature age, to participate in planning, as well as their parents. In these meetings it will be most helpful to learn from the children and from the parents the treatment of children that the children and their parents themselves deem acceptable, proper and appropriate.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Pope Francis commented that “even if so much has already been accomplished, we must continue to learn from the bitter lessons of the past, looking with hope towards the future.”⁴⁵ The abuse crisis has rocked the faith of many lay people, who were so angry not only at the abuse, but also with cover up coming from within the Church. That is one reason why our Pontiff has been very pro-active in

⁴²Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “You did ...,” 2.

⁴³Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “You did ...,” 2-3.

⁴⁴Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “You did ...,” 8.

⁴⁵Francis, *Vos estis* ...

drawing attention to the crisis and looking for ways to respond. In his apostolic letter “As a loving mother” he wrote:

the Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults. This duty of care and protection devolves upon the whole Church, yet it is especially through her Pastors that it must be exercised.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Francis, “As a Loving Mother,” 4 June 2016, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20160604_come-una-madre-amorevole.html