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Association of Moral Theologians of India (AMTI)

**Report: CRISIS IN THE CHURCH: ETHICAL
PERSPECTIVES**

**18-20 October 2019, Joe Beach Conference Centre,
Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu**

In order to overcome the crisis emerged from sexual abuse of minors by clerics, the Church needs to review its structures, concept of priesthood and style of priestly formation, emphasized the Association of Moral Theologians of India (AMTI). The 28th annual meeting and conference of the Association of Moral Theologians of India, held from 18th to 20th October 2019 at Joe Beach Family Resort and Conference Centre at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, had the theme, "Crisis in the Church: Ethical Perspectives" in the Context of the Sexual Abuse Scandal in the Church. Instead of cover ups and trivialization of abuses, the Church needs to respond to the issue with transparency, accountability and traceability, underscored the moral theologians. In this regard, the guidelines given by Vatican and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) are commendable, but dioceses and religious communities need to take steps for an awareness campaign, and to address directly the abuse by the clergy and religious.

The theme of the 2019 annual meeting and seminar of AMTI was decided upon during the 2018 meeting, considering the urgency of the issue, which "has shaken the very roots and foundations of the Church built on the rock," said Shaji George Kochuthara, the President of AMTI, in the Opening Message. Though once ignored as a 'Western problem,' Indian Church is beginning to realize and acknowledge that sexual abuse by the Church personnel cannot be ignored any more, and hence it is an urgent duty of moral theologians to address this issue. Kochuthara emphasized that besides ensuring justice and healing for the victims, moral

theologians have to work to develop new ethical horizons in this context: to fight clericalism and develop a new the theology of priesthood; a more balanced seminary formation; new structures and models of the Church; transparency, accountability and justice within the Church; the concept of sexuality and the need of sex education; and so on.

The annual meeting and conference, in which about 70 moral theologians from various parts of India participated, began with the keynote address by the renowned theologian, Michael Amaladoss, SJ. Referring to the inaction from the part of the Church for years in many cases of abuse by the clergy and clericalism as one of the factors responsible, Amaladoss pointed out that "Clericalism is a real perversion in the Church." According to him, "the terrible reluctance of the clerical culture as a whole to engage matters of sexuality forthrightly and constructively is a grave impediment to ministry." In his opinion, the sexual abuse crisis is basically an "ecclesiological crisis" and emphasized the need of becoming a 'Synodal Church.'

Fourteen papers and seven posters on different ethical aspects of the crisis were presented in the conference. Bijosh M.B., CMI (Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore), outlining the evolution of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church, said that "sexual abuse by the clergy is no longer an unspoken subject in the Church." "Abuse leads to the crisis of faith," and hence "we need a collaborative action between Church authorities, faithful and professionals to avoid future sin and victimization of innocents," argued Bijosh. Amirtham Metti, SCC (Chennai), in her paper, "Sexual Abuse of Women and Children in the Indian Society," referring to relevant data, showed how India has become one of the most dangerous countries for women and children. She also highlighted some of the factors leading to sexual abuse, the consequences of sexual abuse, and emphasized that the "Church should take a bold step forward to empower women and children by breaking down the gender stereotypes, challenging the conventional norms, and by helping them realize their true worth and dignity, thus enabling them to restore their violated divinity." Francis Chittuparambil, OCD (Carmelaram, Bangalore) presented Psychological Perspectives on sexual abuse. Pointing out that human sexuality invites us to be healthy, relational and life-sustaining, he analysed different psychological factors that lead to sexually abusive behaviour, indicating their consequences and the urgent need for the healing of victims.

Based on the Canon Law, various updates in *Motu Proprio* and CBCI guidelines on Protection of Minors and Guidelines to Deal with Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Shaji George Kochuthara (Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore) offered an overview of the “Church Law on Sexual Abuse of Minors and Women.” Although grievance cells and redressal committees are formed in many institutions, it has to be evaluated whether they are actually functional. Another shortcoming, according to him, is that the CBCI guidelines do not particularly address the clergy. Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC (Irinjalakkuda, Kerala), made a critical appraisal of “Indian Church’s Response to Sex Abuse Crisis: CBCI Policies and Guidelines.” She also addressed the gap between theory and practice in such issues, and pointed out that although there are policies, they are not often implemented.

Mathew Illathuparampil’s (St Joseph’s Seminary, Aluva, Kerala) paper dealt with “Combating Clericalism: Ministerial Priesthood in the Serving Mode.” Holding that “clericalism in effect means abuse of power; clerical sexual abuse, especially of the minors, implies severe abuse of power which has to do with clericalism,” he proposed a few means to fight clericalism: emphasize the fundamental value of baptism, reinstating the proper place of lay people; sound theology of the ministerial priesthood; reconsider various aspects of priestly formation; re-examine the existing liturgical practices as to whether they foster clericalism, because of the predominant position of the celebrant priest; synodality in its broadest sense.

Indicating that the “Catholic Church has been questioned by a series of events related to unaccountability and opacity concerning sexual abuse cases and financial mismanagement,” Sunny George Kalapurackal (JDV, Pune), in his paper, “Transparency and Accountability in Church Administration,” stressed that “transparency and accountability are key factors to eradicate corruption.” Referring to the teaching of Pope Francis, he invited the Church personnel to be accountable to the People of God. Joseph Kochuparampil (Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kunnoth, Kerala) deliberated upon the blatant violations of basic human rights involved in the abuse scandal and underlined the duty of ensuring justice to the victims and all those involved. According to him, although legal and retributive justice are important, restorative justice is more important in addressing the issue of abuse, since it helps us to “heal the wounds, repair the broken

relationships and convert the offenders.” Scaria KanniyaKonil (St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kerala), in his paper, “Ethics in Pastoral Ministry” affirmed that “ethics in pastoral ministry is rooted in the good life of the pastors guided by a deep faith in God, moral principles, virtues, and mature relationships.” According to him, both Church authorities and the Christian community need to monitor and evaluate the work of pastors; besides, continual spiritual formation is necessary to empower ethical pastoral life.

Saji Kanayankal, CST (Vidya Bhavan, Bangalore) discussed the Ethical Perspectives on the Financial Administration of the Church. Being an organisation ‘in the world,’ the Church needs temporal goods for the accomplishment of its mission, but in their use, the Church demands pastoral and technical competence, participation, ascetic criteria, apostolic criteria; theological insights such as shepherd, steward and servant will help us to form a better view on the financial administration in the Church. Kanayankal underscored that we have to practise justice, accountability, transparency, answerability, traceability, common good and subsidiarity, for a better financial administration in the Church. “In sexual abuse, the abuser seeks mere expansion of self, tries to annihilate the otherness of the other and looks for the total possession of the other. Love and self-giving are substituted by absolute power,” said John Crasta (St Albert’s College, Ranchi) in his paper, “Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Sexuality.” He also emphasized that celibacy needs to be understood and perceived as a charism of empowerment and freedom, not as a source of power or as a means of claiming superiority.

Anthony L. Fernandes (St Pius X College, Mumbai), underscored that “sexual abuse crisis has grave implications for the training of future priests in the seminary.” In his paper on “Sexual Abuse Scandal and Its Implications for Seminary Formation,” he argued for a rigorous selection process of candidates for priesthood, including psychological tests, introducing new pedagogy for sex education, etc. He also recommends regular services of experts in psychology and counselling for the seminarians, and emphasizes that “priestly formation programme should help the candidates to learn to interact with lay men and women in healthy, professional, and respectful ways.”

George Kodithottam, SJ (Gujarat Vidya Deep Regional Seminary, Vadodara) discussed the civil laws in India regarding sexual abuse,

namely, POCSO ACT (2012) and The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. He also made a distinction between constitutional morality and religious morality and said that morality and criminality need not be coextensive, and emphasized the need of following the demands of civil law in cases of sexual abuse.

Besides the papers, the following posters were presented: 1. Anne Mary, CMC: Preaching Equality and Practicing Inequality; 2. Joseph Royan, CSsR: Clericalism and Clerical Abuse; 3. Daisy George, DST: Abuse of Power in the Church; 4. Jijo T. Varghese Kaithavana: The Spirit of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* and its Impact in the Church in India; 5. Ansa George, SH: Sexual Abuse of Women Migrants in the Indian Society; 6. Nelson Mathew, OCarm: You Betrayed the Trust of the Young People; 7. Shinu Uthuppan: Vatican Financial Scandals and Lessons for the Indian Church.

Besides the papers on the main theme, Charles Irudayam (Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu) presented a paper on "The Issue of Marginalization and Social Justice," and underlined that "social justice is a moral imperative." According to him, we must choose the poor, express solidarity with them, fight for them, and treat their urgent needs as if they were our own.

Marydasan Kizhakkekuzhivila, OCD presented an abstract of his recently defended doctoral dissertation, "Transformation of the Children of God: The Moral Dimension of Christian Sonship in the Doctrine of St. John of the Cross," which was defended at Alfonsianum, Rome, in 2018.

The academic committee consisting of George Kodithottam, Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya, Francis Chittuparambil, Dominic Vechoor, Vimala, Shaji George Kochuthara (Convenor) did a wonderful work in selecting the topics and reviewing the papers. The hospitality offered by Fr Arul Raj, MMI, the founder of DMI and MMI congregations, local coordination by Mahesh, MMI and Vimal Kumar, MMI, and the DMI sisters contributed a lot to the success of the meeting. Besides the president and secretary, Vimala Chenginimattam, the Vice-President, and Thomas Parayil, the Treasurer coordinated the programme.

During the planning session, Mathew Illathuparampil, Vimala Chenginimattam and Shaji George Kochuthara updated the members of the Munich meeting of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World

Church (CTEWC), and invited the members to get involved actively in the new possibilities provided, and to take initiatives.

The meeting also decided to offer extension lectures in different institutions on the theme of the annual meeting. The President and the office bearers were entrusted with the task of contacting various institutions for this purpose. It was also decided that the next annual meeting will take place during the third week of October 2020 and the theme will be “Ethical Response to Migration.”

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Secretary, AMTI