
Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth. Sites of Crime – Scapegoats – Questions to Church and theology: Tentative Answers

Dzimumnoziegumi pret bērniem un jauniešiem. Nozieguma vietas - grēkāži - jautājumi Baznīcai un teoloģijai: pagaidu atbildes

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The article deals with the important problem in the Church and society - sexual abuse of children and youth. Author takes “close look” to this problem in the Church, parental home, family and faces the question of symptoms related to the soul murder and possibility of reconciliation. It is important to search for positive and methodological answers to the mentioned topic for Church and theology. The intellectual strengths of the article deals with the openness and solidarity in searching for the right methodology for solving the problem.

Key words: sexual abuse, Church, family, methodology.

A few quiet sounds to begin with

In my home country, sexual abuse has shaken up the Church and society, and the shock waves can still be noted, not just in Germany – predominantly among the victims, but not only among them, because, thanks to the tremors, even people, who have not been victims of sexual abuse, feel concerned about the issue.

Children and youth predominantly experience sexual abuse in their own families – until today. At the same time, Catholic priests are among the offenders – on a scale which has been massively underestimated so far. I take it for granted that precisely the churches will still spend a long time dealing with this topic, especially when I look at the related questions from the perspective of the Universal Church: the first countries of evil to come out were the US, Ireland and Germany; since 2010 many more have followed, for example Chile; yet around the world more discoveries will come up – with dramatic consequences and troubling questions that have to be asked and which we need to face.

In the face of widespread sexual violence at the international level the concern over the victims may not fade again stealthily for the sake of concern over the Church; the much-demanded culture of taking a close look and listening needs to be cultivated

on an ongoing basis. As the Church, we fulfil our mission by taking the preferential option for the poor, traumatised and excluded seriously. Fulfilling this mission is the more our duty when the Church herself has produced these poor, traumatised and excluded people. Those who only focus on the damage to the image of the Church, disregard the victims.

Of course, sublimation and renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit are needed. But when all too often there is talk of crises as opportunities and of a new beginning – which must seem like mockery to the victims because they can never start all over again – I think that this is inappropriate, even dangerous, when it is meant to herald a gradual transition from the disturbing disclosures to business as usual in the Church, which cannot and must not happen. Much of this sounds to me like a desperate strong man's attitude in these gruesome times for the Church. I prefer the undertones.

The points I am going to tackle are highlighted by the four key words in the subtitle: Sites of crime at first, which means to put the victims centre-stage, to take the offenders out of cover and to sensitise on abuse; then Scapegoats for whom the guilt-ridden are on the lookout; Questions to Church and theology, because the disclosures of the past years also make it absolutely necessary to think of the sinfulness of the Church; and finally Tentative answers, which means approaches to solving structural problems and self-critically identifying the need for change especially within the Church.

In short, it is about the urgent and troubling task to make the protection of children and youth, but also of vulnerable adults, a reality in the Universal Church and around the globe.

2. Parental home, parish house, school building – Sites of sexual abuse of children and youth

2.1. Abuse and violence

About 15 – 20 % of girls and about 5 – 10 % of boys in Germany have experienced some form of sexual violence. As we commonly talk of sexual abuse, this seems to imply that there is also some form of legitimate sexual use of children. Therefore I prefer to talk of violence which is committed in no more than every third case by the evil stranger lurking in the bushes and preying on unsuspecting victims. In a majority of cases the offender stems from the child's family, or at least from the immediate environment, be it the father, step-father or grandfather, or a fatherly "friend"; and in one out of ten cases the offender is a woman.

Where sexual violence takes place outside the family, the victims can at least find shelter with their parents and siblings – to cope with sometimes serious boundary violations that they have been subjected to elsewhere. However, where sexual violence happens inside the family – most of the time over years – the family itself becomes the site of crime. Power imbalances, which prevail in society between the strong and the weak, grown-ups and children, men and women, tragically culminate within a family in the relation between father and daughter, where the father abuses his power and his daughter's trust for the sake of his own gratification. This form of sexual violence occurs most frequently and drastically in the father/daughter relationship.

Objections like "A normal child will defend herself" are completely oblivious to the situation: What is absolutely normal is that a little girl cannot defend herself, but keeps silent about the horrific "secret" of sexual assaults, because she depends on the relation with her father, is not willing to jeopardise the integrity of her family

and often completely ignores the fact that other families are different. Sexual violence committed by one's own father is equivalent to a total assault on a girl's humanity – and can therefore rightly be qualified as soul murder.

2.2. Sexual violence in the family

Such site-of-crime families do not attract attention in society and seal themselves off against the outside world. Class-specific differences cannot be discerned. However the domestic constellation often shows a few common characteristics: an exceptionally needy father in a problematic relation with a mother in withdrawal; a father with low self-esteem who needs sexual activities to feel strong, while his ideals and anxieties do not allow him to indulge in them beyond the family framework, and a daughter who idealises him – and which daughter does not do this at least for a while?; a mother who does not see or want to see anything, who may have been a victim of sexual violence herself and is therefore blind and insensitive to what is happening to her child. Father and daughter form a sinister coalition of those abandoned and disappointed by the mother.

The chronically stressed and humiliated girl develops serious feelings of guilt because she cannot fulfil her mother's expectations, of course also not her father's expectations, and not even her own ones, so she owes something to everybody. Not least because of this, the girl shows solidarity with her family towards outsiders to an extremely high degree. She refuses to grant insight into her family's life and thus massively obstructs access to the site of crime.

Such a family resembles a stronghold which feels encircled by enemies – after all evil is lurking outside – while within these external limits they know no interpersonal boundaries.

The child struggles most desperately with feelings of guilt – while especially the child is not to be blamed at all. So is the father to be blamed? He is the offender after all! Or the mother? For she rejected the father and did not protect the child against him.

Yet, the victim's parents have often been victims of sexual violence themselves. Then they are hardly able to perceive the injustice that they do to their children. Fathers who have been victims of violence are more likely than others to become offenders. Mothers who have been victims of sexual violence unconsciously choose "offenders" as husbands, and thus remain victims. They do not see what is happening to their child because they keep themselves at a distance from what is going on. Such couples are hardly able to positively engage in relations and in the parenting of their children. They are unable to give their offspring what is needed to nurture them, because such parents are hungering themselves and feel disadvantaged. Addressing soul murder means, first of all, to disentangle ties of guilt.

2.3. Symptoms related with soul murder

A bundle of symptoms that victims of sexual violence develop to a greater or lesser degree sooner or later are: depressive moods, weeping seemingly "without reason"; feelings of guilt that the victim develops so as to be able to maintain the good image of her own father in spite of everything; comprehensive feelings of shame that stick to the affected girl like the offender's hands; contempt for her own – disgraced – body in which she lives as if in exile; self-destructive behaviour up to self-mutilation and suicidal ideation; physical and spiritual injuries as well as signs of paralysis; notice-

able submissiveness, the impression to have been betrayed and broken; withdrawal from peers, a feeling of not belonging and detachment.

Affected persons block out entire phases of their childhood which they do not recollect in any way. In a fatal manner this seems to confirm what offenders like to think: that children forget anyway. Nonetheless they develop strongly conflict-laden relationships which are marked by massive ambivalences. Sexualisation also happens, that is the view of non-sexual relations as something sexual, the fusion of sexuality and violence, and the phenomenon that sexual contacts are primarily possible with strangers – to the point of prostitution. Thus it becomes possible, in the future, to avoid dependency on an emotionally attached person, like the father.

Often sudden flashbacks happen in young adults, that is, unexpected powerful sensory recollections of violent experiences suppressed so far, against the disclosure of which the child had to protect herself for the mere sake of surviving. These “pieces of memory” set in motion a very painful process that the affected person can never cope with alone. Professional support is absolutely necessary. What forms of assistance are possible from a practical point of view? Is reconciliation – with one’s own story of origin – possible at all?

2.4. Possibility and impossibility of reconciliation

Forgiving each other and reconciling are vital, but practically impossible or hard-to-reach goals in dealing with offenders and victims. In this regard, the wish for reconciliation must not deprive victims of their right to feel and articulate anger, and to develop their personal revenge fantasies. Some questions come up: Can human beings forgive someone who has deprived them of the basis of their existence, who committed soul murder to them? Can human beings forgive their mothers who did not protect them? Can human beings forgive their fathers who may have repressed the memory of what they did and who are unwilling to admit their guilt? Can human beings reconcile with themselves, their stories of origin, their broken childhood and their broken existence? Can they get into touch with the child they used to be and whose soul was murdered?

This child can only live if the victim of violence abandons the role of victim one day. Often, affected individuals – understandably – run the risk of perpetuating themselves in their roles as victims. This prevents them from living, but gives their non-life orientation and structure. Some women hold on to their role as victims, because they fear to betray the violated child in giving up their role as victims. They have taken many years to find access to and endure the truth of this child and feel a strong resistance against letting go. Yet, in the end, it is not about abandoning the wounded child, but about building a new house where the child is allowed to be free and feel comfortable.

Sometimes I hear of appeals to affected persons in the sense that even Jesus forgave his executioners on the cross. Not so at all! Jesus did not turn to them, but to his Father in heaven when he asked for forgiveness for his murderers: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) This is a huge difference. Violations and traumatisations occur among human beings which will probably only be forgiven in front of God; this may also be true for soul murder.

The choice of words – soul murder – evokes the model of the five phases of dying. From my experience, this can give an analogous structure to the support that is provided.

2.5. Possibilities of providing support

Shock and denial (1) of what the disruptive flashbacks seem to insinuate come at the beginning. The atrocity seems incredible to the person affected. In her despair she depends on a third person, a confidant, a teacher, to believe her, to believe what she can hardly believe herself.

Anger and wrath (2) come up – on the way from “Not me!” to “Why me out of all persons?”; anger and outrage are targeted at the offender, at family members who did not protect or even surrendered the child, ultimately at God who let the person down. Fear is felt to get broken by this discovery of having been a victim of sexual violence.

Bargaining (3) begins, for the sake of limiting the damage: “Yes, I am a victim, but my father only sought the closeness that my mother did not give him.”

Depression (4) occurs as a result of understanding: “Yes, it happened to me.” Getting in touch with one’s own traumatic pain is almost unbearable – and yet unfortunately a prerequisite for every further step. It is also important to assign the disgust of one’s own person, one’s own corporality, to the person who is really disgusting.

Acceptance (5) of the unacceptable, of what happened, becomes a year-long process – not with the aim of chasing after something lost, but rather with the intention of recovering and taking care of the inner child that is given back to this person and setting her eyes on future which is perhaps not spoiled in every regard.

The confidant acts as a support, step by step, but never speeding anything up, so as not to bring too much light into the dark too fast; for the discovery “at one go” might be too much for the person affected and results in retraumatisation. It is the person herself who determines the pace. If the – possibly involuntary and perhaps only – confidant feels overburdened, he or she should go in for further professional help, but ideally without rebuffing the affected person who has finally found the courage to speak. And the confidant needs to resist idealisations of his or her person to avoid another possible imbalance of power.

The topic of sexual violence also needs to be addressed offensively in other contexts of dependency beyond the family as a site of crime: in therapy, pastoral care and parent/teacher relations, whenever in such contexts problem and solution are confused giving rise to serious consequences.

2.6. Sexual violence in the Church and at school

The primary scene of sexual violence against children and youth is the family. Nonetheless this must not let us forget that children and youth also go through traumatic experiences elsewhere. The depth of the wounds that they suffer is also related with the fact that these places were originally meant to offer shelter and protection, to create closeness and trust. The parish house traditionally represents all these qualities – certainly not the only, but the most common site of crime for Catholic priests who abuse minors. Their victims are children who are getting prepared for the Holy Communion, altar boys and girls, and pupils. The last mentioned become victims when clergy educate and teach children in order-owned educational institutions and abuse the mixture of trust and dependency for sexual exploitation.

Victims are especially often children from families with whom the priest-offender is in close contact. Parents used to lack and often still lack the sensitiveness for the feeling of unease articulated by their children. They take “their” pastor for a man of trust, while they sometimes tend to project sublimity and control of sexual and other

desires for closeness on to him. In a fatal manner, they do not believe their children, provided that they haven't been muzzled in the first place. Then children are denied support in their own families. Moreover, a priest and a religious brother take a sort of father's role which adds a strongly incestuous connotation to their use of sexual violence.

The degree of damage done to a victim depends on the severity, length and start of the boundary violations and assaults – whereas assaults can be distinguished from boundary violations by targeted and premeditated procedure. The degree of damage also depends on the intimacy of the family relation or acquaintance with the offender, the extent to which violence was employed, and whether and in how far the victim was coerced to keep secrecy, and finally on the relations of trust with which the victim is left. The enumeration of these factors shows the magnitude of an abuse of closeness when it is committed by a priest who is a friend of the family – vis-à-vis a child who is left with no relations of trust at all, not even the relation with God: For this is deeply interwoven with the offender, who might advance this relation, but instead damages or even destroys the relation with God.

What is a crime by all standards gets even worse when priest-offenders act in persona Christi (according to the Code of Canon Law: Can. 1008 CIC) and commit spiritual abuse. However, since the Crucified and Risen Lord has shown solidarity with all victims, in death and beyond, then those responsible for such crimes must also let others hold before them that they have turned into executioners of the Lord by committing or tolerating soul murder.

2.7. Paedophilia

In 2004 the John Jay Report was published for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States*. According to that study Catholic clergymen, unlike the majority of other offenders, significantly often abused adolescent boys. Those boys were mainly peri- or postpubescent. Therefore the diagnosis is not paedophilia, but hebephilia – based on Hebe, the Greek goddess of youth, – or ephebophilia for male and parthenophilia for female adolescents.

Yet even the term of paedophilia, which translates literally into friendship with a child, is a deception from my point of view, which totally falls short of the related statutory offence and the victim's perspective as the target of such "love". Paedophilia is currently considered as a non-curable psychiatric disorder. In addition, paedophilia can be classified into a fixated typology, which is targeted exclusively at children, and a regressed typology. The latter occurs when adults feel also or primarily attracted by other adults, but when exposed to external stressors in their sexual relationship with an adult, abuse children as a substitute. So not every "child molester" is a fixated paedophilic in the classical sense. Nonetheless paedophilic offenders are skilful in identifying children who appear helpless and vulnerable and emotionally deprived, and who might fit into such constellations of power that they are looking for.

3. Scapegoats as an abuse of the abuse

The back-breaking burden of guilt that priests, other offenders, religious orders and dioceses, the Universal Church and society have to carry, makes it understandable from a human point of view that scapegoats are sought which might be ritually burdened with those sins and driven away into the desert. However, what is not accept-

able are silent or loud attempts to capitalise on the misery of the affected – in whatever currency. For one or the other comment has given me the impression that the current debate on sexual violence seems to offer a welcome opportunity to reactivate a variety of traditional concepts of the enemy, be it by representatives of politics and society, be it by representatives of the Church. Such an instrumentalisation is intolerable, from my point of view, especially with regard to this topic, because it implies the risk of making further abuse of the abuse.

3.1. Scapegoat Homosexuality

The debate is not suited to launch a campaign against homosexuality, because a connection between homosexuality and paedophilia cannot be observed. According to the most recent studies, paedophilia is not more frequent among homosexually oriented men than among heterosexual men.

The number of primarily homosexual men is significantly higher among Catholic priests than in the overall population; yet it is not homosexuality that makes persons vulnerable for paedophilic or ephebophilic behaviour, but sexual immaturity: A more or less strong stigmatisation of homosexuality in the Church context incites a posture of avoidance with regard to the necessary confrontation with one's own sexuality; and so one priest or the other makes the painful discovery at a later stage of his life that his vocation process was favoured by the prospect of being spared this confrontation with his own sexuality. It is this mixture of sexual immaturity and unacknowledged inclinations that implies a special susceptibility to paedophilic behaviour. Whatever an individual's sexual preference is, it needs to be accepted. A differentiation can then be made between accepting and approving, between feeling and acting out on it. In any case this complex situation gives some idea why priests primarily abuse boys. In addition there is the simple fact that a church-operated boys' boarding school provides an opportunity that makes it seemingly easy for potential offenders.

The study on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests, Deacons and Male Members of Religious Orders, that a research consortium carried out on behalf of the German Bishops' Conference and published in 2018, comes to the clear conclusion that homosexuality is no risk factor for sexual abuse.

3.2. Scapegoat Celibacy

The debate is also not suited for putting the blame on celibacy, even if the current discussion calls those to action who put men living in celibacy under general suspicion. Models of permanent abstinence also exist in other cultures. At the same time, with or without abuse, mandatory celibacy cannot evade the question as to whether and how the Church's salvation mission can be fulfilled with it and the current conditions for admission to the Presbyterate. In any case, the following is true: Celibacy does not give rise to paedophilia, and marriage does not prevent paedophilic behaviour.

3.3. Scapegoat Church

The debate is also not suited for an all-out attack on the Church. Anyhow, those responsible must acknowledge straight out that offenders have often and for a long time been protected more and better than victims.

Moreover, as the Church, we would make it too easy for ourselves if we fooled ourselves into thinking that abuse mainly took place in distant decades and that most offenders died long ago. And we would also make it too easy for ourselves if, in an

unbearable naivety, we claimed that in transferring the offenders – which sometimes occurred at the scale of the Universal Church, for example in religious orders – consideration had been given to the victims, while believing in the offender’s new beginning. We have covered things up with our minds set on the image of the Church.

Do we find it more difficult to deal with innocent victims than with guilty offenders? Is it possible that in theology and spirituality we have developed high levels of sensitiveness to sins, but lack sensitiveness to suffering?

3.4. Scapegoat Society

In return, the debate is also not suited for presenting Catholic sex morals as a stronghold against child abuse and pointing to the fact that also non-Catholic and secular institutions working with children and youth attract persons with potentially paedosexual behaviour. To a large extent this is true, if I think of sports clubs, for example, but as the Church we must let ourselves be measured by our own high standards, not least the promises and vows that later offenders took in their time. And it appears hardly plausible when exactly those who speak of a stronghold put a part of the blame for the disclosed misery on the liberalisation of society which, they say, has had the effect of causing uncertainties, also among the clergy. If the latter is true, I fail to perceive the stronghold.

3.5. Scapegoat Media

Another popular scapegoat in this debate is the media. Nonetheless, the picture of the sensation-seeking press that discredits whatever emerges is not at all appropriate in my opinion.

From the time when the topic received extensive coverage across all channels, I specifically remember German boarding schools where systematic abuse was commonplace. Graduates from those schools spoke out and related of affected individuals who have committed suicide meanwhile. In thinking of those testimonies, the question troubles me what role fellow students played, or parents and all the silent onlookers who left those offenders in power. In any case those media reports had the merit of not solely choosing the perspective of the victims or the offenders, but a third one: What was the role of those who knew or guessed what was happening and remained indifferent? And why did the “disclosure” of sexual violence have no effects in earlier years?

School authorities and responsible bodies of various kinds develop an image of the enemy, painted also by representatives of the churches: They criticise the ongoing discourse in the media, while, from my point of view, it covers an exceptional variety of perspectives and is nearly balanced.

4. Urgent questions to Church and theology

4.1. Closed systems – and the bandwagon effect?

The hedge around some of the affected schools became denser and denser – and turned them into closed systems where no joint reflection and communication took place any more. In such systems it is unthinkable that I ask myself what my action means or does to others – but it becomes possible that male and female students feel captivated, seemingly without the use of any force, that they feel honoured to be part of it – part of the circle of those who are closest to the paedophilic, yet also charismatic and therefore venerated teachers, thus turning into the next victims. I am troubled by the question of the unconscious of an institution where “we” are “something special”,

and by the question of power mechanisms which cause the bandwagon effect, and by the question concerning the churches: in how far do they constitute closed systems; in how far do they stand in the way of reflective-communicative processes?

Such systems must stop being closed. Otherwise the bandwagon effect will go on. This applies to a boarding school in the same way as to a family; and it also applies to the Church. Against this backdrop, leaving the church is for many people a painful, but consistent step out of the system – even if it implies the threat of metaphysical homelessness.

4.2. Holy Church – and sinful church?

A closed system is secured against curious eyes, knows no third-party supervision and has no vision beyond this system. Yet, by behaving this way, the Church falls short of her mission. Although she does not qualify as a scapegoat, she is also not free from sin. Our Church is not only a church in which sinners also live, not only a church of sinners, instead our Church is a sinful church. Whenever she acts, guides, takes – or fails to take – decisions, this action is at the same time the action of concrete human beings who can also act sinfully – as women and men of the Church. A human being is not only a sinner in a Church that otherwise remains unaffected by this: no, this person rather determines the quality of his church – not only the priest, also the family father.

And, as a Church of sinners, she is obliged to a humbleness without which she would not be the Holy Church, which we confess in our Creed, although today perhaps in rather quiet sounds. The Church does not constitute a perfect society where sin is at best an accident. If this attribute is still applicable at all in the face of the sexual violence, her holiness is certainly not due to being free from sin. God is holy with and for us, the Incarnated God, who knew no sin and was still considered the lowest sinner in Jesus Christ and nailed to the cross, the Incarnated God who meets us, while nothing falls out of this affection, out of this grace – not in sin, not in death, not in judgement.

And the offenders? Forgiving them what they did seems difficult, seems impossible for human beings, at least for those who were victimised by those offenders. And some people appear to feel that it is even less forgivable that the offenders deprived the Church of her image of sanctity. Do we want to create a Church of the pure, a Church free from sin, by totally excluding and casting out the offenders, only to emphasize how unfathomably innocent we ourselves are? “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone.” (John 8:7)

4.3. Solidarity with the victims – and the offenders?

In my eyes this requires a practical theology of substitution: When I do not side with the victims, when I do not act as their vicarious substitute where and as long as they cannot defend themselves, when I do not act as their substitute vis-à-vis the offenders, I will never be able to fathom how what was done to them is soul murder. Solidarity starts with the victims, with the damaged and wounded who are dependent on it. However, if I exclusively take the side of the victims, I remain unaware of my own abysses. If I completely stay away from the offenders, by choosing not to act as their vicarious substitute when they are threatened to be cast out into no man’s land, I will not be able to understand how quickly offenders become victims – victims whose entire humanity is reduced to the offence.

At the same time, there continues to be a huge difference between offenders and victims: Offenders do not lose their status as offenders when they themselves have

been victims, and victims do not have to be free from sin to be considered victims. The verdict – soul murder – persists, but the question concerning possibility and impossibility of reconciliation also persists.

I can only believe in the Holy Church when she mediates between condemnation and reconciliation. The Crucified Lord who identifies himself with sinners does not take away their guilt, nor does He avert the consequences of sin, and nonetheless when Jesus dies as their vicarious substitute, this results in a change: it is the Crucified Lord who enables the sinner to confront his guilt in the first place, and to do so not only in a next-to-last, but in a last consequence – thus leading him to believe that his own sinfulness is overcome in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So when the Crucified Lord descends into the kingdom of death, He shows solidarity with the dead and their suffering in His death and by means of His resurrection; thus He creates solidarity among humanity beyond death. Christian diaconia is aimed at solidarity, and Jesus promises reconciliation even to those who have afflicted suffering on others; Jesus even offers them the opportunity to convert. Christian diaconia – and that is the difficult thing about it – does not even stop at the offenders. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) Preferential treatment should still be given to the victims, but reconciliation efforts with victims and offenders may not be neglected, even if, in its futility, this journey will take until the day of Last Judgement.

5. Tentative answers: Approaches to solving structural problems

I regard it as a structural problem of our Church that, although it has no pathologising effect by itself, mandatory celibacy tends to attract pathologised men. Celibacy may seem appealing to a young man who consciously or unconsciously perceives this as an opportunity to avoid the exploration of his own sexuality, which was interrupted in the age of puberty, or even to turn it into a virtue – but only until the moment of an assault on those who have in fact only just reached the age of puberty.

5.1. Church Guidelines

Structural problems cannot be denied; we are not dealing with incidents caused by individual offenders. We are not dealing with individual faults or the faults of many individuals, especially as faults are not a theological category; instead we are faced with structural sin. Structural problems require taking action so as to change these structures. Guidelines of national bishops’ conferences and conferences of superiors of religious orders on steps to be taken in case of sexual abuse of minors, and vulnerable adults, by clergy, religious and other staff working for the Church therefore provide that every bishop in his diocese and all superiors of religious orders appoint commissioners in their communities to receive and examine information on incidents and to act as points of contact for state criminal prosecution authorities. Where possible, two persons shall be appointed, a woman and a man. All staff in the service of a diocese or religious order are obliged to pass on reports coming to their notice to this commissioner, whereas priests have to adhere to the provisions concerning the seal of confession (according to the Code of Canon Law: Can. 983 and Can. 984 CIC).

It seems absolutely necessary, from my point of view, to remain critical about the selection of female and male commissioners in the individual dioceses and to provide for the compulsory consultation of external experts. Diocesan commissioners need the trust of their local bishops, commissioners in religious orders need the trust of their superiors, but they need to be able to act with structural independence, which means

that they must not be part of the management of the diocese or religious order. Those who have experienced and survived sexual violence within the space of the Church will not be able to put trust in the institution in which they were humiliated.

In addition, it is important that every bishop appoints a group of permanent (female and male) consultants, combining psychiatric and psychotherapeutic, legal and canonical expertise, pastoral and other skills, the experience of victims and experiences of dealing with victims.

A personal exploration of issues such as boundary violations, assaults and violence must go hand in hand with anchoring the topic in the structure of the Church's work. Those who are in contact with affected individuals on behalf of the Church are entitled to supervision and support.

5.2. Dealing with offenders and victims

Persons who have committed sexual abuse of minors are no longer deployed in areas where they are in contact with children and youth. But assigning them to work in a home for the elderly is no alternative either, because the pattern of poor social interaction and tendency towards abusiveness in dealing with vulnerable persons will persist there.

Those who are clearly paedophilic cannot perform pastoral tasks, not even after psychotherapy. Such therapy is aimed at helping clients refrain from acting on their erotic preference; it seeks to avoid that the "addicted" give in to the temptation of indulging in their desire; it is aimed at controlling the corresponding impulses and encouraging the ability to feel empathy for the world of children. However, the relapse rate among paedophiles who have shown delinquent behaviour is very high, almost 50 %.

In contrast, disorders of sex development, which occur under difficult living conditions, can be treated therapeutically. Yet those who have definitely shown ephebophilic misconduct cannot work with children and youth any more, only in other church contexts, if at all. Every new deployment requires that the respective environment is informed, that supervision and therapeutic counselling are ensured, and that independent expert opinions have been obtained beforehand, which may not always be right though. When there are doubts about the non-recidivism of a priest, he may not work in pastoral care.

The conferences of bishops and superiors of religious orders promise the victims and their families human assistance, psychotherapy and pastoral care as well as other services in recognition of the suffering inflicted on them. Guidelines are meant to prevent concealment and cover-up, and oblige the responsible commissioners to involve the competent church and state authorities at an early stage and to support their work actively.

In fact, the initial legal situation – for example in my home country – often impeded the investigation of the offences under criminal law. The original period of limitation of ten years was too short, even if it did not start before the completion of the 18th year of life, because cases reported by the victims had practically no chance: the victim's right to criminal prosecution expired at the age of 28 because then the crime was considered as time-barred. That was so although sexual traumata go hand in hand with long-time aftereffects. A case is often only reported after extensive therapy, after broken relationships and failed attempts to start a family. That period of limitation was rather in line with the offender's perspective, who aggressively works through his own experiences of violence and persuades himself that he is not inflicting harm on the victim or is introducing the victim to the world of sexuality. Certainly such a period

of limitation does not do justice to the perspective of the victim, for whom the offence often only unfolds its full horror after decades. Probably the greatest tragedy is that, in the end, it can lead to the victim committing suicide. In the meantime, the period of limitation has been raised to up to 30 years.

And even if the suspicion of sexual abuse cannot be prosecuted under statutory provisions any more because a case is time-barred, the responsible persons in the Church should seek to investigate what happened.

Moreover in his Instruction On the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings, proclaimed on the 17th of December 2019, Pope Francis repealed, with immediate effect, the pontifical secret in prosecuting cases of abuse. The clarification of the facts can thus no longer be hampered by referring to the *secretum pontificium*; investigations and other potential duties to report a case to the state authorities can no longer be obstructed.

5.3. Against a zero-tolerance policy

Against the backdrop of what I have expressed so far, I advocate against an absolute zero-tolerance policy in dealing with priest-offenders. Although it appears strict and consistent, I feel that it leads from one ditch into the next: such a “policy” is no solution at all, because then the Church would dismiss any responsibility for those who once worked as the Church, leave the problem to the rest of society and blame them. An unrestricted solidarity with the victim also implies co-responsibility and mercy for the offender, who often was a victim himself in the past – without embellishing what he did; in this regard it remains “zero” tolerance, and independently from whether the person is a priest or another member of the Church’s staff. The protection of potential victims has priority, but attempts to do justice to the offenders are also justified, however difficult they are. In the end, working with offenders is aimed at breaking devilish delinquency cycles; work with offenders ultimately serves to protect victims.

5.4. For prevention in working with children and youth

Guidelines offer a framework within which individual church institutions and federations can and must develop their own protection policies. Prevention measures must be transparent, understandable and verifiable; their implementation needs to be subject to regular evaluation, giving rise to the adaptation of the existing protection policies if needed. They describe the concrete procedure in the case of an incident, prescribe mandatory training for all full-time and voluntary commissioners and establish a code of conduct to which all employees commit themselves by means of their signature.

Unspeakable suffering becomes the more unspeakable when an institution provides no channels for speaking out on it – by way of prevention and advocacy. It is vital to train educators and teachers about the symptoms and reasons for suspicion, to break the taboo around this topic in educational contexts, to sensitise in classrooms, institutions of residential care, youth work and schools for parents, to draw attention to helplines and child and youth protection centres, and to avoid that the important shelter that families can offer degenerates into a cover-up for acts of violence. Those children affected can only find protection outside their families – or nowhere at all.

Preventive effects come from information and education events for children, youth and adults, in nursery schools, schools and communities – with the aim of increasing attentiveness for conspicuous behaviour of potential offenders and victims in Church and society. Contributions are also made by networking with other church and non-church institutions, with counselling centres, and the Police, and by setting up

groups in which people with different denominational or even religious backgrounds explore the context of sexual violence and religion.

It is vital to empower children – so that they know that their body belongs to them and acquire skills to talk about it; so that they learn to trust their feelings; so that they know to distinguish between good and bad contact, between safe and inappropriate touching, because as long as physical contact between family members has no need to shun daylight, that is the best protection against abuse and violence that I can think of; so that they know of their right to say “No” to adults; so that they are confident enough to disclose bad secrets.

And it is vital that parents take it seriously when their children notice that the pastor only spends his holidays with juveniles and has no adult friends at all.

5.5. For prevention in education and training

The development and implementation of preventive measures is realised in a participatory approach, that is, in co-operation with all persons and groups involved, above all with affected individuals. This includes training to understand the concepts of closeness and distance, offenders’ strategies, psychodynamic processes in victims, systemic dynamics in institutions, the bandwagon effect, legal issues, communication in situations of conflict, assistance for victims, but also for offenders, and follow-up care in irritated systems.

The formation of priests requires an intensified exploration of celibacy and sexuality – to fight an atmosphere where sexual regression and fixation are tolerated or even encouraged. The selection of candidates must be done very carefully; it must not be prompted by the lack of priests and give in to the restraints of the small number; instead, it must identify potential communicative and psychosexual deficiencies among the candidates for priesthood. For life in celibacy can only be fulfilling in meaningful relations.

The Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood published in 2008 by the Congregation for Catholic Education postulate “the capacity of the candidate to integrate his sexuality in accordance with the Christian vision, including in consideration of the obligation of celibacy“. In this context I do not assume that grace will necessarily complement the natural disposition of persons lacking psychophysical or ethical stability. I therefore think that it is absolutely necessary to involve and consult psychologists.

Exploring the unconscious motives of a vocation is a must from a pastoral-psychological point of view, however difficult it may be. It cannot be permitted that young men puzzled by their own sexuality “escape” to celibacy in avoidance of this awkward situation. Sexuality is a gift of God, but also visualises abysses of the human soul.

A few quiet sounds to end with

It is vital that we take full responsibility in the face of the serious harm caused by sexual abuse – as the Church, and not only when priests turn into offenders. Of course, prevention must at last be given its rightful place in the formation of clergy, but church-led prevention is also important in other contexts, because the Church is also alive in families. Families are understood as places of learning for our belief and, in return, the language of the church makes abundant reference to the family, when I only think of my “sisters” and “brothers” and of the “fathers” in our “mother” Church! Church-led prevention is under a responsibility; we are under a responsibility if we stay indif-

ferent in our approach to sexuality, by sweeping under the carpet what needs to be put on the table of communication. We are under a responsibility if we do not just honour, but idealise marriage and family to an extent that nobody can believe how a place of good breeding can turn into a scene of crime at the hands of an overstrained family father.

Parents, pastors and teachers must take responsibility for what they did. But the Church as a whole must also take the blame and assume responsibility. In this regard, I do perceive gradual changes in thinking and acting which will hopefully prove to be stronger than all counter-movements with a merely internal focus on the Church. After all, the given networks within the Church and the Universal Church are not only ideal for covering up, but also enable high levels of transparency – in the sense of a turnaround: and the question regarding a new beginning in these gruesome times for the Church can solely be raised thanks to this turnaround.

And let me make one last point: take the figures with a grain of salt. There will be a certain number of unreported cases, because despite the corresponding requests – which I have also often made – many victims do not find the strength to report what has happened to them and are afraid of retraumatisation. And there will also be unreported cases because victims have already committed suicide in their despair.

Dzimumnozīgumi pret bērniem un jauniešiem. Nozīguma vietas - grēkāži - jautājumi Baznīcai un teoloģijai: pagaidu atbildes

Raksts analizē seksuālās vardarbības problēmu attieksmē pret bērniem un jauniešiem, skatot to Romas katoļu garīdzniecības kontekstā. Autors aplūko seksuālo vardarbību ģimenē, analizē dvēseles nogalināšanas simptomus, kā arī runā par atbalsta pasākumiem upuru labā. Aplūkojot seksuālo vardarbību baznīcā un skolā, tiek vērtētas tādas darbības kā pedofilija, homoseksuālitāte, par grēkāžiem nosaucot Baznīcu, sabiedrību, medijus. Kā neatliekami risināmi toloģiskie jautājumi nosaukti tādi jēdzieni kā “slēgtās sistēmas”, “svētā Baznīcā versus grēcinieku Baznīca”, “solidaritāte ar upuriem”, “Baznīcas stratēģiskās vadlīnijas”.

Atslēgas vārdi: seksuāla vardarbība, Baznīca, teoloģiskie risinājumi.



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